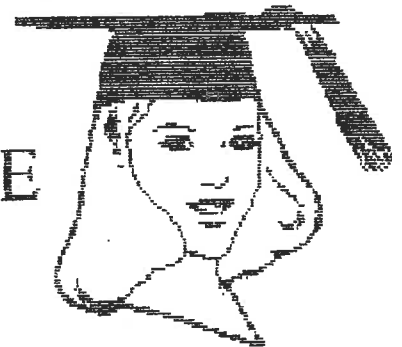


WOW! SKIRTS! :

**THE
INTRODUCTION
OF WOMEN
TO
MARIST COLLEGE**



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**WOW! SKIRTS! The Introduction of Women Students to
Marist College**

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WOW! SKIRTS!

Introduction and Methodology

The period of the late '60's and early '70's found the United States going through a period of dramatic social change. The United States had just been through the traumatic death of John F. Kennedy, the youngest elected President of the United States. With the unexpected murders of other prominent social leaders, such as Martin Luther King, combined with the escalating Vietnam conflict, the American society was in a period of reflection on its values and cultural beliefs. Women were no longer happy to be merely housewife and mother, as the groundbreaking novel The Feminine Mystique revealed to its readers. According to the author, Betty Freidan, women should not be considered neurotic or strange, if they were unhappy with the drudgery of their household chores. It was perfectly realistic for a sane individual to naturally want the same traditional opportunities as their male counterparts.

In order to have the same opportunities, women felt that they should have an equal right to higher education. Gradually, many colleges that were traditionally single-sex institutions began going co-ed, as their administrators felt that a co-educational atmosphere would adequately prepare students for the real world of men and women. During the 1960's, several Mid-Hudson Valley region colleges were making the switch to becoming

co-educational, such as Mt. St. Mary in Newburgh, and Vassar College in Poughkeepsie.

It was during this period of such dynamic social change that Marist College began admitting women as well, due to a variety of reasons, both economical and social. Barbara Murphy, one of the first women to enter Marist, believed it was a matter of self-preservation. "Marist simply could not afford to ignore 51% of the Mid-Hudson region's population."

This study into the history of Marist College was undertaken by a group of undergraduate students in Dr. William C. Olson's Research Methods class, because the group felt that the previous histories of this college did not adequately cover this period of dynamic change. In a period of a little more than five years, the school went from having a totally male student body to being a co-ed institution. This greatly affected the identity of this school as it was seen by its students, faculty and staff. The ramifications of such a momentous change have been ignored by the previous Marist College Histories.

Our hope is that through our interviewing of former and current members of the Marist College community who were present to witness these changes first hand, that some light can be shed on a subject not formerly researched to the fullest extent. The group decided to utilize videotapes in order to preserve the interviews, in the hopes that perhaps the other groups of historians who

will follow us will be able to use them to create a more comprehensive history of one of Marist's major periods of change.

Other sources utilized in our research of this topic include Marist College Catalog 1991-1993, the Dutchess County Historical Society Yearbook 1989, the Poughkeepsie Journal, and the resources available through the Alumni Office at Marist College.

Chapter 1-- Marist Before the Arrival of Women Students

Marist College, during the early 1960's, before the induction of women students and faculty, was much smaller in size. The male student body consisted of approximately 1500 students while the all male faculty had only 65 members. Today, in 1992, according to the Marist College Course Catalog 1991-1993, there are approximately 155 faculty members and 2900 full time students(7). According to students and staff members present at that time, due to the small size of the student population, students and teachers knew each other by name. According to Ted Prenting, professor of business, the academic performance of the students was better monitored due to the smaller size, and the school was strictly an academic setting, with little social interaction.

