

# Joe Ball Takes Up the Piano: Curriculum, Extracurricular Activities, and the Formation of Gender at Riverside Junior College, 1929-1941

Margaret A. Nash  
University of California, Riverside

## Abstract

This article examines gender dynamics on a junior college campus in southern California during the Great Depression. Historians have argued that there was a “crisis of masculinity” due to widespread unemployment. This article examines references to gender in student newspapers and the yearbook and concludes that because students were concerned with raising the status of their college, and because far more men than women students attended, the marking of gender differences was less acute.

Male students at Riverside Junior College did not seem to mind too much when female students smoked cigarettes, formed a rifle club, or ran the student newspaper. But when women consistently trounced men in their grade points, or when students heard that women elsewhere ran the student government and wore slacks to campus, they drew a line. “Are we men or are we mice?” male students demanded in the student newspaper, implicitly acknowledging a process of defining gender ([Mueda?] 1938). The decade of the 1930s marks a significant period of transition in gender relationships in the United States. Women had won the right to vote just a decade prior, and increasing numbers of women took on high profile positions in business, government, and academe. More women and men went to college in the 1930s than had ever gone before and national media trumpeted women’s engagement in education for the sake of civic participation (Nash and Romero 2012). At the same time, the nation along with much of the

world was plunged into an economic Depression. During times of transition, conservative norms often are held on to all the more tightly, and particularly so in times of economic stress (McComb 2006). Old and new concepts of appropriate gender roles often exist side by side. Yet sharp distinctions of gender can be blunted when local situations make other concerns more prominent.

In this article I examine gender roles during the 1930s on one junior college campus in southern California. At Riverside Junior College, the local context was one in which students wanted to be taken seriously as college students, a status difficult to achieve when their institution was named a *junior* college, and when they shared a campus with a high school. Approximately half of Riverside Junior College’s students had graduated from that high school, underlining all the more their desire to distinguish the college from the secondary school. I argue that because students as a group were concerned with raising the status of their junior college, and because throughout the decade far more men than women students attended the college, the marking of gender differences was less acute here than on other college campuses.

Historians have documented cultural shifts from the nineteenth century Victorian ideal of masculinity, one defined by character, honor, and duty, to a Modern ideal of masculinity, defined by personality and youthfulness and achieved by participation in consumer culture (Pendergast 1997, Kimmel 2006, Mosse 1996). This Modern ideal of masculinity is especially visible on college campuses through the fraternity system

(Syrett 2009). At the same time, historians have written about the Depression era as a period of a “crisis of masculinity.” Widespread unemployment meant that men were no longer able “to prove manhood by providing for their families,” and many men felt “deep humiliation” at being “impotent patriarchs” (Kimmel 2006, 128, 132-33). According to this view, when masculinity is in crisis, men work to shore up their sinking status by enacting more polarized versions of manhood, effectively defining themselves as men more sharply against an extreme construction of femininity (Hoganson 1998). An examination of a college campus during this time, then, might reveal men’s hostility toward women invading a space perceived to belong to men, or engaging in curricular or extracurricular activities seen as fitting only for men. None of this was the case at Riverside Junior College, where the student newspaper reveals men wishing for a larger female enrollment, and celebrating women’s accomplishments on and off campus.

To what extent, then, was there a crisis of masculinity among this population of students? Historian Judith A. Allen notes that there apparently were “regular crises in masculinity” throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and asks whether masculinity is “doomed... to be in constant crisis” (Allen 2002, 202). If “crises” were familiar, how did that affect notions of gender for students? Allen also asks whether “the prospects of class division and conflict” might modify gender relations that in other situations might be oppressive to women (Allen 2002, 202). At Riverside Junior College, the overarching project of improving the status of the college as a way to launch or sustain students’ entrée into the middle class may have ameliorated an emphasis on shoring up extreme gender identities.

There is little research on the construction of gender identity on college campuses during this period. Much of the research on masculinity on campuses has largely focused on fraternities, and none of that research focuses on the 1930s (Syrett 2009, Phillips, Brown and Parks 2005). Some research has been done on higher education for women, but most of it has been on issues of access or on institutional development, or examines periods before or after, but not during, the 1930s (Manekin 2010, Eisenmann, Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965 2006, Gordon 1990, Solomon 1985, Horowitz 1984). In addition, much research has tended to gravitate to elite institutions—the Ivy League colleges, or major public and private research universities (Eisenmann, Reconsidering a Classic: Assessing the History of Women’s Higher Education a Dozen Years after Barbara Solomon 1997).

I chose to study Riverside Junior College in a small city in an agricultural region in southern California. Because junior colleges (later called community colleges) drew largely from the local population, they are more likely to reflect norms held by the broader community rather than just the collegiate culture. California classified its junior colleges in this decade as part of the secondary school system; restricted by law from having dormitories or fraternities and sororities, some of the means by which students on other campuses formed social groups and relationships and established norms of gendered behavior, were not available to students at the junior colleges. Students found other ways to establish gender roles, such as through competition for grades and limiting women’s involvement in student government. Yet overall, although students publicly commented on gender through the pages of their student newspaper, campus life included multiple opportunities for women that were not

available at other colleges. Junior colleges, still relatively new types of institutions in the 1930s, appealed to a much larger section of the population than did the elite liberal arts colleges, and helped fill the “unprecedented demand for higher education . . . as a symbol of economic and social mobility” (Levine 1987, 21). At Riverside Junior College, negotiation of gender identity and gender roles existed in the context of a “culture of aspiration” for the white middle class (Levine 1987).

This study is based on two primary archival sources: the student newspaper, *The Arroyo*, and the campus yearbook, the *Tequesquite*, during the Depression years of 1929-1941 at Riverside Junior College (RJC). The newspaper reflects multiple voices and perspectives. Most students stayed at RJC only one or two years, and by the mid-1930s newspaper editors held their positions for only one quarter, so one voice never dominated, or could never dominate for long. The newspaper staff consisted of a dozen or more students each year and other students frequently wrote letters to the editor, resulting in many points of view in the newspaper. The editors also exchanged ideas with other campuses; hundreds of two- and four-year colleges sent reciprocal copies of newspapers all over the country. RJC editors ran columns variously called “Elsewhere,” or “Tidbits,” or other titles that identified snippets of news culled from these other sources. What those columnists chose to include in the paper reveals another layer of local interests. In all these ways, the student newspaper can be a proxy, albeit an imperfect one, for multiple perspectives on campus life.

