

The Role of Women's Colleges in the Leadership Development of Female Students

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This paper examines the literature about women's leadership development at women's colleges. The benefits of women's colleges in terms of student success are reviewed. The role of the environment at women's colleges and the role of faculty and staff in creating the college environments are presented. Next discussed is leadership and other opportunities for involvement at women's colleges. Research into the benefits of women's colleges and implications for co-educational institutions are presented.

Introduction

Women are entering higher education at higher rates than in the past with most of them attending coeducational institutions (Sagarra, 1988). Of these women, approximately 96% are at coeducational institutions (Sebrechts, 1992). Although women's colleges enroll only a small portion of the women in college, they continue to graduate a disproportionate number of women with baccalaureate degrees (Ledman, Miller & Brown, 1995).

Several studies have examined the benefits of attending a women's college. It appears that several factors act on students at these institutions to encourage their growth. Women in single-sex institutions report feeling more involved in the college and experience growth in leadership skills which are often determining factors in persistence (Whitt, 1994).

On the other hand, women hold fewer leadership positions on coeducational campuses due to such reasons as traditional expectations of male and female roles, institutional obstacles, and self-doubt among the female students (Whitt, 1994). In coeducational schools, women's grades as well as their career aspirations and self-esteem tend to decrease from their first year to their senior year (Leonard & Sigall, 1989). Since women's colleges seem to offer better environments for involvement and leadership, they should be studied to determine what changes coeducational colleges and universities can make to enhance the college experience for women students (Whitt, 1994).

This paper will first give an overview of the benefits of women's colleges. Then the role of the environment at women's colleges will be described, followed by a description of the role faculty and staff play in creating college environments that encourage involvement. Next, leadership and other opportunities for involvement at women's colleges will be presented. For the remainder of the paper, the term "students" refers to female students at women's colleges.

The Role of Women's Colleges

Much of the literature on women's colleges and women's development involves examining the benefits of attending women's colleges, including post-college success, entry and retention in nontraditional fields, and satisfaction with

both college and themselves. In the seven decades between 1910 and 1979, 343 of every 10,000 graduates from women's colleges achieved measurable intellectual or career accomplishments compared to 116 out of every 10,000 women graduates from coeducational institutions (Tidball, 1989). "Women's colleges graduate women who attain a variety of measurable post-college accomplishments" (Tidball, p. 157). Graduates of women's colleges are more likely to be successful as indicated by appearing in lists of notable people and are also more likely to have obtained a graduate degree (Ledman et al., 1995; Smith, Wolf & Morrison, 1995). However, some studies that show differences in outcomes have been criticized for not controlling for other variables, such as students' socioeconomic status and the school's selectivity (Miller-Bernal, 1993). Other studies have indicated that selectivity and socioeconomic status were more important variables than the gender composition of the undergraduate school (Crosby, Allen, Culbertson, Wally, Morith, Hall, & Nunes, 1994).

Students at women's colleges are more likely to enter and stay in nontraditional fields, especially math and science (Sebrechts, 1992; Smith et al., 1995). They are "three times as likely to earn a baccalaureate degree in economics and one and a half times as likely to earn baccalaureate degrees in the life sciences, physical science, and mathematics at a women's college than at a coeducational institution" (Sebrechts, pp. 45-46). These women are also more likely to pursue doctoral work in math, science and engineering or go to medical school (Sebrechts). Since the students of these colleges are generally all female, the barriers of gender are not found in the college environment, making women more comfortable in pursuing non-traditional fields of study such as science and math (Sebrechts). Faculty relationships are particularly influential with women studying science. Mentoring prepares the student for the type of knowledge she will need to succeed in the sciences (Sebrechts).

Environmental Factors

"[W]omen's colleges provide a uniquely supportive climate for women to explore themselves and other members of their gender in a wide range of intellectual and social leadership roles" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, as cited in Smith, et al., 1995, p. 246). Bennett and Shayner (1988) agree that women's colleges provide an environment that recognizes and encourages leadership potential in its students. A holistic environment that incorporates academics, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is created by the women's colleges (Tidball, 1989). The experience for women at coeducational institutions is different. Many coeducational schools have been described as having a chilly climate for women (Miller-Bernal, 1993).

Another difference in the environment of women's colleges is their commitment to community. Students at women's colleges report a strong diversity orientation and are more likely to believe that their college values civic involvement and multiculturalism (Smith et al., 1995). The students view their commitment to leadership in a larger institutional context of service, feeling that they were "giving back" to their community by holding a leadership position (Whitt,

1994).

At women's colleges, the faculty and administrators express their high expectations for students and the lack of limits to their success, prompting the students to perceive their potential and become involved in research (Sebrechts, 1992; Whitt, 1994). Another study found that faculty contact with students was highest at women's colleges and this increased contact allows faculty to express their high expectations to the students (Komarovskiy, 1985, as cited in Neff & Harwood, 1993).

