TRINITY COLLEGE

THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN UNDERGRADUATES TO TRINITY COLLEGE

Introduction

Colleges and universities everywhere are studying the question of co-education. Institutions which are now considering this issue (or have already reached a decision) include many with which Trinity compares itself: schools such as Dartmouth, Wesleyan, Williams, Colgate, Hamilton, Union, Yale, and Princeton. Thus it is natural that there should be a great deal of talk about this subject among the faculty and students at Trinity.

Recently, this informal discussion has been given greater urgency. Trinity College has been asked by the Hartford College for Women to consider the possibility of accepting their two-year graduates as non-residential candidates for Trinity's Bachelor's degree. This request, made by President Laura Johnson to President Lockwood, comes at a time when the pressure for inter-institutional cooperation is increasing rapidly, in Hartford, in Connecticut, and in the nation. College after college sees cooperation with other educational institutions as essential to its own improvement. Trinity has always enjoyed very congenial relations with Hartford College for Women. If for no other reasons, this tradition and the pressures for cooperation behoove us to take their request seriously. But there are other reasons, more fundamental reasons, why Trinity should consider modifying its admission policy so as to accept women at the undergraduate level. Studies of coeducation by Wesleyan, Union, Colgate and Princeton have recently been published. They contain some findings that bear very directly on our own institution. To be sure, their results are not always pertinent to the situation at Trinity, but the documentation included in their reports provides us the essential background for a decision.

In order that the Trustees may reflect on the general question of admitting women to Trinity College, and the specific problem of how to respond to Miss Johnson's request, we set forth here a summary of the pertinent facts and arguments. Our discussion will be subdivided into three sections: educational, social, and financial considerations.

Educational Considerations

Many of the best colleges in the country have long been single-sex institutions. Trinity is such a college. The graduates of these institutions have gone on to assume roles of leadership in the arts and sciences, the professions, business, government, etc. Why should the single-sex admissions policy of these schools now require study, let alone modification?

The fundamental reason lies in the changing social patterns that have developed in the nation over the last several decades. The overwhelming majority of boys and girls in America today attend coeducational elementary and secondary schools. Furthermore, it is becoming ever more common for men and women to work together in business, in education, in the professions, and in government. All in all, the increased mixing of the sexes, as of the races, is characteristic of the times. The strength of the American system of education, as well as our system of government, is reflected in the fact that we

are on the verge of becoming the first nation in history to assimilate a large racially distinct minority group in full freedom and equality.

The whole thrust of contemporary American history is towards the integration of previously disparate social groups, towards equal opportunity for both races and both sexes. Separate education of the races has been found intrinsically unequal. In contrast, separate education of the sexes is certainly not less fair to one sex than the other. However, recent studies suggest that in the America of the future men or women educated separately may be at a disadvantage compared to those educated together. The continued high quality of education in the single-sex institution is seriously threatened by this assumption in our society.

But there is also a compelling, institutionally selfish reason for considering coeducation: fewer and fewer high school students are interested in attending single-sex colleges. The Princeton study reveals that only three percent of today's high school senior men prefer a small all-male liberal arts college, in contrast to 24 percent who prefer a small coeducational liberal arts college. The remainder prefer large universities. If one ignores size and type of institution and asks seniors merely whether they prefer coeducation or single-sex education the response is that they prefer coeducation nine to one. It seems that the vast majority of young people today, having spent all their lives in bisexual schools, find a single-sex institution "unnatural." The Princeton study followed up the rejections received from 244 of the top 425 students to whom they offered admission. The most frequently given reason for declining admission to Princeton was its lack of women students.

These preferences undoubtedly are one of the main reasons behind the falling number of applications made to Trinity College. They also mean that coeducational institutions are able to select their students from a pool that is almost ten times the size of the pool from which schools like Trinity are choosing. Since the total pool of applicants to single-sex institutions is shrinking steadily, the number of talented students that a single sex institution may expect to attract will shrink, too.

The United States outclasses Belgium in Olympic competition because we have a larger pool from which to choose athletes and hence we are likely to find more athletic talent. If the pool from which Swarthmore (long coed), Wesleyan (going coed), and Williams (studying coeducation) are drawing their students is (or becomes) roughly ten times the size of ours, they are sure to develop shortly a more talented and diverse student body. By talented we refer not only to academic credentials but also to the potential contributions to the full range of campus activities that applicants might make. The quality of the student body will in turn affect the quality of our faculty, since the best professors gravitate to those schools which are attracting the best students. Princeton's faculty overwhelmingly prefers coeducation. There is every indication that Trinity's does, also.

