

Women's colleges in US

Gloria Goodale

Women's colleges in America are not only alive and well they're defending and promoting their specialised role in education.

In contrast with those in the early '70s who predicted co-education men and women educated at the same institution would be the wave of the future the Women's College Coalition in Washington D C insists women's colleges are holding their own against and in some cases doing better than their equivalent co-educational institutions.

The 116 women's colleges in the United States today find encouragement in these developments:

— Total enrolment rose 25 per cent in every type of women's college over the last decade.

— Applications rose four per cent in 1980 from 1979 and new part-time students rose 17.9 per cent.

Nan Keonane, President of Wellesley College in Massachusetts, says that "women's colleges have if anything more of a mandate than ever before as women prepare to serve in a world that is increasingly difficult to understand."

As Ms Keonane observed "there is still a need for (women's colleges) despite huge gains for women.

"We have a history of taking women's education seriously... and we have a good track record

Many of our (country's) most successful women have come from women's institutions

"A lot of coed schools are good with women. But we are a group of institutions that have done nothing but think about how to educate women. We think we can share some good things — In many ways I think (women's colleges) can serve as models for co-educational institutions."

Susan Shea, Director of Public Information at Mills College in Oakland, California observed that "we're finding many young women today come here for the good education first and then get hooked on the all-women's college. It's a chance to achieve with a higher sense of self-esteem than they had in high (secondary) school."

Ruth Schmidt, President of Agnes Scott, an all-women's college in Atlanta Georgia noted: "Women's colleges will continue to be leaders in understanding contemporary women's lives."

Many women's colleges have pioneered programmes relating to women's needs. Many of the

RU wall magazine

The Geography Department of RU has brought out a wall magazine namely Pallal Deyal Patrika recently. Edited by Mr Insar Ali Rana, the magazine contains both stories and poems

urban colleges have started flexible scheduling to include working women, mothers or both while others have restructured programmes and requirements to enable older women to return to campus.

Rhoda Dorsey, President of Goucher College in Baltimore Maryland speaks enthusiastically of the changes ushered in over the last decade. "Women's colleges have improved their financial conditions and enrolments. And there is a lot more respect abroad for them than there was 10 years ago in part because the times have addressed more specifically opportunities for women."

"Women's colleges are a very good place for a certain kind of woman — There are role models galore — all the administration is female, the faculty is half female," Ms Dorsey says.

"Our job is to build up a degree of confidence within women so they can move forward... We know what we're doing and what we do we do well."

On the future of women's colleges, President Dorsey concludes "Women's colleges are a subset of the traditional liberal arts colleges. As the genre goes so will they."

"But for the foreseeable future there is and will continue to be a legitimate place on the American college scene for them" — Christian Science Monitor