The following sections detail various prisms through which gender dynamics appear. First, the institutional ambition many people held for raising the “junior” college to the status of a regular college depended on the success of all

students. Therefore, the newspaper praised both women and men for their successes, which brought prestige to the school. However, writers for the student newspaper routinely made academic achievement a competition between men and women. In fact, the newspaper often referred to gender; the next two sections look at a range of ways gender came up in the paper, from curricular choices to student behavior, extracurricular activities, and student leadership. Finally, this paper delves into the story of the women’s rifle club, the Reserve Officers Training Corps (R.O.T.C.), and the student peace movement, all of which bring to the fore a vibrant mix of activism and concepts of gender.

### **Gender and Institutional Aspirations**

Riverside Junior College, founded in 1916, grew out of a 1907 state law that allowed high schools to offer the first two years of college-level courses. When RJC opened, therefore, it was housed in the same building as the Polytechnic High School. In 1917 the state legislature allowed the establishment of separate junior colleges in high school districts, and by 1930 there were thirty-five junior colleges in the state. At Riverside, the college held classes in the high school building, one principal served both institutions, and both institutions were governed by the same board of directors. By 1924 RJC had two of its own buildings, and a third opened in 1932. Even then, the college still shared the same campus with the high school; students at the two institutions shared the auditorium, the gymnasium, the grounds, and the vocationally oriented equipment, as well as the principal and Board (Jiminez and Johnson 1981, Brint and Karabel 1989). This arrangement was common in California, where 75 percent of junior colleges shared buildings with high schools in the 1930s (Brint and Karabel 1989). This association with

high schools plagued junior college students who wanted to use the institution as a launching point into an upwardly mobile life.

The city of Riverside, the county seat, had a population of almost 35,000 in 1940; 3,200 were foreign born (of whom about 1,500 were Mexican), 880 were African American, 750 were Native American, and 220 were of Japanese descent (Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940; Population 1943). Student enrollment at RJC in the 1930s ranged from 544 in 1930-31 to 817 in 1937-38, ranking in the middle in terms of size of California junior colleges (Jiminez and Johnson 1981, Enrollment Puts Riverside Tenth 1935). Most of the RJC students were white, as were most of the inhabitants of Riverside, although there also were Hispanic, Japanese, Native American, and some years Filipino students (Rabin 1968, Transfers From North, South, East, and West 1934, Graduates of Sherman Aided 1935, Sherman Institute Represented By 14 Students 1939). A few foreign students also attended RJC during the Depression, coming from Columbia, Germany, Japan, Mexico, and the Philippines (Students From 18 States Enrolled 1931, Students Enrolled From Many States; Japan Represented 1933). Initially tuition-free throughout the state, the legislature gave local boards of education the option to charge tuition for the junior colleges during the Depression. The RJC board declined, choosing instead to remain as accessible as possible (Jiminez and Johnson 1981).

Throughout the 1930s, men students outnumbered women, sometimes by as wide a margin as two to one. Women, however, had higher graduation rates (Student Enrollment Sets New Figure 1931, Jaysee Women Graduates Outnumber Men 1933, Women In Minority As Quarter Ends 1937, Total Enrollment Under Last Year's 1939). Year after year the student

newspaper pondered the question of why men so outnumbered women, as this disparity was unique to RJC and did not occur on other Southern California junior college campuses, or in the local high school from which about half of the students came. The reason usually posited was that RJC was an athletic powerhouse and therefore drew more men students. Men who might not otherwise go to college came to RJC to be part of its reign of "athletic supremacy" (Transfers From North, South, East, and West 1934, Graduates of Sherman Aided 1935, Jiminez and Johnson 1981). These two factors may have played a large role in the formation of gender roles on the campus. Men's predominance was assured by virtue of their much higher enrollments, and the masculinity, at least of the male athletes, was vindicated frequently at sporting events. Therefore, men may have felt far less need to assert themselves in other ways.

Junior colleges served multiple functions. They prepared students for specific vocations, and they provided the first two years of coursework for four-year colleges and universities. The latter function was the origin of the name, as the first two years of undergraduate coursework were "junior" to the "senior" or upperclass work. Junior colleges allowed students to get basic courses out of the way at a less expensive institution, and often one that was much closer to home. The cooperative program, in which students alternated getting credit for working in an industry with taking a term of coursework, is an example of the vocational aspect, and RJC was the first in the state to do this (Jiminez and Johnson 1981, Brint and Karabel 1989). In 1931-32, for instance, coop students prepared for work as aircraft mechanics, forestry researchers, nurses, and librarians (New Success for Co-ops 1931, Brint and Karabel 1989).

Many students attended RJC with the intention of transferring to a four-year college or university, and many did so with great success. The student newspaper commented frequently on this goal, and reported proudly on female and male former RJC students who went on to greater glory. In the fall of 1931, nearly 60 former RJC students were enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley, and the previous spring, 21 former RJC students had graduated from Berkeley. Other former RJC students had gone on to UCLA, Stanford, and Occidental College, their “splendid records” demonstrating the “excellent foundation” provided by RJC (State University Draws J. C. Grads 1931, University Head Compliments J.C. 1931). In 1933, 28 RJC students transferred to UCLA, 21 to Berkeley, 8 to the University of Southern California, and 7 to the Stanford School of Nursing, along with two dozen others who transferred to half a dozen different out-of-state colleges (UCLA Claims Most Jaysee Transfers 1933). In 1937, 17 RJC graduates enrolled in Stanford (Graduates Sustain Creditable Record 1937). RJC apparently filled the function well of preparing students for four-year colleges.

