

Indiana University: The Transition to Coeducation

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In 1867, Indiana University became one of the first state institutions of higher education to admit women to a public university on the same terms as its male students. This paper will provide a brief history of women in higher education followed by a closer look into the process by which Indiana University became coeducational.

Many institutions of higher education are currently experiencing a shift in their student populations. At Indiana University female students outnumber their male counterparts by a margin of nearly six percent (Indiana University, 2001). While this may seem normal by today's standards, in the mid-1800's gender demographics were quite different. Post-secondary education for women has changed dramatically since its inception. "The years between 1790 and 1859 witnessed a remarkable growth in female schooling, and as a result the notion of collegiate study moved from the realm of fantasy to that of real experimentation" (Solomon, 1985, p.14). In 1867, Indiana University became one of the first state institutions of higher education to realize the dream of admitting women to a public university on the same terms as its male students. This paper will provide a brief history of women in higher education followed by a closer look into the process by which Indiana University became coeducational.

In 1787, Benjamin Rush opened The Young Ladies Academy in Philadelphia. "Rush maintained that the education of women was critical to the well-being of the new nation, with emphasis on mothers' responsibilities for the early instruction of women" (Solomon, 1985, p. 12). While there was much opposition to this concept of education for women, including the argument that females were incapable of great thoughts and thus not worth training, Benjamin Rush did help to establish a precedent and opened doors for college women in the future (Rudolph, 1962). Female seminaries and academies were founded, largely in the New England area, throughout the early 1800's. Mary Lyon and Zilpah Grant, both having been instructed at the Byfield Female Academy, sought equality for women's education and dreamed of an institution as important as those for the education of men (Solomon, 1985). Mount Holyoke Seminary, the result of those dreams, was chartered in 1836 (Solomon, 1985). Mount Holyoke

became a model for many female institutions throughout the country, yet a new concept with regard to women's education remained unexplored. Coeducation eluded the collegiate academic environment until women at Oberlin College made history in 1837.

In 1837 Oberlin College, originally called the Oberlin Collegiate Institute, became the first institution of higher education to admit women to its all-male roster of college students (Rudolph, 1990). The College's founding father, Father John Shipard, published the first campus circular in 1834, writing, "The elevation of female character by bringing within the reach of the misjudged and neglected sex all the instructive privileges which hitherto have unreasonable distinguished the leading sex from theirs" (Hosford, 1937, p. 5). The institution was chartered in 1834 and from the very beginning sought equality for women. In 1834, both boys and girls were admitted to its preparatory department and were offered the same courses. Students who had completed the appropriate course work at the preparatory school were then eligible for admission to the college (Hosford, 1937). In 1837 four women enrolled in the Oberlin Collegiate Institute's freshman class, inaugurating the coeducational academic experience (Hosford, 1937; Rudolph, 1990). Because Oberlin College was committed to coeducation since its inception, all-male institutions that eventually converted to coeducational institutions could not use Oberlin as a model for their transition; Indiana University came to set a standard by which many institutions operate today.

In 1867, Indiana University admitted women on the same terms as men, a novel idea at that time regarding the education of college women. In 1866 the Board of Trustees in Bloomington, Indiana had considered the admission of women to the institution. (Clark, 1970). The board suggested that, "the quickest way to meet the feminine drive to achieve equality was to admit girls to university classes" (Clark, 1970). The following year, the Board officially voted to allow women to apply to Indiana University (Clark, 1970). While the first woman applied and matriculated in 1867, the University's coeducation experience was not advertised until 1868. An 1868 issue of the campus newspaper states that, "Ladies are admitted to the College Classes on the same terms as males" (The Indiana Student, 1868, p. 7). A later copy of The Indiana Student (May 1, 1871, p. 91) describes a time when students questioned the University's efforts toward women.

The trustees, in the fall of 1867, resolved to admit ladies into the College Classes on the same conditions that young men were admitted; thus giving your ladies of our State an opportunity to receive the same mental discipline, to acquire the same collegiate education as their brothers...Most of the old students did not quietly look upon this innovation. It was decried with the most bitter words and assailed with biting sarcasm. On all sides was heard: 'Mixed Colleges will not live.'