According to Gordon Walton, a Marist alumnus, before there were women at Marist, the extent of social interaction at the school would be orchestrated by the school in the form of two seasonal "mixers", held in the spring and fall. All women schools such as Vassar and Mount St. Mary's would bus their student to the college for these events. Gordon Walton describes these events as "meat markets" where the men were socially unprepared to interact maturely with "imported" women. Women were also imported from local high schools and colleges to take the female roles in plays, as well as being cheerleaders for the Marist men's sports. When women students became

matriculated at Marist, they were able to smoothly fill this existing social gap. Before the admission women to the Marist campus, dormitory accommodations were quite different than they are today. In 1964, Gordon Walton remembers mandatory study hours being strictly enforced by the Marist Brothers, and curfews that were also harshly enforced. His wife, Maria, remembers that "he managed to slip in after curfew more than several times". At this time, there were explicit dress codes, that mandated that male students be dressed in suits and ties while attending classes.

But the male students truly had some of the comforts of home, as cleaning ladies would clean the male students' rooms as well as make their beds at least once a week. On the flip side, if a women was found in one's room it was grounds for immediate expulsion from Marist College.

Chapter 2-- Why the Change?

The shift from an all male to coeducational college occurred for several reasons. The late sixties were a time of social advances and changes. As mentioned before, with the emergence of the best-seller The Feminine Mystique, the concerns and needs of the modern woman were no longer able to be ignored. Women were gradually moving into the work force in larger numbers than ever before, and trying to obtain positions which were traditionally all-male. In order to realize these ambitions, it was necessary to receive the same education that their male colleagues were getting.

Many colleges, at this time, were moving in the direction toward equal education opportunities for both sexes. The "Powers that Be" at Marist College, recognizing this previously untapped source of new students, and new income, made the motion to admit women. Most interviewed agreed that financially, admitting women would be a help to the college rather than a burden, as the government was currently giving monetary incentives to colleges that were non-denominational and co-educational. For Marist to expand as an institution of higher learning, they needed this money, while adding women students would also increase student enrollment leading to a bigger tuition base. Society was changing and Marist changed along with it in a generally smooth and natural process.

Chapter 3-- Faculty and Their Views on the Changing Institution of Marist College During 1964-1969

While the effects of the admittance of women students to Marist College primarily impacted upon the formerly all male student population of Marist College, it also profoundly influenced its faculty and administration. For some time, Marist had attempted to make itself more marketable in the field of education. As Dean G.A. Cox recalls, Marist attempted to start up a nursing program in the 1964-65 academic year. Even though this took place almost a year prior to his arrival at Marist, he remembers that the proposed program was deemed a failure. Marist college simply did not believe it had suitable demand for the program. The plan was hampered as well by the lack of necessary residential facilities on campus for the predominately female students interested in the program.

Yet almost three years later, with no significant building projects completed in the interim, Marist had fifty or so women housed in the sixth floor of Leo Hall. "The times, they are a changin'", as the popular Bob Dylan song expressed, and single sex colleges were seen as anachronisms. As Prof. Prenting remembers, "The handwriting was on the wall..." and even the formerly all-female Vassar College was changing to co-ed. Most students viewed same-sex colleges as having artificial environments that were simply undesirable in the "worldly" sixties. The decision to go co-ed was not simply social,

but also economical. If Marist had not gone co-ed, it most likely would have had to close its doors like the two smaller same-sex colleges in the local region, Ladycliffe and Harriman Colleges, according to Barbara Murphy.

As the social climate of the school changed, so did the administration's views towards the school's identity. "The college was redefining itself; [and] it had the obligation to prepare itself, the students, faculty and staff to [the incoming] women students," stated Dean Cox. As Prof. Prenting remembers, the transition period took place in stages over several years. In 1966, Marist College opened its night classes to female students. At that time, the night classes were separate entities, independent from the day classes. The female students were commuters, and were predominately married women who had given up on their educational goals to marry and have a family. As Meredith Wharton admits:

I always highly respected the other students who worked full time and then went to night classes. As for myself, after dealing with young children all day, it [Marist] was a joy!

Then Marist began to expand majors such as social work and teaching, designed to attract new female students. Meanwhile the majority of faculty members perceived that they did not have to change their teaching styles to adapt to their new students.