Students knew that the moniker “junior” had a pejorative sound in many people’s ears, and sharing a campus with the high school didn’t help, so with a tinge of defensiveness they touted their accomplishments. “Our record stands as evidence of the ability of junior college graduates to take their places among students of higher institutions, with credit and even honor to themselves and the junior college,” noted one article (Our Phi Beta Record 1931, 2). When first-year student Agnes Coleman won a national writing contest and a scholarship to Drake University in Iowa, *The Arroyo* reported that she received “congratulations from well known journalism instructors of leading colleges and

universities in the east” (J.C. freshman Receives Journalism Scholarship 1933, 3). The newspaper was proud that Josephine Brown, who was the *Arroyo* business manager in 1932-33, went on to the University of Southern California and became office manager of the *Daily Trojan* there (Graduate Made Officer Manager of S.C. Trojan 1933, 4). When a former RJC student was a headline speaker at the California Medical Association for his discovery of the link between heart disease and diet, the event made the front page of the student newspaper (Former J.C. Student Cited For Discovery 1938). The newspaper also proudly touted the accomplishments of artist Mine Okubo, graduate of RJC and Berkeley, who won a fellowship to study art in Italy (M. Okubo Earns Henicke Award 1938). Dissatisfaction with the “junior” nomenclature grew throughout the decade. By 1938, Los Angeles Junior College changed its name to Los Angeles City College, and many RJC students, faculty, and administrators hoped to make a similar change (‘Junior College’ Criticized At Meeting Of Administrators 1938, Change of College Name Again Proposed 1939). Riverside’s Board of Education did not approve the name change until June, 1945, when, with a huge influx of new students, RJC became Riverside College (Jiminez and Johnson 1981).

The success of both female and male students was critical to the campaign to garner more respect for junior colleges. The student newspaper lauded former RJC students who succeeded, and celebrated the forensic skills of current female students. The newspaper regularly reported on accomplishments of women in the world, as well as those of former RJC women students. For instance, the newspaper noted that Mary E. Woolley, president of Mount Holyoke College, was “the only woman member” of the American Disarmament Commission appointed

by President Hoover (Other Colleges 1937). Guest speakers invited to campus included Marguerite Harrison, former secret service agent, international newspaper correspondent, and author (Mrs. Harrison Banquet Speaker 1937). The newspaper, then, touted the accomplishments and encouraged the success of women on and off campus. Yet, as we will see, when women outperformed men, some students expressed unease. Women could succeed, but when their success overshadowed men's, it raised concerns, at least in a tongue-in-cheek manner.

One recurring topic that always became about gender was grades. Each term when the students who had earned spots on the Honor Roll were named, *The Arroyo* headline almost always commented on whether males or females had performed the best. The students with the highest grade point averages had earned their status through individual achievement, to be sure, but, at least as far as *The Arroyo* writers were concerned, those individuals also achieved on behalf of their gender. Many articles made clear that there was a contest going on, friendly or not. This was especially clear when the headline emphasized only one part of the story. "Men Head Women In Grade Average For Quarter," proclaimed a headline in January of 1933. If one read the story, one would know that, in fact, a woman earned the highest grades, more women than men were on the honor roll even though the student body was comprised of more men than women, and men's average points were only slightly ahead of women's (Men Head Women in Grade Average for Quarter 1933). The following year a headline read "One Woman Only in Highest Six;" the story reported that "for the first time in many years," men earned five of the top six places on the honor roll (Two Students Tie for Highest Grade Points; One Woman Only in Highest Six 1934). In 1937, the newspaper hailed women for

leading the list of honor roll students (Miss M. Babcock Gets High Honor Rating For Term; Women Students Lead List Of fifty-Five For Fall Quarter 1937). Women didn't just lead, they "dominate[d]; ..."only one of the hardier sex" made it to the top ten of the list (Women Dominate Honor Roll for Fall Term 1938). This situation apparently raised concern, as shortly thereafter an editorial asked, in an article entitled "Are We Men, Or Are We Mice?", whether men at RJC were "mentally inferior" to women ([Mueda?] 1938). Perhaps male students were reassured when "Men Lead Women On Honor Roll" was the headline in 1940 (Men Lead Women On Honor Roll 1940). The tone of these articles was that of sincere congratulations for whoever was on the Honor Roll, combined with a dash of consternation when men had not won the top spots.

### **Behavior and Curricular Choices**

The student newspaper contained frequent references to gender, including appropriate or inappropriate gender roles. Sometimes the references lauded boundary pushing behaviors, and sometimes the references denigrated them. Whatever the case, the judgment constantly pointed out gender. "With Joe Ball registered for piano lessons, and Vivienne McGovern signed up for the boys' golf, it is beginning to look as though the college really has a big year ahead," one writer commented (Campus Column 1931, 2). The surprising news that at the University of Alabama "a girl has enrolled in a boxing course," was followed by the equally unanticipated statement that at Northwestern University, "the men have organized a knitting class" ([untitled] 1935, 3). "This is the star center and sparkplug" of a Connecticut Air Cadets football team, another article with photograph announced, and the player "answers to the name of Esther."

Esther Burnham, a 14-year-old, went into the game for three minutes and helped her team win by blocking a punt (Girl Grid Star 1935, 7). The previous page in the same newspaper had a photograph of the only woman collegiate drum major in the country, Bernice Henry, at Bucknell University. Although the stance of the newspaper seemed supportive of these young women, the copy also reinforced conservative perspectives on gender. Students read, for instance, that there were bigger drum majors than Bernice Henry, “but there aren’t any prettier” (Leads Parade 1935, 6). In this way, as good as Henry must have been to earn her position, the story diminished her skill so that what really mattered for a girl, being pretty, could be emphasized. Everyone could rest assured that, however good she was, men were still bigger, thus preserving at least some semblance of proper order in the world. “A very fresh freshman indeed” was how an *Arroyo* staff writer described Marion Shepard at the University of Michigan who, “just to prove she could do it—donned men’s clothes and slipped past the guard at the door of the exclusive Michigan Union club, where no woman is ever allowed” (Other Colleges 1932, 4). In this instance, the writer hinted at approval of the moxie of Shepard, as well as perhaps befuddlement that a student union would ban women.

