

Women Students '74

AC 232
BOX 19 FOLDER 8

Early
Achievements of
Women Students

Browder Study

A SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR WOMEN STUDENTS AT MIT

*File
Studies
of
women
at
MIT*

1. Grading at MIT, as indicated by the past 5 years of GPA data, shows no correlation to sex of student. Men and women are indistinguishable by grades across all departments averaged over this period.
2. There is no significant difference in the number of women vs. men on academic warning.
3. A look at statistics for the fall of 1981 for Tau Beta Pi (the engineering honorary society) show that out of 277 women enrolled in engineering, 32 were invited to join Tau Beta Pi or 11.5%. Out of 1332 men enrolled in engineering 197 or 14.8% were invited to join.
4. The figures clearly demonstrate that women are elected to Phi Beta Kappa in a percentage far greater than their distribution in the population would lead us to expect. For example in 1981, 10 of the 38 members of Phi Beta Kappa at MIT or 26% were women while women represent 19% of the group.
5. In the last 5 years there were 82 cases heard by the Committee on Discipline. Of those, 3 were women.
6. Women students participate in a wide range of Institute committees. A look at the 1981-82 academic year shows that there are a total of 63 Institute committees. Forty committees have student members. There are 109 male students and 55 female students on Institute committees.
7. There is a wide range of participation of women students in student activities across the board. From a look at the 1981-82 directory listing student activities, women chair about 20% of the student organizations.
8. Women received a substantial share of awards in June 1981. During 1981 women made up 19% of the undergraduate student body.
Women received: 15% of the academic awards
 31% of the extracurricular awards
 21% of the athletic awards
 20% of the military awards

SUMMARY: There does not seem to be any significant difference in academic performance of men and women students at MIT. Women participate fully in extracurricular activities and receive a substantial share of awards each year.

Emily Weidman

Coordinator for Women Students' Interests

MARY P. ROWE
Special Assistant for Women and Work

Memorandum from the

OFFICE OF THE DEAN FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

M. I. T.

JUN 3 1974

Ref. to June 3

File ~~File Ellen Richards~~
~~Richards~~

Mary,

Here is the abstract & first few pages (the part dealing with Ellen Richards) of Rusty Browder's paper. She will be delivering a complete copy to me tomorrow and I'll see that you get it. The meeting is the annual convention of the American Home Economics Convention, this year at Los Angeles.

Pete

File Swallow
Ellen Richards next to
Studies about
(Women at)
MIT

ABSTRACT The Home Economics Movement: Its Origins and Early Years

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PURPOSE An historical analysis of the origins and early years (up through the formation of the AHEA in 1909) of the home economics movement with particular focus on: its beginning in relation to women's activities and organizations in the 19th century; the life of Ellen Richards and her views on women; and the role of domestic science in the development of education for women. A critical look at some characteristics of and assumptions underlying the profession, stemming from the taproots of home economics (early writings on domestic science, rural education, cooking schools, vocational education, nutrition investigations, etc.). Discussion of obstacles to be overcome in the early years and the influence of the early movement on the development of the profession in this century.

PROCEDURE Before and during the writing of this paper, the author was engaged in the study of women in American history, as well as in her studies in home economics education. Therefore, she used two major sets of sources: excellent texts and primary material in women's studies (bibliography available on request) and the major primary and secondary sources in early home economics history (bibliography attached). The author is, of course, solely responsible for her conclusions.

RESULTS A socio-historical approach to the subject enlivened the already interesting emergence of the home economics profession and encouraged interpretive as well as analytical approaches to the subject. Certain characteristics and assumptions of the early movement were determined variously to expand and/or limit the effectiveness of the profession; acceptance of the broad and deep roots of women's responsibility for home life and the belief in their moral and social power as homemakers, "right living" as a value concept and its meaning for those inside and outside the profession, attitudes of home economists to different classes and roles of women, the appropriateness of domestic science in different educational settings. The author concludes that at the same time the young profession could give women knowledge and skills to control their environments, it also had a tremendous influence on preserving traditional roles for women in this century.