The relationships between the new students and the

faculty were quite cordial. Barbara Murphy remembers that since she was slightly older than her male counterparts, she was better able to relate to the faculty. Instead of treating education lightly, she viewed the Marist faculty as highly valuable aids towards attaining her degree. Maria Walton also remembers the faculty quite favorably, stating that the vast majority of them were very supportive to the female students. In turn, the faculty was quite happy with its new students. "[There is] no question at all that after the first few weeks that women students were holding their own... [and making] significant, positive contributions academically," stated Dean G. Cox.

Dean Cox also believes that there was some slight difficulty between male and female students when the female students became more involved in student and academic affairs. Many rumbles of discontent were raised when the first few females beat male students in student elections. One faculty member believes that there is little doubt that "capable women are very frightening to insecure males."

Chapter 4- Attitudes

When the college community saw that the integration of women students into Marist was inevitable, there were mixed feelings between the students and the faculty. According to Dean Cox, Marist had a chance to integrate female students in 1963, when a vote was held on whether or not to start a nursing program, with the cooperation of St. Francis-Poughkeepsie Hospital. Originally, it was voted down decisively. As the change was now inevitable, those who did not reconsider their view, were a silent minority on the staff. This minority was a deeply conservative group who were looking to keep the tradition of the male college alive. The students welcomed the new change, although there were a small pocket of students who were adamantly opposed to this move.

Most staff members felt this was a golden opportunity to advance the college through the expanding of curriculum and degrees offered. Federal money would help expand the college through funding numerous building projects. Women were also seen as very good students who were working very hard. This helped the decision that allowed women students to come in as day students. There was also some false stereotypical attitudes, as several female alumnae remembered. Maria Walton, brought in an old Poughkeepsie Journal article which gave the impression that with the admission of women, the campus would be decorated with doilies by the women.

Chapter 5-- The Influence of Women on the Different Aspects of Marist College

As one would have expected, suddenly having women on campus, changed the social life significantly. Before women attended Marist, Marist students had to go off campus to meet women. Many Marist students dated local girls, including girls from other college in the area, or from the nursing students from St. Francis or Vassar. Although some of this continued after the admission of women, the students didn't have to go off campus for a social life.

Another aspect that changed, when women became students was the mixers. Before Marist had female students, girls were bussed into Marist from the other schools in the area. A former student at Marist, Gordon Walton, described this as a "meat market" with "guys lined up on either side." In retrospect, he believes that it must have been an awful, demeaning experience for the women involved, as the "guys would obviously check out the females." With the admission of women, the "meat market" atmosphere of the mixers ended, though the mixers themselves continued. Another student, Richard Ainsworth, expressed the fact that the mixers were now actually more fun, being that the women in your classes were there.

Dorm life was not effected immediately when women came, because at first they were "townies", or off-campus students. But rules and regulations seemed to

loosen up a lot after women became integrated into Marist. Gordon Walton recalled, that in his freshman year, women were not allowed into dorm rooms at all. In his sophomore year, there were winter and spring weekends where one could have a female guest in one's room, but there were certain house rules that needed to be followed, such as "having the door open to the room, and the curtains open". In his junior year, this was allowed about once a month, and in his senior year, it loosened up even more.

Although it seems that there weren't many social activities or clubs for the women to get involved in, there was a cheerleading squad formed, as prior to women being at Marist, cheerleaders were also bussed to Marist. Another advantage which came out of this, was the easiness to cast roles for females in the college's plays.

An interesting contradiction which became apparent in our interviews, was focused on appearances of the male students. According to Prof. Ted Prenting, it was believed that with the arrival of women on campus, the men would start dressing better. He says they didn't. A former student, Bryan Maloney, thought that the women did have a civilizing affect on the men, and that they did take greater concern with their appearances.

The arrival of women at Marist College, had quite an impact on the entire school. Students, faculty and administration were each influenced by this change and so were their attitudes. Maria Walton, who was one of the

first females at Marist, recalls how at first, the males would hold the door for them, and that overall their manners were "very gentlemanly--" at first. By her senior year, this had lessened because they were no longer guests on campus, they were mainstreamed in.