RJC had no student union, and women and men shared use of what facilities existed. One shared space was the parking lot, where students congregated before and after classes. One editorialist reprimanded students for making a bad impression on the Riverside community for loitering: engaging in “plain ordinary wasting of time” rather than “worthwhile recreation.” In particular, the community might object to the sight “of many students, especially girls, standing on the parking lot smoking and ‘killing’ time.” Bad enough for the boys to do it, this editorial

implied, but when girls did it, it simply went beyond acceptable behavior. “Let us watch ourselves and in loyalty to our college, not create a situation that will do harm to it,” the writer pleaded (What They See As They Pass 1932, 4). There is a hint here of a division of opinion on whether women should smoke, and if they did, whether they should be so public about it. There is no evidence that any of the students heeded this plea, and all indications are that some women and men continued to convene in the parking lot, some of them, no doubt, continuing to smoke. The physical education department conducted an anonymous survey in 1937 in which forty percent of RJC women answered that they smoked. The student author of the newspaper article on the survey thought that women were underreporting, as “it seems almost unbelievable that sixty percent of the women do not smoke.” Further, women’s smoking was not new behavior for them; the majority of smokers said they had begun during their first year or two of high school (Paxton 1937, 2). Any negative views of smoking, to the extent such views existed, had not swayed many women. Peer pressure that regarded smoking as inappropriate for women seemed minimal.

Slacks aroused more concern than smoking. The newspaper reported on women wearing slacks on other campuses. When women at the Los Angeles Junior College started wearing slacks, a group of five men formed an Anti-Slack League and wore skirts on campus and to classes (Elsewhere 1933). Later that spring, after an earthquake devastated the campus, Long Beach Junior College began holding classes in a nearby park. As a result, women students “have definitely adopted slacks.” The article mentioned women wearing slacks among other examples of faculty and students going to great lengths to keep the school operating under difficult

circumstances; it was noteworthy, and spoken in the tone of congratulation for willingness “to go through discomfort” for the sake of keeping the college open (Results 1933, 4). RJC yearbooks and newspapers do not show women in slacks, other than athletic apparel. Rules at the women’s dormitory permitted women to wear slacks in their private quarters, but not in the more public areas of the dining and living rooms (Fraser Hall Rules Strictly Enforced 1939). The campus climate may have inhibited women from trying it, or wearing slacks in public might have felt to the women, too, like encroaching on foreign territory.

In spite of these attitudes about slacks, RJC men clearly stated their preferences for modern, healthy, assertive women. When asked in an informal around-campus interview what type of women they liked, RJC men emphatically denounced “clinging vines.” “We like good sports that keep up with us and occasionally beat us at our own games. The delicate ones are out of style,” men said (Men Don’t Like Too Much Lipstick 1936, 3). Some references to modern womanhood poked gentle fun at “the bonny, bashful maid of yesteryear” who had been replaced by “the blatant young college woman” unafraid to ask “Johnny” for a date. “For lady date-makers no longer confine their activities to Leap Year,” or at least, not at RJC, they didn’t. Men were warned that they would “be chased; you’ll be hounded,” but in the end, maybe it was all for the good: “at least, you’ll have a partner for whom you won’t have to pay!” (Shy Maid Trips Primrose Path to Oblivion - Yes 1934, 4). After one dance in which women asked the men, an article declared, “The idea of the gals getting the dates isn’t so bad at that” (Jaysee Posers 1934, 3). The modern age held some advantages for men, even if women took on unexpected roles.

Curricular subjects did not seem terribly gender differentiated, for students or professors.

*The Arroyo* congratulated instructor Bertha DuBeau for publishing a manual of bacteriology, with no comments on whether that was appropriate for a woman, just as it congratulated instructor Edmund C. Jaeger for publishing a natural history guide to California deserts (*The Arroyo Congratulates* 1931, Edmund C. Jaeger *Completing Book* 1932). Another article encouraged women to enter the field of astronomy, and announced fellowships from Harvard specifically for women who wanted to study astronomy, further noting that several of those fellowships in previous years had gone to California women (*Astronomy Offers Careers to Women* 1932). Conversely, subjects that perhaps “belonged” to women sometimes were offered to men. *The Arroyo* spoke of colleges “keeping abreast of, or a bit ahead of, the times” when it mentioned that Oklahoma A&M held home economics courses for men, instructing them in selection of food, clothing, and home furnishings (*Colleges Teach Modern Courses* 1932, 2). In 1939 RJC instructors encouraged men to take secretarial courses, as “larger cities are calling for men secretaries” (*Men Secretaries In Demand* 1939, 4).

Some subjects, however, were clearly demarcated. When the high school that shared the grounds with RJC opened new night classes, *The Arroyo* let students know that “both boys and girls are benefited,” although not by the same courses; boys could take a “complete course” in agriculture, while girls could take a two-year vocational homemaking program (*New Courses in Poly High Night School to Begin* 1932, 3). Not an official part of the curriculum or a credit-earning class, a Los Angeles woman who claimed to teach poise to Hollywood actresses offered to come to RJC and teach a series of lessons on “How To Be Charming.” Few RJC women signed up, however, and it is not clear that the series

actually was taught (Marie Fontayne to Offer Course in Charm at Request of RJC Women 1936, 2, Hollywood Authority Begins Charm Course for Riverside Women 1936, 1). Women at RJC sometimes entered fields typically consigned to men, as when four women joined the printing class. Although the article spoke of women being welcome in the class, the author also invoked gender stereotypes by assuring readers that one of the women said that her experience with the stock cutter would prepare her for “the domestic weapons of later life,” meaning kitchen knives. The article also cited the instructor as saying there was no reason to worry that “the fair sex [will] unfairly run the linotypes,” given that men outnumbered women in the class by more than four to one. Thus, although a few women had entered a nontraditional course, the newspaper article made clear that as a profession, it was not for them (Four J.C. Women Following in Craft of Johann Gutenberg 1937, 4).

### Activities and Leadership

Some campus activities were remarkably egalitarian. Most notably, both men and women wrote and edited the student publications. Historian John Thelin observes that on coeducational campuses women were “unlikely to attain positions of leadership such as editor of the student newspaper” (Thelin 2004, 228). At RJC in the 1930s, however, women did take on the top positions for the two student publications. Of 23 editors-in-chief of *The Arroyo* during this period, 7 were women, and 10 of 12 editors-in-chief of the *Tequesquite* were women. That women took on such leadership on a coeducational campus is remarkable, but it is especially so given that men far outnumbered women at RJC.

