The Coeducation Decade: The Fiftieth Anniversary of Women at Wofford

Phillip Stone

Luke Meagher

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In February 1971, four women enrolled as day students at Wofford under a new policy that allowed for day student coeducation. The Board of Trustees had changed the policy to allow the admission of women in greater numbers, although women had been part of the student body in small numbers since the 1890s. Within five years, the college moved to full residential coeducation. No matter the status at Wofford, women have made contributions to the campus community. This exhibit celebrates the history of women at Wofford and the ways that women have helped shape the college.
1848 The Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention, meets, launching the women's suffrage movement.

1854 Spartanburg Female College opens.

1855 American Association of University Women founded.

1856 Converse College founded.

1857 Puella Littlejohn, May Wannamaker and Minnie Wannamaker become the first three women students to enroll at Wofford.

1881 Puella Littlejohn and May Wannamaker become the first two women to graduate from Wofford.

1889 Olive Chapman and Marie Tarboux graduate, bringing a close to the college's first generation of women students.

1897 Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the first Black Greek letter organization for women, is founded at Howard University.

1901 The 19th Amendment affirms that women have the right to vote.

1904 Betty Friedan publishes The Feminine Mystique.

1908 National Organization for Women (NOW) founded.

1909 Princeton, Yale, Colgate, Johns Hopkins and Georgetown open applications to women.

1918 Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution proposed.

1920 Katherine Graham becomes the first female CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

1922 The number of bachelor's degrees conferred on women first surpassed those conferred on men (in the United States).
Nothing in Benjamin Wofford’s will required that the college accept only men, but the expectation of the 1850s was that Wofford College would be responsible for educating only white males. South Carolina’s Methodist Conference made provisions for educating women at several Methodist-affiliated colleges, including the nearby Spartanburg Female College, which operated from the late 1850s to the early 1870s. Barely 40 years after Wofford opened its doors, however, the college admitted a small group of women in 1897.

**WOMEN STUDENTS, THE FIRST GENERATION 1897-1904**

**“Co-Eds”**

The first young ladies to attend Wofford dates far back in the history. Professor David Duncan had two granddaughters who lived with him after their mother, Mrs. Lomax died. They were Misses Alice and Tilla Lomax. These young ladies attended the classes, especially those in Latin and Greek, these being the ones taught by Professor David Duncan. The young ladies were never recognized as students by the college authorities, nor did they take any degrees.

Miss Alice Lomax married Mr. W.H. Wallace, for years she was known Editor of the Newberry Observer, and became the mother of Dr. D.D. Wallace of the Chair of History at Wofford, while Miss Tilla married Mr. Lewis James.

From “Memories of Wofford College,” by James H. Carlisle Jr.

**Trustees misjudge the sentiment in regard to “co-ed”**

A striking illustration of how trustees can misjudge the wishes of their patrons is given in the following account of their admitting young ladies into the institution. I asked one of the trustees, “Why did you admit young ladies into Wofford College?” He replied, “There was such a great demand from all over the state for us to admit them that we could not refuse.” The next fall, when only a few took advantage of the opportunity thus afforded them, I asked the same trustee, “If there was such a universal demand, as you trustees thought, why did not more young ladies take advantage of your offer?” He laughed and said “We were mistaken. The demand was not as great as we thought.”

Several young ladies graduated, taking A.B. degrees, and Miss Puella Littlejohn took A.M. degree, but like the “school system” it was not a success, and after a few years, it was thought best, as [my] father would say, to quietly let the matter of admitting the young ladies drop.

From “Memories of Wofford College,” by James H. Carlisle Jr.
It’s not accurate to say that Wofford was all male between 1904 and 1970. Women took classes during summer school, and a few women earned bachelor’s degrees at summer school commencement. During the era that the college awarded master’s degrees, 43 of the 288 degree recipients were women, many were teachers who took afternoon courses. Nurses in the Spartanburg General Hospital’s School of Nursing took science courses at Wofford. As one faculty member noted, while it was not common to award degrees to women, “we didn’t faint when one showed up in the graduation procession.”
The 1960s saw significant changes in higher education. According to a report prepared for Wofford's administration, 100 institutions were all-male in 1962. By 1969, about 40 of those had started admitting women. In South Carolina, only Wofford and The Citadel were still officially all male.

In October 1970, the Board of Trustees approved admitting women as day students, with no plans to provide campus housing for women. The admissions office began to accept women that fall, and four women enrolled in February 1971. In September 1971, 18 more students enrolled, totaling 22 women in a student body of 1,031.
The number of women was small at first and many early female students reported feeling isolated. Some male students, and even some faculty, were not quite ready for women in their classes. Some of the stories in the Old Gold and Black reflected this attitude. These early day students organized and pressed for equal opportunities. For example, many women noted that without residence hall rooms, they had nowhere to study or relax between classes. Between 1971 and 1975, 128 women enrolled at Wofford, 54 as first-time students and 74 as transfer students.

1971-75

The Spartanburg Herald-Journal reported on the first four women.

Association of Wofford Women President Pam Mason explained the challenges Wofford women faced in this 1974 Spartanburg Herald-Journal story.