In Gordon Walton's opinion, the men could have made greater efforts to acclimate the women better as they were boys, "immature and not knowing how to handle the situation of girls on campus." They tended to make the girls feel somewhat uncomfortable. Maria Walton, Gordon's wife, remembers that there was an unwritten law that the women would never go to the Rathskeller, the on-campus pub, alone. Going with the adage that safety lay in numbers, women never went to the Rathskeller alone, because of the large amounts of men present. This was not due to a fear of the male students, but because of the overwhelming feeling of being a very obvious scenic minority in a "no-women's land". The majority of the women interviewed, felt they had to maintain an aloofness toward the men, just to combat the prevailing opinions that they were only there to pick up a husband, not to gain an education. For this reason, especially in the first years of women on campus, women looked towards other women for study groups and even just for friendship, and they all became very close.

Another factor which didn't help the gap between men and women, was that there existed a split between the

resident students and the "brown baggers." Women felt being only day students in the beginning made them even more like outsiders, as they missed the common experiences that often bonded resident students.

The early years for women at Marist College were the most difficult. While most everyone interviewed, said that the transition from an all male to a co-educational facility went pretty smoothly, faculty and student alike agreed that the transition was actually hardest for the women. "The first women had it the roughest," stated Dean G. Cox. "The Marist officials were naive to many of the women's needs." The prevailing ideology of the administration was that "what ever was here for the men was good enough for the women." They were the ones who were entering into a new environment, and they were playing a major role in the change of the institution. They were a very small minority of the students as well. There were only about 50 women who lived on campus as compared to the 900 male students. Those 50 women lived on the sixth floor of Leo, and this led to the feeling of the "princesses in the tower" being protected from those "rowdy, rowdy Marist males". There was a very vocal group of angry young men who had to give their rooms for the female students. With the introduction of women as residents, it was thought beneficial for a majority of changes to occur with the women present. Being able to consult the female students on many of the proposed

modifications ensured more adequate facilities.

Unfortunately for these women, due to being such a small percentage of the student's population, and being the first women residents on campus, they were looked at as though they were "fish in a fish bowl" per Gordon Walton. The women constantly felt as though they were on display. It was very intimidating for these women to know that they were constantly being "checked out". One former Marist College student said his first reaction to seeing women on campus was, "Wow-- skirts!!!!!!!"

Women also had problems in the classroom, since they believed they had to prove themselves to the other students, to the faculty and possibly even to themselves. The women alumnae interviewed, stated they were constantly under pressure, as though they had to work twice as hard as the male students in order to receive the same grade. They had to work even harder to receive respect from many of their male peers, as many of the male students argued that the women collegians did not earn their grades, rather the grades were due to their appearance in their mini-skirts! Even Mrs. Walton remembers her husband Gordon, telling her this after she received an A in a class, while her husband had received a much lower grade by the same professor.

Women dealt with more than just the great disadvantage of being stereotyped by the male population of Marist College. As Dean Cox suggests, perhaps Marist College may

have been slightly naive in believing that all the faculties were adequate. Barbara Murphy, one of the first female night students, laughs when she remembers when she first came to Marist, women had to use the faculty bathrooms. Then, there were numerous comments made by the female alumni about the inadequate gym (now Marion Hall). It had only a "communal" type bathroom, and it simply was inadequate for having both female and male students. Therefore the previous physical education requirement toward a bachelor's degree was dropped, stated a female alumnus with great relief.

As mentioned before, there weren't many activities for the women to get involved in, but Maria Walton remembers one particular organization she was a part of-- Phi Alpha Theta. This history honors society simply loved having the women as members, she recalls, because they "threw really great parties." Being great party hostesses, meant they were stuck doing the dishes. One time in particular, it was raining and the vast majority of the cars got stuck in the dirt parking lot. While the women were doing the dishes, in came the very muddy men, looking for help with the cars. The women turned around and said "Since we're doing the dishes, you pull the cars out of the mud. If this is what you think women do, well that is what we think men do." Satisfied they had made their point, the females left the men to pull the cars out of the mud. When asked if this had changed any of the men's viewpoints

toward doing the dishes, Mrs. Walton said it didn't.

