

The Truth About A Women's College

By:
President Thomas V. Litzenburg

All of us, I suppose, have a list of our favorite questions. At the top of mine is one the answer to which I never tire of giving—namely, why the tradition of the separate education of women continues to endure.

The shortest and least useful way to answer this question, of course, is to ask why anyone would doubt that there should be colleges for women. While such a response is very much to the point, it is not particularly illuminating. That is to say, there are any number of reasons why women's colleges have prevailed—most of which should be known by those who care about the education of women.

That these reasons are not, in fact, widely known is one very good explanation why colleges for women are needed and have endured. Nan Keohane, President of Wellesley College, made the same point more forcefully and clearly when she said that one of her "purposes in working at a women's college" is to help us get to the point where "baccalaureate education would not have to be offered in a single-sex institution." Noting that she was speaking only for herself, President Keohane went on to remark wistfully that she hoped there would come a time when she could say with conviction that "women's colleges are no longer needed."

But is there, the skeptic persists, any hard evidence that women's colleges really are still needed? While some may not like the answer, there is evidence aplenty. Consider, for example, the following facts recently reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

- "Women who graduated from women's colleges between 1975 and 1978 were [anywhere from] 2 to 11 times more likely to go to medical school" than women attending coeducational colleges and universities.
- "Nine women's colleges are among the top 25 institutions that, over a 40-year period, produced the highest percentage of [women] graduates who went on to earn doctorates, even though those nine colleges represent only a small percentage" of the more than three thousand institutions educating women.
- "The percentage of students at women's colleges majoring in such fields as chemistry, economics, mathematics, and physics—subjects that have traditionally been dominated by men—is two to three times the national average for women".
- "Students attending women's colleges are more likely to attain positions of leadership, to become involved in student government, to develop high aspirations, and to persist to graduation".

These facts have implications—unhappy as they may be—that also have been documented. In a 1982 study of the experiences and attitudes of women at coeducational institutions conducted by the Association of American Colleges, researchers discovered what they called a "chilly classroom climate" that "puts women students at a significant educational disadvantage." By that they meant an atmosphere that, as the *Chronicle* has put it, "discourages [women] students from participating in class, prevents them from

seeking help outside the classroom, causes them to drop or even avoid taking certain classes, and deflates their career aspirations."

It is, perhaps, a testimony to the genuine difficulties that women continue to encounter in pursuing their education that such "discrimination" is more subtle than blatant. Indeed, few if any educators would contend that coeducational institutions intentionally discriminate against women. On the contrary, the problem is far more serious and complicated than such an accusation would suggest.

To understand that this is so, we might come at the central point from another angle of view. There are those who argue that far too many women assume that the lack of attention and support provided them by teachers, advisers, and administrators has to be accepted as part of the natural order of things. Embraced in this assumption, critics contend, is the curious if not provocative argument that if men seem to get preferential treatment in the classroom and on the athletic field it is only because they have earned and, therefore, deserve it.

If true, this is a disturbing state of affairs—a closed if not vicious circle. For how, one might ask, is a woman to articulate much less realize her highest expectations if she entertains the assumption that her aspirations are unreasonable and somehow out of order? The answer to this question may be all the more troubling if it is put yet another way. As some proponents of women's colleges have asked, where else other than in an institution dedicated to the education of women can a woman properly assume that she will be taken seriously as a woman? When the question is cast in precisely this manner it has a distinct rhetorical flavor—that is to say, the question entails its own answer.

We do well, I think, to test the utility of this question. Perhaps the most useful way to do so is to ask another set of questions the answers to all of which are obvious. Where, other than in a women's college, will women earn all of the academic honors? receive all of the athletic awards? hold all of the elected offices? administer all of the co-curricular activities? enjoy the undivided attention of all of their teachers and advisers?

While there is an apparent fallacy in this line of questioning, it may be only that—namely, apparent rather than real. Here, of course, the discussion comes full circle and the hard question must be faced once again. If, as some argue, most women do not enjoy full equality in their educational endeavors, if they lack for want of their fair share of recognition, and if the absence of genuine concern and support for women has telling consequences, then what is "real" about the world of coeducation and, more importantly, why would one characterize the environment of a women's college as "unreal"?

I know of no more responsible answer to the latter question than to say what others have said before—namely, that for generation upon generation of exceptionally bright and determined young women, the setting and circumstances of a college for women have remained anything but unreal. Rather, the environment of a women's college is very real to these women precisely because it affords them the special opportunities for learning and development that they believe they cannot find elsewhere. It is very hard, I think, to provide a convincing counter-argument to such a personal and telling point of view.

Because I cannot and should not speak on behalf of the personal feelings of women, my point is best

made, perhaps, by relating a not uncommon story. Shortly after my arrival at Salem, it was my good fortune to become well acquainted with two students at the College—one a transfer and the other a four-year student, each quite different than the other. While their hopes and aspirations were as varied as their talents and personalities, they both held remarkably forceful views concerning the worth of a women's college.