A locker room in Andrews Field House was renovated for the use of women students and employees.

Women participated in the college’s ROTC unit in this 1974 Bohemian photo and Old Gold and Black story.

Coeducation happened after the college desegregated, and Janice B. Means and Gwendolyn S. Prince became the first two Black women to graduate in 1973, photos from the Bohemian.

Donna Green, the first of the day students to earn her degree, graduated in 1972, photo from the Bohemian.
Since 1949, one of the main scholarship programs had been the King Teen scholarship. That name would not work for women scholars. A parallel program, named for Anna Todd Wofford, Benjamin Wofford’s first wife and the person whose estate largely formed the Wofford bequest, began to award scholarships to highly-qualified women applicants in 1973. By the fall of 1976, the two scholarships became the Wofford Scholars Program.
The passage of Title IX in 1972 meant that the college could not admit women while refusing to give them access to college resources. And so, the college had to choose - return to being all-male, which the law permitted, or become fully coeducational. After hearing from faculty, students, alumni and friends, among whom opinion was divided, the trustees voted to begin full residential coeducation in the fall of 1976.
The board’s vote in October 1975 paved the way for women to move into campus housing beginning in the fall of 1976. That fall, 29 women joined a class of 325 first-year students, and 23 women joined a group of 79 transfer students. Those numbers grew, with seven more women enrolling in January or February of 1977. The next fall, 45 women joined a first-year class of 237, and 15 women were among the 56 transfer students.
Coeducation also brought Greek-letter organizations for women to campus. Transfer student Elizabeth Hammitt began the efforts to bring Zeta Tau Alpha to Wofford in the fall of 1975. Representatives of other chapters installed the Theta Zeta chapter on Feb. 4, 1978. Kappa Delta established the Epsilon Sigma chapter at Wofford on Nov. 17, 1979. Black women began working to create Greek-letter organizations that were part of the National Pan-Hellenic Council. Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta and Alpha Kappa Alpha had members at Wofford and other colleges in Spartanburg, though the student publications did not give them much space.
The college placed the first women resident students on the upper floor of Wightman Hall, which had a suite-style arrangement in which four rooms shared a bathroom. The administration explained that Wightman’s suite arrangement made converting the space for what was initially a small group of students more feasible. The college also took some extra steps to provide security for the women in Wightman Hall, including adding lockable doors to the stairs that gave access to the top floor. The housing options for women occasionally proved to be controversial, and the Old Gold and Black featured several complaints and solutions.
Though their numbers were small at first, women quickly joined student organizations and became leaders on campus. Even before full residential coeducation, one woman, Joanne Deakin ’77, won election to a student body office. Within a few years, women generally were winning a higher percentage of the seats in Campus Union than their numbers on campus. In the 1980–1981 academic year, women held three of the four Campus Union offices. In 1979, students convinced the college to amend a line in a later verse of the Alma Mater from “Cherished by thy sons forever” to “Cherished by thy sons and daughters.”
Women’s intercollegiate sports began competition in the fall of 1980 with volleyball and basketball, and Patricia Gainey became the college’s first women’s coach. No one could honestly claim that these two women’s sports were priorities for the college. They received less desirable practice times, including very early morning slots in Andrews Field House. Even with these obstacles, the volleyball team got off to a strong start, with a 19-10 record in its first year. In the first years of women’s athletics, Wofford’s teams participated in the NAIA’s District Six. Wofford joined the NCAA in 1988.
Even before full residential coeducation, the college had appointed women to faculty and staff positions. Mary Sydnor DuPré and Dorothy Woodward both served in administrative posts. As the faculty grew after World War II, Marie Gagarine, a Russian émigré, began to teach classes in French and Russian, and in 1962, Professor Constance Armitage Antonsen began teaching art history. Gagarine and Antonsen were legendary figures in the classroom and on campus. After the college moved toward admitting women as students, Dr. Vivian B. Fisher joined the English faculty in 1973 and Dr. Susan Griswold joined the modern languages faculty 1980.
In 1974, Anne Springs Close became the first woman elected to the Board of Trustees. Agnes Sandifer Stackhouse and Elizabeth Johnston Patterson became trustees in 1978, and Kate Elizabeth Smith joined the board in 1982. In 1984, Close became the first woman to chair the board. As of 2021, 23 women have served as trustees.

The college's tradition of granting honorary degrees dates to 1866. In 1947, Wil Lou Gray became the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate. The college next conferred an honorary degree on a woman in 1976, when it recognized Peggy Thomson Gignillat.
The first four-year class of women resident students graduated in 1980, and they had helped transform the college. In the 1980s, about 100 women typically enrolled in each entering class. In the 1990s, the size of the entering classes was usually evenly divided between women and men. The number of women on the faculty and staff continued to grow. Two additional Greek-letter organizations for women, Kappa Alpha Theta and Delta Delta Delta, joined the community. With the college’s move into the NCAA, additional teams began competition, and in 2012, Rachel Woodlee ’13 was named a Rhodes Scholar.

ONGOING SUCCESS

The next decade

Four of the 16 students elected to Phi Beta Kappa in the class of 1981 were women.

An Old Gold and Black article notes the 10th year of full residential coeducation.