Chapter 6-- Academic Life

The admittance of women into Marist College did have somewhat of a positive effect on the institution as well. For one thing, they had a very profound effect on the scholastic life. With the arrival of women into the classroom, came the arrival of a previously ignored facet, a women's perspective. Women came into the classroom with their views and their beliefs, many of which were quite different from their male counterparts. Male students were no longer viewing the world through a male's eyes, they were also seeing things through the female's perspective. Women in the classroom brought on a whole new dimension to learning, and the preponderance of the male undergraduates were interested in what the women had to say in the classroom.

This influence was especially noted in the field of nursing. Many females, known as the diploma nurses, realized that a bachelors degree was crucial in order to receive a pay raise or a possible supervising portion in their field.

The sex of the student did apparently affect their choice of a major at Marist College. The men and women interviewed had different opinions on which degrees the majority of the women students majored. A few of those interviewed, believed initially that women were attracted to traditional "female majors," such as nursing or the humanities. This didn't last very long however, and

women began to infiltrate into the various majors including the traditionally "male majors," such as chemistry and physics. According to Dr. Prenting, the female students were treated equally when they began to major in male dominated subjects such as business. He also suggested that in some schools, the different administrators were against women majoring in certain subjects, yet it was not a problem at Marist. According to Richard Ainsworth, an adult student who majored in physics, women did not feel obligated to choose certain majors, rather they majored in the subjects which interested them. They also took the same required courses as the male students, and Ainsworth felt all students, whether male or female, were simply here at Marist to further their education.

Yet there is a negative point that was mentioned by one Marist alumna, as she believes to this day, that there was a flaw in the system. She believes that one director of a highly desirable program, was very discriminating towards the women students, and most obviously did not want women in the program. She counts herself lucky that she just made it through. This was due to the difficulty in getting into the program, combined with the fact that after many female students came specifically for this program, and that they had no real alternative if they were rejected. She believes at that time, Marist College did not have an acceptable alternative to students

who were unable to place into the program.

Chapter 7-- Marist College Summed Up During the Transitional Period

The first stage of female integration was allowing them to attend night courses. Most of the women who took night classes had jobs during the day, or were housewives with children. Meredith Wharton, who had two young children during her tenure at Marist, had a real positive experience at Marist. She didn't feel there was much negativity directed towards her by either students or faculty, even though she was in the predominately "male major" of mathematics.

The second and final stage was to admit women to the day program. This period also included co-educational facilities for housing. The first female residents housed at Marist in the fall of 1969, were put into the sixth floor of Leo Hall. Bryan Maloney believes that it really awkward for the first few females, especially in the cafeteria. All the guys' heads would turn and they would stare at the females when the co-eds came into the room. It must have been an unnerving experience to have been stared at by over 90% of the room's populace. He credits the females with having a "civilizing" effect on the male students, as the men had to clean up their language.

Bryan Maloney, a student, believes the Civil Rights' movements and the Vietnam War had a greater impact on the Marist community, than the matriculation of

females. Mr. Maloney recollects that he had much bigger concerns then whether or not females were at Marist:

I was more concerned about failing out of Marist, being drafted, and being shipped to 'Nam, then women students being admitted to Marist College. I also firmly believe that is how the majority of the male students felt too.

To their credit, the first class of women on campus were able to make the transition smoothly. Dean Cox noted that the women were able to exert leadership and influence the decision making in student activities, by becoming actively involved with the activities.

One experience seems to sum up best their experience at Marist College during the Age of Aquarius. Barbara Murphy remembers fondly of her friendly contest with Floyd, a male student. By the end of their tenure at Marist, Floyd and Barbara had bet which would have the longest hair at graduation. She recollects that on graduation day, she won the bet because it was hot and humid, and Floyd's hair frizzed. Her hair didn't.

