

## Women's Colleges are Still Important

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I attended a women's college, which is NOT a girls' school, and definitely is not a finishing school! No, I never had to walk around in heels with a book on top of my head to improve my gracefulness. I was not taught to be a "bra burner." No, it was not like living in a convent. Yes, I was allowed to have men in my residence hall room. No, men were not allowed to spend the night in my room. Nope, we never had pillow fights wearing Victoria Secret's lingerie, and we definitely did not have catfights while wearing aforementioned lingerie. No, I do not plan to be a stay at home mom. No, I never took cooking lessons, and we definitely did NOT have Home Economics as an elective. No, I did not attend a women's college in order to obtain my "Mrs. degree." Yes, I CAN get a job and/or attend graduate school after graduating from a women's college.

Despite these common stereotypes, women's colleges still play an important role in higher education. I would not trade my undergraduate experience at a women's college for anything. Since I work in higher education, I have been exposed to several other institutions, and at each one, I imagine how my life would have turned out if I had attended another type of institution. I can safely say that I would be very different if I had not attended a women's institution. However, I do not think I would like who I would have become by attending a coeducational institution. I believe that a coed institution, rather than a women's college, would have inspired me to work on that "Mrs. degree." I do not think that I would have worked as hard academically because I would have been intimidated by the cute guy sitting next to me in class. I would have been held back by my own insecurities-what if I look like an idiot when I ask for further explanation in class? I understand that not every woman feels this way, and I respect them for that. I, on the other hand, was completely introverted and shy when I started college. I was so shy that I started crying when my mother made me spend the night on the college campus during my senior year of high school. The women's college setting allowed me to come out of my shell in an environment that invited me to just be me-without trying to impress the cute guy beside me in physics.

I attended Converse College which is located in the upstate of South Carolina. Converse, like most women's colleges, was founded to develop the unique talents of women through a liberal arts education on a residential campus. Yes, in the past, some institutions placed a heavy emphasis on developing young ladies to become proper members of society, but those times have long gone. Women's colleges should never be referred to as "finishing schools" because they offer so much more than that. To be quite honest, some of my fellow "Connies" graduated without the social graces needed to become polite members of society, yet they were still able to enter prestigious graduate programs!

There used to be hundreds of women's colleges and universities, but the doors of many have closed and we are left with fewer than sixty in the country (Women's College Coalition, n.d.). It saddens me that people understand so little about these colleges, and, as a result, many women's colleges are losing quality students to co-educational institutions. As the students shy away from visiting single gender institutions, they fail to see the benefits of a women's institution. Students may be too close minded to even visit these institutions. Or, maybe their parents are so consumer minded that they refuse to spend so much money on an institution that they do not believe will live up to the cost-benefit analysis. I think both parents and students are overlooking several important parts of their cost-benefit analysis.

It is true that more women than ever are entering math and science fields, but according to the Women's College Coalition, single gender institutions graduate women in these fields at 1 ½ times the rate for coeducational institutions (Women's College Coalition, n.d.). Women's institutions help female students explore and develop their inherent strengths. Females are exposed to positive roles models on these campuses. Women hold every leadership position on campus, so not only are students exposed to more female role models, they also have the opportunity to engage in more leadership opportunities. Females at women's institutions develop a strong sense of self, without trying to please others or mold into stereotypical female roles. Students are free to ask questions without being conscientious of what the guy sitting beside them might think about them. Women's colleges positively affect the development of self esteem and confidence. Women's institutions have been graduating well respected women for many years. Did you know what Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Katherine Hepburn, and Madeline Albright, and Harvard's first female president, Drew Gilpin Faust, have in common? All of these famous women attended women's colleges (Women's College Coalition, n.d.). There are pages and pages of women who have attended women's institutions and have gone on to be accomplished professionals, wives, and mothers.

I have come to terms with my struggle to defend my decision to attend a women's college. I have chosen to accept a position as a Director of Student Involvement and Programs at a women's institution, and once again, I find myself defending my actions. I can hear the questions now: "Why in the world do you want to work at a women's institution? I can't believe that they still have girls' schools? Why....." I hear the same questions over and over again. I will continue to put on a smiling face and answer their questions politely. I know the best way for me to prove to the world that a women's college does provide a quality education is by showing them a product of a single gender institution--ME.

## References

Women's College Coalition. (n.d). Our alumnae. Retrieved July 28, 2007, from <http://www.womenscolleges.org>

Women's College Coalition. (n.d). The compelling imperative of and for women's colleges; The college of Saint Catherine commencement address. Retrieved July 28, 2007, from <http://www.womenscolleges.org>