The one who had entered as a freshman reflected on her stay at the College and commented: "My four years at Salem didn't turn me into a smug feminist, but it did make me recognize and appreciate a woman's potential, and my own." She went on to add that, based on her own experience, she honestly believed that "Salem women are more ambitious, assertive, and self-assured" than the women she had met at coeducational colleges.

No less certain about her reasons for being at Salem was the student who had transferred to the college from a large, public, coeducational university. For her, it was self-evident that if she wanted to be taken seriously as both a student and a woman, she had to find an environment where she would not be "a social security number" or "feel lost." She chose Salem, she claimed, because it was "a more personal place," a place where her "professors were always available," a place where people would "encourage me to reach farther than I sometimes think I can. . . [and] help me do my best".

Hardly atypical, these personal testimonies as to the worth of the separate education of women are striking precisely because they convey the sentiments of many of the women who continue to seek out institutions like Salem. Which is simply to say that it is from them alone, in the end, that we can learn the truth about a women's college.

Honor Council and Faculty Polarized

By: Angie Bostrom
Chairman, Honor Council

This year Honor Council has been investigating the possibility of implementing an automatic penalty for academic cheating. If a student is found guilty of a non-procedural cheating violation, she would receive an automatic academic penalty.

With Faculty Advisory Board, we have examined literature from other colleges, reviewed Salem's current procedures and policies, and met with Dean Sullivan and Dr. Litzenburg. Evaluating whether or not this system is appropriate for Salem is not a clear-cut decision, and I am interested in student opinion.

As the current policy stands, when a student is found guilty of a non-procedural cheating violation, Honor Council makes a recommendation to the faculty concerning the student's academic penalty. The faculty member may choose whether or not to concur with Honor Council's recommendation.

One of the issues surrounding this penalty is the fact that the privilege of determining an

academic penalty would no longer lie in the hands of the professor. The counter-point here would be that the penalties for cheating would be uniform—all students found guilty of cheating would receive the same penalty. Another problem is finding a way to implement the penalty - what grade or notation would be given?

The faculty tabled a proposal last spring that stated that a student found guilty of academic cheating would automatically receive a grade of F in the course. Does a student who cheats deserve an academic evaluation? Has she not forfeited her privilege of academic evaluation? What is the difference between a student receiving an F because she just could not pull her grade up above 70% and a student who cheats and receives an automatic penalty? Should the student simply be withdrawn from the course and receive no grade or withdrawal notation?

In light of all of these problems, the idea of an automatic penalty still has its good points. For one thing, an automatic penalty adheres to Salem's published policies on Honor and the Honor Tradition. We are a community

based on Honor, and cheating of any kind does not belong in such an environment.

Some faculty have questioned the Honor Council's authority in even recommending penalties involving academic cheating. Who else on campus deals with cheating violations? Why do we even have a council if the students in the group do not have any right to enforce the Honor Code? The published duties of your Honor Council include maintaining the standards of honor at Salem College. The automatic penalty would ensure that our penalties would be uniform, and we would still have the ability to look at each case individually and decide innocence or guilt.

As one can well see, this issue is not as simple and clear-cut as it would seem on the surface. There are easily two sides to be taken, but there are a great deal of advantages and disadvantages to either side.

If you have any input whatsoever, or would like to find out more about the proposal, please contact any member of Honor Council or myself. We are sincerely interested in student opinion and hope that you will respond.

SGA on the Road Again

By: Leigh Flippin
SGA President

In North Carolina, one out of five families is headed by a woman.

The median income for a family headed by a woman is \$9,320; 34% of these families currently live in poverty. Projections for the year 2,000 are that all families headed by women will live in poverty.

Fewer women are marrying, and those who do are marrying at an older age. In 1983, 25% of the women between the ages of 25 and 29 had never married, as compared with 10% in 1970.

52% of all women work outside the home; projections for the year 2,000 are that 77% of women will be employed.

Women are, by and large, still clustered in 20 of 441 occupations listed in the Census Occupation Classification System.

Women (still) earn 59¢ for every dollar earned by men.

I am the first to admit that statistics can be boring; however, there is no avoiding these. The pressure is evident. As women today, we must be prepared for what awaits us. Independence,

strength, leadership, and ambition are no longer virtues we hope to acquire - they are virtues we must acquire.

Many of Salem's students, including myself, are from the South. We live in extremely "Southern" communities which do indeed invoke pressure. Think about it. Do our families, religions, and backgrounds try to tell us what we should be? If so, does the effect differ from that in other parts of the country? Are we considered "abnormal" if we strive towards independence? Finally, are our parents, families, and educators aware of our present pressures?

Angie Bostrom, Vicki Gaines, and I have been toying with these questions for several weeks. We are convinced that these issues, which inescapably lead to other issues, are worthy of discussion. The three of us have been working with Terry Moore-Painter and Peggy Scholley (of the Development Office), Dr. Litzenburg, Dean Johnson, and Debbie Cates. Together, we have comprised a list of proposed topics for a Southern Women's Student Leadership Conference. We cannot attempt to formulate "solutions" through this

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