These environmental differences may be related to the relationships developed at women's colleges. The students report that they believe the members of the college (faculty, staff and students) cared and valued their learning (Smith et al, 1995). Historically, women's colleges were created to value and assist with the development of women (Pearson, Touchton, & Shavlik, 1989). The colleges also include women's voices in the curriculum which create a sense of valuing women and themselves and may contribute to the students being more participatory in class settings (Miller-Bernal, 1993).

The Role of Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff at women's colleges play an important role in aiding in the growth and leadership development of the students. Faculty and staff impact is thought to occur in numerous ways including awareness of their potential for impact, role modeling and mentoring, the composition of the faculty and staff, encouragement of women student leaders, and high expectations for students. Sagaria and Johnsrud (1988) emphasize that female administrators must be aware of their role in leadership development.

The faculty and staff are committed to encouraging female students to become involved in leadership opportunities (Whitt, 1994). Many of the women in Whitt's study indicate their involvement in leadership positions is due to encouragement from faculty and administrators at the college. Female students are also more likely to perceive the faculty and administrators as supportive of their needs at women's colleges. This creates an atmosphere where students are comfortable participating (Miller-Bernal, 1993). Whitt found that women students are taken seriously as leaders in women's colleges. The women administrators use a collaborative leadership style that allowed for student participation (Whitt).

Mentoring and role modeling are two ways that faculty, staff, and administrators can take an active role in impacting students. Role modeling is often intentional and designed to allow the students to see women achieving so they understand that they, too, can achieve (Whitt, 1994). The faculty are role models of women who continued their studies. Miller-Bernal's (1993) study confirms that women at women's colleges or coordinate colleges (colleges with a co-educational school and a women's college, like Harvard and Radcliffe) were more likely to have women role models than women at coeducational schools. Staff and administrators also have an impact as role models. Role models can also be advisors who work with student leaders in their student organizations. Some women students feel that leadership will be an isolating experience; role models and men-

tors play an important part in calming those fears and offering reassurance (Guido-DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988).

Leadership Opportunities

The environment at women's colleges and the faculty and staff combine to create opportunities for students to develop their leadership potential. Whitt (1994) suggests that "women's ways of leadership" which include "emphasis on relationships, decisions involving collaboration among all members of the organization, sharing of information and power, commitment to promoting self-esteem among all members, and 'values of duty, love and care'" (p. 198) are becoming more accepted among leadership theories. Student organizations at women's colleges serve as an avenue for women students to test and develop their leadership skills (Guido-DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988). Women are free to experiment with leadership positions without the fear that they will be viewed as less feminine (Tidball, 1989). Miller-Bernal (1993) found that the women she surveyed at the women's college and the coordinate college were more likely to have received training in leadership that would be useful in post-college life.

According to a survey conducted at the 1987 National Conference for College Women Student Leaders and Women of Achievement, "the most helpful programs for developing women's leadership seem to be those intended primarily or exclusively for women ... [because they] focus on supporting and affirming women's identity, aspirations, and accomplishments" (Sagaria, 1988, p. 6). Women's colleges offer specific opportunities for leadership development as well as informal mentoring and role modeling. Leadership development activities such as workshops for new leaders, exposure to research on leadership styles, and collaborative leadership are used to encourage leadership among female students (Whitt, 1994).

Implications for Coeducational Institutions

Coeducational institutions have not historically provided a friendly climate for female students, however, most female students attend coeducational institutions. Students sometimes experience the "null environment" where there is nothing overtly hostile but there is also no encouragement for leadership success at coeducational institutions (Whitt, 1994). This can be just as discouraging as overt discrimination to women students looking to participate in leadership positions.

The lack of female students in leadership positions in coeducational institutions may lead to the perception that women are not meant to serve in leadership positions (Whitt, 1994). Female peers create an environment in which the students can identify and can feel a connection and an involvement (Sebrechts, 1992). Sharp (1991) reports that at women's colleges about 40% of students are involved in three or more student organizations. Astin (1993) relates that students who feel a connection and are involved with their college are more likely to be satisfied with the experience and persist in college. Whitt contends that connection is inherent in "women's ways of leadership" (p. 198).

As more women students enter higher education, it is important that coeducational schools adapt their practices and policies to better accommodate women students. It is important for administrators in coeducational institutions to provide some of the benefits of women's colleges to combat the drop in academic self-esteem that women in coeducational institutions experience (Bennett & Shayner, 1988). The environment that helps women students is also more effective for male students. Thus, by adapting these methods to coeducational institutions, both male and female students would benefit (Sebrechts, 1992).