Two additional mixed-gender activities throughout the 1930s were forensics, or debate, and the International Relations Club. When

Southern California junior colleges held a speaking contest in the spring of 1933, Josephine Brown was chosen to represent RJC to speak on the topic of “the Philippine question as it affects the international politics of the Pacific” (Josephine Brown to Enter Contest In Pomona 1933, 1). Approbation of women in this activity continued even after the women left RJC. *The Arroyo* proudly reported that Vivian McGovern, who enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley after leaving RJC, had made the forensics team there (Vivian McGovern Debates for U.C. 1933). The International Relations Club drew both male and female students, as well, and some years selected a woman delegate to the Institute of International Relations. The Institute was a major event, co-sponsored by UCLA and the University of Southern California, and widely attended by delegates from across the country (Institute Lists Noted Speakers; Josephine Brown to be Jaysee's Delegate at Peace Conference 1931). Women's active involvement in these two clubs shows an implicit acceptance of women's interest in national and global politics. No article in *The Arroyo* even hinted that this might be inappropriate for women. Rather, many people assumed that national and global citizenship, with the attendant responsibility of being educated on important issues, pertained to both women and men.

Student government, however, was another matter. The Associated Student Body (ASB) largely was about the male student body. Women had their own group, the Associated Women Students (AWS), and although it did sponsor some events especially designed for women, its main purpose was “to foster school spirit” (Jiminez and Johnson 1981, 64). Student fees supported both groups, but the ASB allocated those fees. Each year the ASB decided budgets for all of the student organizations, including

drama and music clubs, athletics, and student publications (the newspaper and yearbook). “ASB officers are one of the most important factors in school life,” one newspaper editorialist wrote, urging students to vote for “officers who will govern the entire student body” (Assembly Attendance 1931, 2). Therefore, the ASB, as the umbrella organization, had more power than any of the other organizations. AWS only had women officers and members, but it offered benefits to the entire student body as well as to the larger community. AWS sponsored teas and dances and lectures, bridge parties and theater parties, and also conducted fundraisers for needy families in the community (A.W.S. Society Notes 1931, A.W.S. Society Notes 1931, A.W.S. to Sponsor 'Toy Dance' Friday 1931, A.W.S. to Sponsor Leap Year Dance At Mission Inn Galleria 1932, Riverside Tag Day For Irving Children Tomorrow 1932, A.W.S. To Donate Money for Irving Benefit Fund 1933).

Because women also were involved in activities beyond AWS, they were affected by the ASB while having limited voice in the decisions made by the ASB. Year after year, the ASB president was male. One year the Los Angeles Junior College newspaper published an editorial saying that “women should be given an equal chance with men to hold executive positions on the student body board.” *The Arroyo* editorial page concurred, saying that women had demonstrated their “level-headedness and their efficiency” in other arenas. The RJC editorialist congratulated the Los Angeles writer, who the RJC student knew to be “a boy,” for his willingness “to overcome the silly prejudice between the sexes.” Yet for this writer, “an equal chance” did not mean that women should be able to run for president. “Is there any reason why a woman shouldn’t hold the position of vice president,” asked this editor? After all, women

“have always been more talented socially than men” (Politically Speaking 1933, 4). In fact, when this editorial ran in 1933, women had been vice president at RJC for three years running, in 1929-1931. But institutional memories are short, and at a two-year college the turnover in student population is rapid. It is revealing that a student in 1933 felt a need to argue for the legitimacy of something that had, in fact, already been done several times over on that campus. RJC would have female vice presidents again in 1936 and 1941.

The year after the Los Angeles Junior College editorial on women officers, the students there not only gave a woman a chance to run, but elected her president of the student body (Woman Student President of Los Angeles Junior College 1934). At RJC, though, it would be almost forty more years—not until 1972—before a woman would be student body president (Jiminez and Johnson 1981). All of the secretaries were female, and all of the treasurers were male, although many women served as business managers of the two student publications from 1929-1941. This again shows the very local nature of gender construction, that two junior colleges less than fifty miles away would have such different histories of the student body presidency.

### **ROTC and the Rifle Club**

While women may have been preparing to take up “domestic weapons,” men were required to learn to deploy weapons of war. One of the most clearly gender specific courses was the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. The Morrill Land Grant Act had required that land grant institutions provide military training, and many campuses made such training mandatory for male students. The gruesome and horrific realities of World War I changed many people’s opinions about war.

Across the country, students vociferously protested the ROTC requirement, and as a result of student objections to compulsory military training in the 1920s, dozens of campuses across the country made ROTC voluntary (Eagan 1981). At RJC, as in all of California, ROTC was still compulsory for male students in the 1930s. One particular newspaper story about ROTC is chilling. Students were taken to nearby March Field air base to get a lesson in chemical warfare, including learning to identify different gasses by their odors. To impress upon students the need to use gas masks, they were required to run through small quantities of chemicals entirely unprotected. Students were still sick on the bus ride back to campus. The story in the newspaper made light of the incident, saying that the “field trip” was “enjoyed” by students who were inducted into the “royal order of tear gas smellers” (ROTC Learns Use of War Gases 1937, 1).

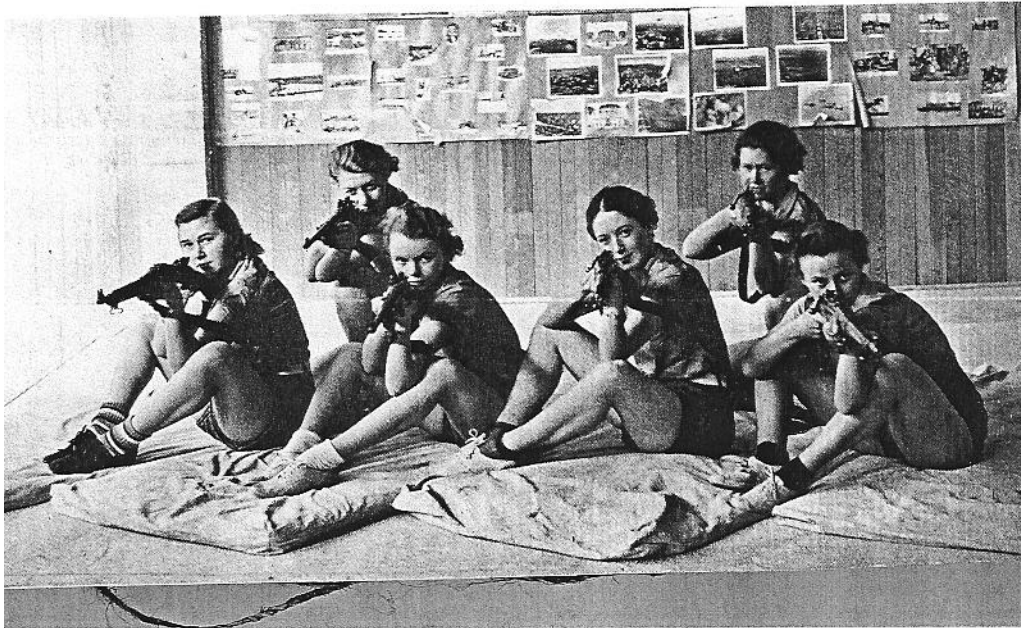
Military training was not compulsory for women, but some volunteered by joining the campus rifle club. They used ROTC facilities for target practice, and learned to shoot from four positions: standing, sitting, kneeling, and prone. The women in the club and their instructor, Major Olin Newell who also taught ROTC men, apparently took shooting seriously, and competed against rifle teams from other colleges (Tequesquite 1937, Tequesquite 1936). College women in the Midwest and West had participated in military training for decades. According to historian Andrea G. Radke-Moss, women at land grant universities saw men performing drills and petitioned for their own regiments as early as the 1870s. The women on drill teams in the late nineteenth century were known as “student soldieresses” (Radke-Moss 2008, 223). The popularity of the regimental activity waned after the First World War, but women’s interest in