Conclusion

If there was ever one trait that the human race can proudly state has enabled it to succeed and prosper over the years, it would be the ability to adapt to the changing times. Through the years, humankind has been faced with a number of crisis, but it has prevailed by adapting to the situation. This was the case when Marist College was faced with the changing time of the '60's.

The social climate of the '60's was shaped by various factors, among those the Civil Rights' movement, the Equal Rights' movement and the Vietnam War. There was a profound change in peoples' views of the world and the part they should play in it. So, it was only natural that Marist College change as well. Marist had always been an all-male school, and for much of the time an all Catholic school. But in order to remain in business, Marist would have to adapt, as it was no longer beneficial to close its doors to women. Like Prof. Prenting said, "the writing was on the wall." Other schools were making the transition as well, so in order to compete with them, Marist would have to, in some degree, conform with them.

For the people interviewed, the change was as smooth as could be. Meredith Wharton said that she was really glad she was able to go to Marist. For her, it was a great experience, as it was for other students and faculty alike, both male and female. That is not to say there was

no resistance to women being there, but what there was very much in the minority.

According to the Dutchess County Historical Society Yearbook, the administrator at Marist College, during this time, Dr. Foy, believes that it took another ten years until the college went truly co-ed. He believes this is true because of the fact that twice as many men as women would apply for admission to the college. It was at this time, that the admission officers were Marist Brothers, and they were visiting the predominately male Catholic high schools (Ibid). Foy also believed the college was "giving off signals to women" that they were "second-class citizens (Ibid)."

During the years, Marist College has attempted to take every available opportunity to attract the female students, such as when Bennett College, a private two-year women's college was closing. Foy decided:

[That since] in the last days, [Bennett college] had two really profit-making programs... [one being] fashion design. So we took the opportunity when Bennett closed to grab their fashion program, to bring their teachers over. (Ibid)

Then in 1978, the college was granted the approval to offer a new degree, a bachelor of professional studies with a minor in fashion design. This program in 1992, is a very well-known program that has given Marist College much national recognition.

It has been twenty-five years now since women were first admitted as students. During that time, woman have

grown from a small group on the sixth floor of Leo Hall, to a majority among the student body. They have been fully integrated into all school activities, and their presence here has been a real benefit for the school. And it would be good to point out, in conclusion, that after twenty-five years, there are still no doilies decorating the campus.

Group 1's Questions for Oral Interviews

Universal:

1. In your opinion, how do you think the admittance of female students effected the academic/social life at Marist?
2. What was the prevailing opinion of the faculty and male students about the arrival of women full time on campus?
3. Was it a rough transition from all male to co-ed?
4. How did administration handle the change; e.g..... housing, student services, sports, facilities, and activities. What is your opinion on it?
5. Do you think gender stereotypes influence major selections and other activities?
6. Do you have reason to believe that most of the women admitted were from the Dutchess county area? If yes, do you think there is a significant reason for this?
7. Initially, how did the men treat women and vice versa?
8. Do you think the acceptance of women was correlated to financial or social reasons or both? Explain.

Faculty:

1. Describe Marist when you first began to work here? (focus on topic)
2. Did you find it necessary to adapt your teaching methods or styles to facilitate women students?

Female students:

1. What prompted your decision to come to Marist?
2. Were you intimidated by the patriarchal institution?
3. Were the facilities adequate to handle women students? Please elaborate.
4. Can you give me one example which would sum up best the experience of being a woman on Marist campus during the first few years it became co-ed. Is this a positive or negative experience?

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Chapter 3

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Chapter 4

Dan Aunkst Brett Clifford

Chapter 5

Dan Aunkst Arcola Paliotta Tara Pantony

Chapter 6

Jonathan Banzaca Arcola Paliotta Tara Pantony

Chapter 7

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Conclusion

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Bibliography

Oral Interviews

Richard Ainsworth

Dean G. A. Cox

Bryan Maloney

Barbara Murphy

Dr. Ted Prenting

Gordon & Maria Walton

Meredith Wharton

Other Resources

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Marist College Alumni Office

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