There were others, however, who fully supported the move towards coeducation. An editorial from *The Indiana Student* dated March 12, 1868, poses the question, "Shall Indiana wait until the universities of all the other States admit the ladies and then follow their example?" The piece reads on to reply, "Why not let our State lead the van in this noble cause, and beckon her sister States to follow her example?" (p. 1). As one of the first state institutions to admit women, and the only to admit women on the same terms as men, Indiana University developed its model for coeducation on the basis of gender equity. The institution planned to provide no special support services to welcome their female students. Each student, regardless of gender, was to receive the same treatment and services.

Sarah Parke Morrison was the first female student to matriculate at Indiana University. In 1867 she accepted a five dollar bribe from her father, John Morrison, of the Board of Trustees, to apply to the institution. Having already completed ten years of formal post-secondary education (at all-female colleges), Morrison would be well prepared for her academic experience at Indiana University. Ms. Morrison was rather tired of going to school and hoped that another woman would rise to the honor of becoming the first female at Indiana University (Morrison, 1911). Ms. Morrison sent notices to women throughout the state indicating that Indiana University was to begin admitting women during the next fall term of classes. After no response, she decided that she could not chance the idea that the University might reverse its decision (Morrison, 1911). Sarah Parke Morrison matriculated into the College Classes in 1867, completed the course work in only two years and graduated in 1869. Ms. Morrison later returned to become the first female faculty member at Indiana University. Eight women followed Ms. Morrison and matriculated in the Fall of 1868, seven of whom went on to graduate with Bachelors of Science degrees in 1871 (Woodburn, 1940). The number of female students continued to rise

and by 1882 nearly one quarter of the total student body was comprised of women (Woodburn, 1940). Despite the initial opposition to women at Indiana University, it became clear that women intended to stay. It was noted in *The Indiana Student* on May 1, 1871, that,

It is evident our University is destined to become a great and powerful 'mixed College.' No more do we hear the words of opposition, or the taunts of derision to the ladies becoming students of the University, and journeying, with the young men, long the highway of learning found in our curriculum, but all exclaim, 'ever be remembered the day, when the daughters of our noble State, and neighboring States, received the same advantages as their brothers, for developing and training their mental faculties; and let the day soon come when the ratio of ladies to gentlemen shall soon be nearer.' (p. 91)

Indiana University was establishing itself as a prosperous institution for both men and women while reinforcing its commitment to gender equity. This commitment was regularly reinforced through University publications.

During these early years, Indiana University produced only a few regular publications. The University's Annual Report and the student newspaper, *The Indiana Student*, were responsible for relaying most news about the institution to the public. It is clear from the Annual Reports however, (released during the first five years following the admission of Ms. Morrison) that some Indiana University news was withheld from the reports. Even though Ms. Morrison matriculated at Indiana University in 1867, no mention was made of the admission of women in the 1867 Annual Report. In 1868 the report confirmed that "Ladies are admitted to the collegiate courses, classical and scientific, on the same terms as young men and are entitled to the same rights and privileges; but no ladies will be admitted to the Preparatory Department" (Indiana University, 1868, p. 24). The Preparatory Department was designed to prepare younger male students for the rigor of the collegiate experience at Indiana University. During 1868 girls had to find alternate methods for college preparation. The following year, 1869, ladies were admitted to the Preparatory Department and the statement excluding them from the school was removed from the Annual Report. This information was the only mention of women at Indiana University in the Annual Reports until 1870 (Indiana University, 1868, 1869 & 1870). In 1870 a new section was added to the

university register called, "The Conditions and Wants of the University." The section mainly described the need for more money, more resources and a new gymnasium, but it also included a passage that expressed some self-pride with regard to the quality of education at Indiana University.

Then no young men and women need leave their own state in order to secure the best liberal and professional education in any vocation they may select. Indiana owes this to herself and her sons and daughters. Her children should not be dependent upon other commonwealths for what she, herself, is abundantly able to provide. (Indiana University, 1870, p. 36)

The Annual Report also contained a section entitled "Literary Societies." In 1871 it was reported that a new Literary Society had been established called Hesperian. The report indicated that "The Hesperian is conducted by the young ladies." (Indiana University, 1871, p. 29). It seemed to be a positive step for women, that they were being provided opportunities equal to those of their male counterparts, but it was also noted that, "To head off a confrontation on the social front, Professor Amzi Atwater was given the task of organizing a "feminine" literary society (Clark, 1970, p. 125). No additional mention of women was made in any subsequent Annual Reports with the exception of the female graduates names listed along with the male graduates. The Annual Reports made it quite clear that women were being "admitted on the same terms as men" and that they were "entitled to the same rights and privileges" with little or no additional support or services (Indiana University, 1868, p. 24). The Indiana Student, as has been mentioned previously, also offered information about the how the University was reacting to women in the college courses.