Coeducational institutions need to create opportunities for women's leadership. One way to address this need could be to create all-female settings to practice leadership without marginalizing their experience (Whitt, 1994). Self-knowledge and self-assessment for coeducational institutions is an important step to supporting women's leadership development and eliminating a "null" environment (Whitt, 1994).

Administrators can provide role models for women and provide leadership experiences and opportunities for women students to take leadership roles (Bennett & Shayner, 1988). Male administrators and faculty members must learn how to be mentors to women students at coeducational campuses as there are often not enough women faculty and staff members to satisfy the mentoring needs of the female students (Guido-DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988). All faculty should also be aware of their gender biases. In co-educational institutions men tend to receive more attention and more resources (Miller-Bernal, 1993). This and other biases can be addressed through training for faculty and doctoral students.

Neff and Harwood (1993) propose increasing the use of the coordinate college model where a coeducational and a women's college share common curricula, general education programs, recordkeeping, joint departments, and joint libraries while retaining individual degrees, faculty, administration, residential life, student government and student organizations. This model allows for the institutionalization of women's voices through the women's college and retains many of the benefits of women's colleges while allowing for flexibility and interaction between the sexes of a coeducational institution (Neff & Harwood, 1993). The model does have the drawback that often the women's college becomes subsumed under the co-educational school (Neff & Harwood, 1993).

More study is needed of the coordinate colleges system to see if it is viable for existing schools to enter into this type of relationship. Research is also needed on specific types of leadership development programs that work for women in coeducational settings. Administrators also need to know what types of programming and training will be most effective in helping faculty and staff overcome their gender biases.

Conclusion

The three factors that seem to play the largest role in women's development at women's colleges are the environment, the faculty and staff, and the opportunities for leadership. The support and encouragement that women stu-

dents receive from faculty and administrators plays a very important role in women's leadership development (Whitt, 1994). Yet, the methodologies of some of these studies have been called into question. Newer studies have controlled for other variables that might contribute to the success of women's colleges' graduates and have still found measurable benefits.

The studies do have some other limitations. Often, the studies did not examine racial or ethnic differences among the students at women's colleges (Smith, Wolf, & Morrison, 1995). The results may differ for minority students at predominantly White women's colleges. Since we know that minority students experience predominantly White coeducational institutions differently than White students (Allen, 1992), one may assume that the experience of racial/ethnic minority women is different than that of White women. Also, it would be useful to the study of gender and racial differences to compare the environment for women at historically Black coeducational colleges and at historically Black women's colleges to see if the same climate differences are found as between predominantly White coeducational institutions and predominantly White women's colleges.

Women's colleges provide a unique environment that is conducive to the positive growth and development of female students. However, there are so few women's colleges that it is unrealistic for more than a handful of women to benefit from them. Coeducational institutions need to adapt the practices of women's colleges so that more women can benefit from a supportive environment during their higher education.

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International Students: An Introduction

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International students represent a population with specialized issues and concerns. Meant as an overview for student affairs practitioners not primarily responsible for international students, this article provides an explanation of culture shock, topics to be covered in international orientation, and the importance of social support systems. Also included are the unique academic issues impacting international students and an explanation of the role of the International Student Advisor and the international advising office in advocating for and counseling foreign students. The paper concludes with suggestions for further research.

International students are playing an increasingly important role on our college campuses. The Institute of International Education cited that in the 1996-97 school year, 457,984 international students came to the United States to study with a 0.9% increase in foreign student enrollment in 1997 (Open Doors, 1997). Nearly 60% of today's international students come from Asia, with Japan, China, the Republic of Korea, India, and Taiwan leading the world in the number of students in the United States. Canada sends the largest number of students from Western nations, (Open Doors, 1997) and enrollment from eastern and western Europe and from the Commonwealth of Independent States (the former USSR) is also increasing (Desruisseaux, 1994). While 67.2% of international student funding continues to be from personal or family resources (Open Doors, 1997), it is becoming more common for the student to be from a developing nation and sponsored by the home government, home university, or some other agency (Locke & Velasco, 1987).

Although the term foreign has negative connotations, it is still largely used in the literature, and the terms foreign and international will be used interchangeably throughout this text. The terms host national and American will also be used interchangeably, although it is important to note that there are a million students in the world not currently studying in their own countries, and the research represents all international students regardless of the host country. This article will discuss the importance of international students on American campuses. An operational definition of culture shock, the first major obstacle confronting international students, will be presented next. Important components to the adaptation of international students will also be discussed, including orientation, social support systems, academic issues and advising, and the role of the International Student Advisor and International Student and Scholar Offices.

The complexity of international student adjustment is often greatly misunderstood by the general public, but Furnham & Trezise (1983) explain that the problems of international students are basically three-fold. First, there are the stresses that confront anyone living in a foreign culture such as racial discrimination, language problems, accommodation difficulties, separation reactions, di-