learning to shoot did not. In the 1920s, the National Rifle Association (NRA), looking for members and for support against anti-gun legislation, sponsored several hundred collegiate and high school rifle programs for both women and men which flourished nationally until the worst of the Depression hit (George 1992).

RJC’s rifle club appears to have begun in the 1930s and had counterparts on other campuses. Women students at the University of California at Berkeley began a rifle club in 1925 and competed nationally. By 1934 Berkeley women also had teams in archery and fencing. Berkeley’s rifle team, like RJC’s, was led by a U.S. Army Captain who also led the male ROTC program (The Blue & Gold 1925, The Blue & Gold 1931, The Blue & Gold 1934). This arrangement was quite common, because beginning in 1922, the NRA and the Field Artillery units of ROTC began jointly sponsoring intercollegiate tournaments. At a time when most women’s collegiate sports de-emphasized competition, rifle clubs—sponsored not by college athletic departments but by the U.S. Army and the NRA—encouraged competition. For most other women’s sports in this era, athletes met for “play days” at which colleges mixed athletes from different schools on ad hoc teams (Verbrugge 1997, Guttman 1991, Theriot 1978). Therefore, women who participated in rifle clubs also participated in a more competitive environment than did women who played any other sport. But because rifle clubs were sponsored and funded by the Army and the NRA, as ROTC programs began disappearing from college campuses, so did the rifle teams (George 1992).

What meaning RJC’s rifle club held in the 1930s is not clear. When members of the team posed for a picture for the yearbook, they stared down their rifle barrels into the camera, some with small smiles on their faces. They are wearing

very short shorts and little anklets, and their knees | are spread. It is a highly sexualized picture,



**Figure 1: Rifle Team, 1936**

almost as though the trade-off for being allowed to handle guns was to promise to look as feminine and demure as possible while holding a weapon. So while women were able to participate, their involvement in the rifle club may have been acceptable only if they didn't push the gender line too far. Men's training was far more involved, including military tactics and use of different types of weaponry, and was required, but some of the same elements and skills also were taught to women. A gender line was drawn, but the line was not absolute.

At the same time that these women learned to shoot, ROTC itself came under fire. Students across the country had protested the compulsory nature of ROTC for years, and much of the protest came to a head in the mid-1930s. A few students who had refused to participate in ROTC due to their pacifist beliefs had been expelled on several campuses, most notably at Ohio State University. The expulsion led to wider protests, which eventually led to legislation in the U.S. Congress, the Nye-Kvale Bill, that proposed

to end compulsory ROTC (Eagan 1981). RJC students were well aware of, and involved in, these debates. The national Committee On Militarism in Education sponsored an essay contest on "Why Congress Should Pass the Nye-Kvale Amendment." Open to undergraduates across the country, first prize went to a student at Columbia University, and third prize went to a UCLA undergraduate. But the second prize was won by an RJC student, Elmer Lewis. His winning essay was published serially in *The Arroyo* in the spring of 1936 (Elmer Lewis Hits Military Training 1936, Lewis Essay Takes Second; Militarism Attack Wins Praise In National Contest 1936). In his essay Lewis writes eloquently about his desire for peace and his critique of mandatory training for war on campuses across the country.

RJC students did not engage in the marches or free speech movements that students at nearby UCLA, University of Southern California, and Los Angeles Junior College did in 1934 and 1935. *The Arroyo* reported on those

marches and demonstrations, though, and on the UCLA administration's swift and repressive response of expelling the five student leaders. This, too, was a moment in which gender mattered. One of the five expelled students, and the most strident, was a young woman named Celeste Strack, who would go on to become a stalwart in the Communist Party. RJC students appeared to have no sympathy whatsoever for Communists (Cohen 1993, U.C.L.A. Ousts Five in Anti-Radical Drive 1934, Strike Set for U.C.L.A. 1934). A student editorialist wrote that "we can be thankful that such tendencies for fanatical and radical changes in government find small foothold on the RJC campus," and wanted to "make it clear once and for all, and to all agitators—Communism under any name or form is not wanted here" ([Angelo?] 1935). The next month another editorialist took satisfaction in the "general failure" of student peace marches across the country, claiming that the only thing the marches proved was "that the majority of college students are still loyal to the high ideals of American patriotism" (Tanner 1935, 4). RJC clearly was not a hotbed of radical activity, a fact that may also reflect the middle-class hopes of students and the community.

Yet not everyone participated in the anti-Communist furor, either. One student wrote to the newspaper complaining about the tone of the "Communism is not wanted here" editorial, urging the student paper not to

follow the example of Mr. Hearst's publications and the *Los Angeles Times* by furnishing us each week with the latest thing in Communist scares and various ill assorted examples of Red baiting.... The point is that we maintain a sane and rational attitude. Why fall in line with utterly asinine and un-intelligent propaganda which American

jingoists are endeavoring to shove down our throats. We are intelligent. We are, I hope, essentially fair minded (Ferris 1935, 4).