If Trinity were to modify its admissions policy and accept undergraduate women there would be two immediate educational consequences, both tending to improve the quality and diversity of our student body. First, as already discussed, we would be drawing from a much larger group of potential applicants and consequently we could admit more talented students and more students with

special skills that would enrich the campus life. Second, we could replace the less qualified among the men we are now admitting with women who were the academic equals of the upper half of our entering men. There are considerably fewer places for women at prestigious colleges than for men. Thus, if a college like Trinity were to open its doors to women, it could expect to tap into a reservoir of talent that would rapidly improve its academic standing until it was fully comparable in this regard to any college in the nation.

It is often stated that admitting women will result in a large increase in the number of majors in so-called "women's fields," (e.g., literature, language and the arts) and a corresponding decrease in so-called "men's fields" (e.g., physics and economics), shifts that will throw departmental staffing out of balance. However, there are very important offsetting effects. As we have seen, a coeducational school can select its students from a pool almost ten times the size of the candidate pool of a single-sex school. With an increased number of potential applicants the admissions office can choose incoming students with an eye to maintaining departmental balance. If, for example, science enrollments are too low, more students predisposed towards science can be selected. Furthermore, women that are as gifted academically as the upper portion of men are readier to concentrate in "men's fields" than is usually realized. The extent to which these countervailing effects cancel one another has been studied by other institutions, and on balance does not seem to be a serious obstacle, although some shift must be anticipated.

There are subtler reasons than those discussed above for educating men and women together, reasons intrinsic to the educational process itself. Men and women <u>are</u> different, intellectually as well as sexually. Each sex tends to bring its own point of view to the discussion of any subject. It is especially obvious how the presence of feminine sensitivities might contribute to the study of the arts and literature. But women's viewpoints complement men's equally importantly in the sociological or political area. Even in the sciences it has been observed that the class of questions that women and men ask is subtly different: women tend more frequently to ask questions with a philosophical slant, whereas men, although more reluctant to appear naive philosophically, usually are quicker to raise practical questions involving the mechanics of the situation. Both components are essential to a full understanding. Thus, in any subject area, the presence of both men and women in the classroom enlarges the scope of the discussion in an intangible, but absolutely fundamental way, a way that deepens the learning experience for all.

Aside from financial considerations, this is the strongest argument against the establishment of a coordinate women's college. Coordinate education deals only with the social question, it fails to remove the basic educational disadvantages of separate education. If one is making the transition to coeducation it makes no sense, educationally or financially, to do anything other than admit women into a college with one campus, one administration, one faculty, and one student body.

The objection is sometimes raised that the presence of women in the classroom or on the campus is distracting to the men. Of course it is, <u>if</u> the women

are only there one or two days a week. But such distraction diminishes rapidly once the continued presence of women is established. And what distraction remains is no greater than the week-long distraction resulting from the absence of women. The conclusion from every study we have read is that future greatness among colleges will be possible only within the framework of coeducation. Only one American educational institution founded in this century has chosen to restrict admissions to men, and that institution was the Air Force Academy. A decision to remain a men's college may well therefore contradict Trinity's traditional paramount objective: to be an unexcelled liberal arts college with a national constituency.

Social Considerations

Today's students stress the desirability of coming to understand women better through low-pressure contact in the classrooms and dining halls. They feel that such contact contributes more towards men and women developing firm and abiding respect for each other as persons than the intense big-weekend atmosphere. It may even help young people to choose marriage partners more wisely.

Another effect of coeducation is a subtle but general improvement in the appearance and the manners of men. Some students at Wesleyan objected to coeducation on the grounds that they would have to clean up, and a professor opposed it because he would no longer be able to tell dirty stories in his classes!

Let us now consider a sensitive, but unavoidable, subject. What is the effect of coeducation on the sexual conduct of the students? There is no definitive answer, but the general concensus seems to be that the net amount of sexual activity changes very little. What does change is its pattern. In single-sex institutions the big-weekend social pattern tends to result in more promiscuous, more intense social interactions. In coeducational institutions there is more steady dating. The net result is that promiscuity is greater in an all male institution, but the total amount of sexual activity remains essentially the same, whether the school is coed or all male. Incidentally, it appears that those students most active in campus rebellions throughout the nation have fewer steady dates than their less rebellious fellow students. It would be interesting to see if there was any correlation between campus disturbances and the presence or absence of coeducation.

It might be pointed out that Trinity, unlike Wesleyan, is situated in a large city which contains many females, and even several women's colleges. This certainly reduces somewhat the social pressure for coeducation. But it does nothing to reduce the educational pressures, discussed in the previous section. Nor is the existence of women off campus of much comfort to the many young men who, due to shyness or inexperience, are reluctant to meet girls through blind-dates, but would soon develop normal social relations with women if they shared the everyday experiences of a college rather than only the intense extracurricular life that prevails on weekends.