The student newspaper was organized in 1867, published for a few years, suspended and then restarted in 1882 (Woodburn, 1940). The newspaper offered information regarding both local and college affairs from community members and students. (The Indiana Student, 1868). The Indiana Student advertised the admission of women to Indiana University during 1868 and continued to advertise the education of women until 1870. The newspaper periodically referenced the success of coeducation at Indiana.

There were eight ladies in attendance last term, two in the freshman class and six in the classes in modern languages. The whole number

of ladies is now nineteen, twelve in the freshmen class, and seven in modern languages... No other institution in the West furnishes equal facilities for obtaining a thorough education, on as favorable terms as the Indiana State University, which never before was in so prosperous a condition; the future was never so bright. The citizens of Indiana and the friends of education have just reason to be proud of their State University. (The Indiana Student, 1868, p. 24)

The Indiana Student was clearly supportive of the coeducation movement. In 1871, the Pantograph, a local publication, announced that "Ladies have just been admitted to Indiana University, and also to equal standing in its literary societies" (The Indiana Student, 1871 p. 43). The Student quickly responded.

The Pantograph has made a slight mistake. Ladies have been attending the University for four years. Nor do they belong to the literary societies although one of the societies opened her doors to them and bid them welcome. They preferred to be in a society themselves and consequently organized a society of their own, which they called Hesperian. We rejoice to know that they are prospering finely...Indiana University will have seven ladies to graduate on next Commencement day. (The Indiana Student, 1871 p. 43)

The newspaper was committed to helping Indiana University honestly describe women's experiences as college students. Overall, women did not receive an overabundance of either negative or positive press. Women regularly contributed to the articles and personals, although no more or less than did their male counterparts.

Some of the first institutions of higher education that admitted women either provided separate services for both male and female students or they provided significant support for the female students that were to be integrated into the all-male courses. Oberlin developed a model for coeducation that included significant support for their female students. For example, a residence hall and a Female Department full employed by female faculty and staff members was provided to Oberlin women upon their admission in the college courses. Indiana University took its own path and gave no special privileges or support to its female students. Some might say that Indiana University was a pioneer with regard to gender equity as they admitted women on the "same terms as young men" (Indiana University, 1868, p. 24). Others might think that because no special preparations seem to have been made for women at Indiana, the female students may have had diffi-

culty adapting to college life or may have felt unwelcome. Neither the University's Annual Report nor the student newspaper mentioned the admission of Sarah Parke Morrison until she had completed half of her collegiate course work at Indiana. Aside from the organization of the Hesperian Literary Society for women (which was organized simply to avoid future social conflict), no additional support services were developed for the female students at Indiana University. From the very beginning, Indiana University established itself as an institution that would provide ultimate equality to all its students. The institution successfully implemented this model and offered no special privileges to any individuals or groups of students.

Indiana University was a successful pioneer with regard to women's education. Current Indiana University female students outnumber their male counterparts by a significant margin, and the numbers of female students continues to rise (Indiana University, 2001). Contemporary student affairs professionals and student support staff may question the efficacy of Indiana University's complete gender equity model especially recognizing the fact that women were not equal to men outside of the university environment. Considering the idea that students had not experienced gender equality until they arrived at Indiana University, it seems curious that the institution felt as though no special support for female students actually created an equal environment. In retrospect it seems as though the Oberlin model, offering some assistance to its female students, may have been more effective. At the time, however, Indiana University was striving to provide quality education to the citizens of their state and neighboring states regardless of gender, with little or no help from any predecessors. Its foresight allowed Indiana University to establish itself as a predecessor for many institutions that became coeducational. It is fascinating to note that Indiana University's 1867 groundbreaking equity for all students, is the same standard to which the university holds itself today.

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