Students could oppose Communism and still support the peace movement or the abolishment of mandatory ROTC. These were different and clearly separable issues.

Many students, both women and men, were vocal pacifists, and according to a survey cited by Elmer Lewis in his winning essay, a wide majority—71 per cent—of the broader Riverside community also opposed "compulsory training in the science of mass murder" (Elmer Lewis Hits Military Training 1936, 4). Masculinity may once have been linked to a militaristic Rough Rider image, but the savagery of the First World War led to widespread pacifism (Bederman 1996). That anti-militaristic view would be dashed quickly after Pearl Harbor, but for much of the 1930s many cities and many campuses were home to active peace movements. Masculinity, then, could not continue to be defined by militarism. Whether women in the rifle club simply had an interest in learning to shoot as a form of exercise, or whether they were making a comment on ROTC, either parodying it or supporting it, is impossible to say. But it is the case that the several years that the female rifle club appeared in the yearbook were the same years that protest against compulsory military training was at its height, both nationally and locally. It might be that shooting became an activity that was acceptable for women at RJC precisely at a time when militarism was not a bulwark in the designation of masculinity.

## Conclusion

These articles and photographs from *The Arroyo* and the *Tequesquite* suggest gender roles in flux. RJC students seemed to accept that

women could be involved in world affairs or study astronomy at Harvard, and men could study food preparation, become secretaries, or take up study of the piano. Women could shoot rifles, as long as they countered that activity with obvious displays of femininity. RJC was unusual in having so many female editors of the newspaper and yearbook, and this is especially striking given that men outnumbered women on campus. Not all leadership was shared, though; women could occasionally be vice president of the student body, but never president, even though a woman in that role existed on another coeducational junior college campus not far away. Women could succeed in forensics or art and be celebrated for helping make their alma mater look good to outsiders. At RJC, the need to raise the status of the institution so that students could reach their middle-class aspirations depended on the success of everyone associated with the institution. Further, as part of that middle-class identity, most students agreed that women should be educated in ways that would help them carry out their civic responsibilities. To whatever extent there was a “crisis of masculinity” during the Depression, evidence for it at RJC is limited.

More work needs to be done to explore the role of the student peace movement in reshaping definitions of masculinity. Militarism, a defining characteristic of masculinity only a decade or two previously, was now devalued in response to the grim horrors of World War I. At the same time, unprecedented opportunities opened for women in higher education, government, and business, further reducing the boundaries that previously had separated ideals of masculinity and femininity. What the repercussions were of this confluence, and understanding how it might have shaped students’ experiences on various campuses, is ripe for future scholarship.

## References

- [Angelo?], Mort? M.A. 1935. "Not Wanted Here." *The Arroyo*, March 11.
- [Mueda?], H. M. [Henry?]. 1938. "Are We Men, Or Are We Mice." *The Arroyo*, January 26.
- Allen, Judith A. 2002. "Men Interminably in Crisis? Historians on Masculinity, Sexual Boundaries, and Manhood." *Radical History Review* 82:191-207.
- "Assembly Attendance." 1931. *The Arroyo*. October 21.
- "Astronomy Offers Careers to Women." 1932. *The Arroyo*. January 6.
- "A.W.S. Society Notes." 1931. *The Arroyo*. October 21.
- "A.W.S. Society Notes." 1931. *The Arroyo*. November 4.
- "A.W.S. To Donate Money for Irving Benefit Fund." 1933. *The Arroyo*. November 6.
- "A.W.S. to Sponsor Leap Year Dance At Mission Inn Galleria." 1932. *The Arroyo*. January 6.
- "A.W.S. to Sponsor 'Toy Dance' Friday." 1931. *The Arroyo*. December 9.
- Bederman, Gail. 1996. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brint, Steven, and Jerome Karabel. 1989. *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*. New York and Oxford.
- "Campus Column." 1931. *The Arroyo*. September 30.
- "Change of College Name Again Proposed." 1939. *The Arroyo*. March 17.
- Cohen, Ronald. 1993. *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- "Colleges Teach Modern Courses." 1932. *The Arroyo*. January 6.
- Eagan, Eileen. 1981. *Class, Culture, and the Classroom: The Student Peace Movement of the 1930s*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- "Edmund C. Jaeger Completing Book." 1932. *The Arroyo*. September 26.
- Eisenmann, Linda. 2006. *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.
- Eisenmann, Linda. 1997. "Reconsidering a Classic: Assessing the History of Women's Higher Education a Dozen Years after Barbara Solomon." *Harvard Review of Education* 67: 689-718.
- "Elmer Lewis Hits Military Training." 1936. *The Arroyo*. April 15.
- "Elsewhere." 1933. *The Arroyo*. March 10.
- "Enrollment Puts Riverside Tenth." 1935. *The Arroyo*. October 16.
- Ferris, Melton. 1935. "To the Editor." *The Arroyo*, March 14.
- "Former J.C. Student Cited For Discovery." 1938. *The Arroyo*. May 18.
- "Four J.C. Women Following in Craft of Johann Gutenberg." 1937. *The Arroyo*. December 13.
- "Fraser Hall Rules Strictly Enforced." 1939. *The Arroyo*. March 1.
- George, Judith Jenkins. 1992. "Women's Riflery Teams: A Collegiate Anomaly of the Post World War I Period." *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 23: 32-45.
- "Girl Grid Star." 1935. *The Arroyo*. November 25.
- Gordon, Lynn. 1990. *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- "Graduate Made Officer Manager of S.C. Trojan." 1933. *The Arroyo*. October 23.
- "Graduates of Sherman Aided." 1935. *The Arroyo*. October 23.
- "Graduates Sustain Creditable Record." 1937. *The Arroyo*. November 17.
- Guttman, Allen. 1991. *Women's Sports: A History*. New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press.
- Hoganson, Kristin L. 1998. *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- "Hollywood Authority Begins Charm Course for Riverside Women." 1936. *The Arroyo*. October 28.
- Horowitz, Helen L. 1984. *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- "Institute Lists Noted Speakers; Josephine Brown to be Jaysee's Delegate at Peace Conference." 1931. *The Arroyo*. December 9.
- "Jaysee Posers." 1934. *The Arroyo*. January 15.
- "Jaysee Women Graduates Outnumber Men." 1933. *The Arroyo*. October 30.
- "J.C. freshman Receives Journalism Scholarship." 1933. *The Arroyo*. October 9.
- Jiminez, Gilbert, and Thomas M. Johnson. 1981. *Riverside City College, 1916-1981: A 65 Year History*. Riverside: Riverside Community College District.
- "Josephine Brown to Enter Contest In Pomona." 1933. *The Arroyo*. May 5.
- "'Junior College' Criticized At Meeting Of Administrators." 1938. *The Arroyo*. November 9.
- Kimmel, Michael S. 2006. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- "Leads Parade." 1935. *The Arroyo*. November 25.