Financial Considerations

The cost of coeducation depends most importantly on the extent to which it is accomplished by an expansion, allocating the new places to women, or by substituting women for some of the men that would otherwise be enrolled. Coeducation is not significantly different in cost per student than single sex education. Of course, there is the need for women's dormitories, but Trinity already has one dormitory designed to accommodate women, and could easily modify others. The question of women's athletic facilities would require study. The present fraternity system would in no way be affected.

There are, however, several possible financial consequences of a less direct, but no less important, nature. First, there is the question of the effect of coeducation on the financial support of alumni. Would significant numbers of alumni lose interest in their college if it were to change its policy in regard to admitting women? Princeton's study is most revealing on this matter. It confirms one's intuition that some alumni would be upset by coeducation, but these prove to be in the minority and among those graduated longest ago. When all Princeton's alumni were asked if they thought it was in Princeton's interest to admit undergraduate women over 2/3 replied "Yes," less than 1/3 "No." There was an unmistakable upward trend in the percentage of "Yes" responses as one considered ever younger alumni, ranging from a 50-50 division for the group of oldest alumni (graduating before 1925) to a 82-16 division among the youngest alumni (graduating since 1960). Thus the disappointment the older alumni may feel is more than compensated by the approval of the much larger younger group. And what will be the principal source of alumni support over the next few decades?

What is at issue here is whether alumni value their college primarily for the male camaraderie it provided them or for the quality of the education they received and their pride in having attended a still flourishing institution of national prominence. There can be little doubt that Trinity's graduates, like Princeton's, would prove to be devoted to their college's past excellence and its future development above all else.

A further indirect financial consequence deserves mention. There is today a huge demand for scholarship funds in the expensive private liberal arts colleges. The admission of women would reduce this demand, because a family seldom considers sending a daughter to an expensive private college unless it can pay her way. Thus, in accepting women, a school like Trinity might expect in the near future to obtain a somewhat larger share of students able to pay. This in turn would reduce the financial pressure for more scholarship funds, a pressure certain to rise rapidly with increasing costs. This effect probably would not last forever because of other countervailing factors, but it seems likely that by then public sources of scholarship aid will have become available to bail out the private colleges, all of which are in trouble in this regard.

Conclusion

The first thing most people want to do when they spot a trend is to join it. Trinity, should it decide to admit undergraduate women, would clearly be

contributing to a trend, but it would also be continuing its tradition of undertaking whatever actions were necessary to protect its excellence. It would be foolhardy to abandon our status as a men's college if the only reasons for doing so were to conform with the other colleges. But the very reasons that are operative in Princeton's and Wesleyan's situation are operative in ours. These reasons are primarily educational in character, and have been set forth briefly in this report.

The argument can be made, that with so many colleges becoming coeducational, shouldn't there remain at least a few for those who prefer to spend their undergraduate education among men. We have seen that the number of such students is already dangerously low. But assuming it fell no further, the question remains, can Trinity retain its level of excellence if it remains all-male? Is Trinity's future excellence as a national college best assured by its opting for uniqueness in terms of an admissions policy with diminishing appeal? There can be little doubt that the chief concern of those in the Trinity community lies not with maintaining an outpost on the educational prairie but in guaranteeing future excellence.

If Trinity is to become a coeducational college it should not do so half-heartedly. It should do a better job in this regard than those schools which are now so reluctantly accepting coeducation. We should enter this phase of our history boldly, firmly, and soon. There are many among the faculty who are not only prepared to undertake this task but who believe that Trinity can do a significantly better job than our competitors.

Nothing the Trustees and the new administration could do could have a more beneficial effect on the campus. During the year all the plans could be laid, with full faculty and student participation, to accept women next fall into the freshman class and into the upper-classes as transfer students, from Hartford College for Women and other similar institutions. Wesleyan, whose program in this area is very gradualist, will not admit its first regular women until 1970. If we were to strike out boldly we could skim the cream off the untapped reservoir. If we remain cautiously behind Wesleyan and the others, they will get the cream. By seizing this unique opportunity we might well surpass, in one bound, the Little Three schools in the quality of our student body. Few such opportunities are presented in an institution's history.

The English statesman-philosopher Edmund Burke described the role of a Trustee as that of conserving until there is overwhelming evidence pointing to the need for change. We feel that such evidence now exists.

Robert W. Fuller
Dean of the Faculty
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