

This statement was prepared as a first position paper for the Rockefeller Study of Women's College. It was written by Sister Jacqueline after interviews with the following faculty members:

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Sr. Mary Francis	(Theology)
Sr. Mary	(History)
Mr. Wassef	(Sociology)
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Mr. Walton	(Physics)
Sr. Roger	(Chemistry)
Sr. Marita	(Drama)
Mrs. Wise	(Spanish)
Sr. Philomene	(Education)

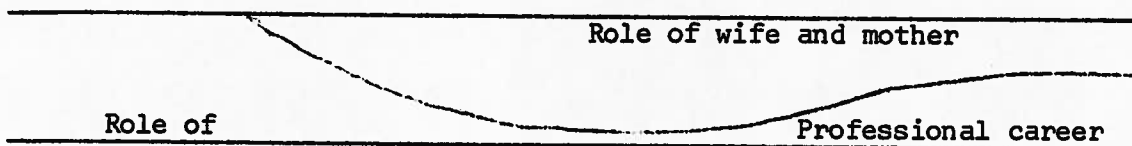
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EDUCATION OF WOMEN AT WEBSTER

Because she is a human person, a woman has a right, a need, and an obligation to complete her personality. This fulfillment of her intellectual, emotional, and spiritual powers is the root reason for her higher education. Her vital role in marriage, in business, in society will be a function of the degree to which her personal resources continue to deepen. At a time when the frontiers of knowledge are exploding, the value of a truly liberal education in helping to deepen these personal resources is great. The complexity of our modern world has led to a fragmented view of life, a frustration resulting from the inability to integrate the tensions in all areas of society. Society and women in society are looking for the stability which will resolve these tensions. It would seem that the aim of education should be to give her the resources to live in inevitable tension, thus providing the individual, her family, and society, their only chance for stability. Margaret Mead in a recent article called attention to women as "inheritors of [the] tradition of service," but lamented the fact that "if, after their children are grown, women look for some great meaning in life, their eyes usually are turned toward a hobby or some form of self-fulfillment, seldom toward activities on behalf of the larger community."

If this is true, it is apparent that one of the critical challenges facing those involved in the education of women is a mode of education which will enable women to live a life of vision in what can be - and too often is-- the provincial world of women and children.

It is the role of the woman's college to build curricula for and to counsel young women toward professional careers which are conducive to their ultimate preparation to be wives and mothers. We are convinced that the personal resources which the young woman develops in a true liberal arts college for women as she prepares for a professional career are conducive to her happiness and productivity in the world as we know it. During a given number of years after her marriage, her direct duties as wife and mother will consume quantitatively the major bulk of her time. Here, however, it is imperative that the collegiate experience be the qualitative factor which allows her to grow personally and to share her vision in her small world. As her children grow up and away from her, the education which has continued through her marriage should allow her to make those contributions to society through either volunteer work or partial professional employment which may enrich her marriage at that stage.



This philosophy is a dangerous one for a woman's college to espouse and to implement. We are the victims of the opprobrium brought about by the common concept of a finishing school. Still we believe that it is possible and necessary for a woman's college to work toward such an internal rationale and such an external image.

If this kind of integrative vision can be honestly made the center of focus in the higher education of women, we will no longer see a short

term "professional use" of their education as the causal and directional force of their studies. Even in preparing them for a professional career we will not sacrifice the core of liberal education which will develop in them the creative flexibility to respond to ever-changing needs. In this sense, somewhat paradoxically, we are attempting to make a woman a perfect man. Because her primary vocational role is a generally liberal one, we are both freer and more constrained to gear her education in this direction. There is a deep analogy in the grace-life of the Mother of Christ. The Incarnation took place at the moment of her fiat, her response to the opportunity, the need, the grace of the moment. It was her flexible readiness for such a response that freely brought Christ to the world. It is some measure of readiness to respond on the natural and supernatural levels that we see as the critical aim of woman's education.

In this context, it seems apparent to us that a woman's college is freer to concentrate its efforts. If the integrative vision is to remain the causal and directional force into which professional preparation is to be subordinately but effectively articulated, some institutions must have this as their primary aim. Only if women's colleges are loyal to this trust and productive in their efforts will they provide a model in focus for other institutions which are not free to keep this as a primary focus. If the products of women's colleges become existence theorems demonstrating the effect of this integration, then coeducational programs will begin to respect and to imitate the critical elements within the intensive model. If, instead, women's colleges produce feminists, unproductive socialites, or pious prudes, they indeed will have been sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. In the woman's college, curriculum builders,

personnel directors, classroom teachers, and students are free to keep the long-term vision of life in principal focus.

As a comparatively small Catholic liberal arts college in the mid-west, Webster College has in its tradition and in its current direction the potential for exploring the needs and possibilities and of producing such a model. The apostolate of the Sisters of Loretto who own and operate the college was born in the pioneering spirit of the Westward Movement. Men and women lay teachers who now comprise over half of the college faculty point to the Sisters as a kind of ego-ideal in the formation of flexible, resourceful women -- as models of the integration of freedom of spirit within deep commitment, of vision and concern within externally limited lives, of cheerful, happy oblation.

It is the paradox of freedom in commitment, of vision within external limits, of cheerful, happy oblation that Webster College seeks for Webster women. To accomplish this, we attempt to educate women who will espouse fundamental principles not as automotive robots of action, but as catalytic agents in the personal process of thinking through, of adapting in any given situation. Many of the developing programs at Webster College which have begun to draw a degree of national attention have as their controlling force the freedom of inquiry, the respect for the inductive method and for the structural approach to learning surveyed in Bruner's The Process of Education. But Webster College sees these modes as not limited to studying mathematics, or civics, or poetry, but proper to the larger context approaching life itself. In this sense what are often tolerated as unavoidable tensions can be approached as creative opportunities in which to be personally productive.

Happiness lies in one's growing ability to solve problems as they come along through shrewd guesses, through watching results, thus economizing the subsequent attempts. Such a freedom to act, rooted in a basic faith, can produce a forceful confidence in the future. Where the accent is on freedom and even invitation to inquiry, perhaps most important of all, ~~her~~ faith will be freely espoused and the degree of depth of freedom of that espousal will largely determine the degree of depth of integrative vision. If a Catholic woman's college can emerge whose students, faculty, and alumnae are characterized by a buoyant kind of life of the spirit, a willingness and eagerness to explore, a security in approaching never-to-be-exhausted truth, and a refusal to be stifled by any provincial limits, such a college will become a life-principle for the Church, for society at large, for families and for women in these roles. It is the present aim of Webster College to create and to develop such a role.