- Levine, David O. 1987. *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- "Lewis Essay Takes Second; Militarism Attack Wins Praise In National Contest." 1936. *The Arroyo*. April 22.
- Manekin, Sarah. 2010. "Gender, Markets, and the Expansion of Women's Education at the University of Pennsylvania, 1913-1940." *History of Education Quarterly* 50: 298-323.
- McComb, Mary C. 2006. *The Great Depression and the Middle Class: Experts, Collegiate Youth and Business Ideology, 1929-1941*. New York: Routledge.
- "Marie Fontayne to Offer Course in Charm at Request of RJC Women." 1936. *The Arroyo*. October 14.
- "Men Don't Like Too Much Lipstick." 1936. *The Arroyo*. October 14.
- "Men Head Women in Grade Average for Quarter." 1933. *The Arroyo*. January 4.
- "Men Lead Women On Honor Roll." 1940. *The Arroyo*. April 10.
- "Men Secretaries In Demand." 1939. *The Arroyo*. October 18.
- "Miss M. Babcock Gets High Honor Rating For Term; Women Students Lead List Of fifty-Five For Fall Quarter." 1937. *The Arroyo*. January 8.
- "M. Okubo Earns Henicke Award." 1938. *The Arroyo*. June 10.
- Mosse, George L. 1996. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- "Mrs. Harrison Banquet Speaker." 1937. *The Arroyo*. November 24.
- Nash, Margaret A., and Lisa Romero. 2012. "Citizenship for the College Girl": Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education for Women in the United States in the 1930s. *Teachers College Record* 114: 1-35.
- "New Courses in Poly High Night School to Begin." 1932. *The Arroyo*. October 10.
- "New Success for Co-ops." 1931. *The Arroyo*. September 30.
- "Other Colleges." 1937. *The Arroyo*. November 24.
- "Other Colleges." 1932. April 6.
- "Our Phi Beta Record." 1931. *The Arroyo*. September 30.
- Paxton, Harriet. 1937. "Forty Percent Of RJC Women Smoke, Poll Reveals." *The Arroyo*, April 28.
- Pendergast, Tom. 1997. "Horatio Alger Doesn't Work Here Any More": Masculinity and American Magazines, 1919-1940. *American Studies* 38: 55-80.
- Phillips, Clarence M., Tamara L. Brown, and Gregory S. Parks. 2005. *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- "Politically Speaking." 1933. *The Arroyo*. May 5.
- Rabin, Phyllis. 1968. "The Negro in Riverside: 1900-1950." *Senior Thesis, Department of History, University of California, Riverside*.
- Radke-Moss, Andrea G. 2008. *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- "Results." 1933. *The Arroyo*. April 21.
- "Riverside Tag Day For Irving Children Tomorrow." 1932. *The Arroyo*. October 24.
- "ROTC Learns Use of War Gases." 1937. *The Arroyo*. February 17.
- "Sherman Institute Represented By 14 Students." 1939. *The Arroyo*. March 8.
- "Shy Maid Trips Primrose Path to Oblivion - Yes." 1934. *The Arroyo*. January 8.
- Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940; Population*. 1943. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Solomon, Barbara Miller. 1985. *In the Company of Educated Women*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- "State University Draws J. C. Grads." 1931. *The Arroyo*. October 5.
- "Strike Set for U.C.L.A." 1934. *Los Angeles Times*. November 5.
- "Student Enrollment Sets New Figure." 1931. *The Arroyo*. September 30.
- "Students Enrolled From Many States; Japan Represented." 1933. *The Arroyo*. October 9.
- "Students From 18 States Enrolled." 1931. *The Arroyo*. September 30, 1931: 1.
- Syrett, Nicholas L. 2009. *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Tanner, Thomas. 1935. "Student Strikes." *The Arroyo*, April 29.
- Tequesquite*. 1937. Riverside: Riverside Junior College.
- Tequesquite*. 1936. Riverside: Riverside Junior College.
- "The Arroyo Congratulates." 1931. *The Arroyo*. September 30.
- The Blue & Gold*. 1934. San Francisco: H.S. Crocker Co.
- The Blue & Gold*. 1931. San Francisco: H.S. Crocker Co.
- The Blue & Gold*. 1925. San Francisco: H. S. Crocker Co.
- Thelin, John R. 2004. *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Theriot, Nancy. 1978. "Towards a New Sporting Ideal: The Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 3: 1-7.
- "Total Enrollment Under Last Year's." 1939. *The Arroyo*. October 4.
- "Transfers From North, South, East, and West." 1934. *The Arroyo*. November 14.
- "Two Students Tie for Highest Grade Points; One Woman Only in Highest Six." 1934. *The Arroyo*. January 8.
- "UCLA Claims Most Jaysee Transfers." 1933. *The Arroyo*. October 16.
- "U.C.L.A. Ousts Five in Anti-Radical Drive." 1934. *Los Angeles Times*. October 30.
- "University Head Compliments J.C." 1931. *The Arroyo*. October 5.
- "[untitled]." 1935. *The Arroyo*. April 19.
- Verbrugge, Martha H. 1997. "Recreating the Body: Women's Physical Education and the Science of Sex Differences in America, 1900-1940." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 71: 273-304.
- "Vivian McGovern Debates for U.C." 1933. *The Arroyo*. April 21.
- "What They See As They Pass." 1932. *The Arroyo*. April 27.
- "Woman Student President of Los Angeles Junior College." 1934. *The Arroyo*. January 22.
- "Women Dominate Honor Roll for Fall Term." 1938. *The Arroyo*. January 12.
- "Women In Minority As Quarter Ends." 1937. *The Arroyo*. December 13.