IMPLICATIONS Despite the obvious relationship of home economics to the women's movement of the 1960's and '70's (the common concern being growth in the lives and health of women and, by extension, families), the dialogue between these two groups has been scant and, where occurring, often marked by antagonisms. The author hopes that her research will encourage informed and fruitful discussion of home economics and the women's movement. She hopes also that further research will be done dealing with the influence of home economics on the roles and status of women up to the present. Certainly the profession will continue to have an impact on the lives of women; the author feels the impact will be greatest and best when done in the light of a sophisticated understanding of the profession's own strengths and shortcomings and of a sympathetic understanding of the progressive women's movement.

The home economics profession had its beginnings in a series of ten conferences in Lake Placid, N.Y., held 1899 through 1908. These conferences resulted in the founding, in 1909, of the American Home Economics Association, the single professional organization which has brought together people from all branches of home economics since. It would seem there were events which made the end of the 19th century a particularly auspicious time for the formation of a sturdy professional organization composed almost entirely of women.

Indeed, in the early years of the 19th century, women began coming together for common purposes. Emma Willard established a seminary for the education of women in Troy, N.Y., in 1821; Catherine Beecher's female seminary in Hartford, Conn., existed 1823-27; Oberlin, with its policy of coeducation, graduated its first female student in 1841; Mary Lyon founded Mt. Holyoke College in 1837; Vassar opened in 1865. Education for women was a controversial issue throughout the century, as was, even more certainly, suffrage for women. Like suffrage, the temperance movement had its beginnings in the 1840's; in 1874 the Women's Christian Temperance Union was formed. Nearer the end of the century, the progressive era found women involved in a fairly wide spectrum of social reforms. In fact, women were involved visibly and actively in social reforms to the extent that a countermovement among women, specific in its anti-feminism, sprang up. Beginning in the 1860's women's clubs began to appear, and their number had greatly increased by the end of the century. The women's clubs were considerably broader in orientation, less political, and less controversial than the aforementioned movements; but they nevertheless represented a gathering of women outside the home for some common purpose. In the 19th century, then, women came together to organize, to speak publicly, to confront a wide range of issues, to demonstrate competence individually and collectively. It was within this context that the home economics movement had its vigorous beginning in 1899.

Another legacy of the 19th century which undoubtedly had its influence on the home economics movement was the "cult of

true womanhood," a pervasive code of ethics which urged women, presumably wishing to be ladies, to be pious, chaste, submissive and domestic. One's image of a Victorian lady is of a frail, rather helpless woman, encumbered by extremely elaborate styles of dress and existing in a similarly elaborate home environment.

The early participants in the home economics movement had a selective response to both these legacies: some values were rejected; others were preserved. Other facts of American life at the turn of the century needed to be confronted or ignored, too: increasing industrialization and its consequences for working women, urban and rural families; persistent problems with public health, sanitation, and nutrition.

Within this context, I will explore the particular people and events which brought the home economics movement into being, the goals of the movement in its earliest years, and the issues and assumptions which defined its scope of activities. In conclusion I will speculate briefly as to how its orientation in those early years created consequences for the home economics profession and for women today.

I must agree with other historians that no account of the early home economics movement would be complete without a look at Ellen H. Richards, chairperson of the Lake Placid conferences and president of the American Home Economics Association for its first two years, until her death in 1911. Only the last twelve of her sixty-nine years fell within the span of the organized home economics movement, but the way in which she lived her life, personally and professionally, was definitely related to the emphases present in the movement.

She was born Ellen Swallow in Dunstable, Mass., in 1842. Her parents were both well-educated for that time, and they were ardent and affectionate supporters of their only child as she proceeded through her education and professional life in a rather remarkable fashion. She was educated largely at home in her early years and worked closely with her father in his several occupations. Ellen Swallow entered Vassar in 1870, in its fifth year

of operation, supported by her own earnings. She worked with Maria Mitchell studying astronomy but elected to concentrate in chemistry because of, she later wrote, "an unrecognized leaning toward social service," (1) from which, presumably, the skies were too far removed. She claimed frequently in her abundant correspondence with her mother that she was at Vassar for "self-culture" and eschewed competition; yet it is clear from the same correspondence that she was intensely aware of, excited by, and proud of the pioneering venture in women's education in which Vassar was engaged: "...they won't let us study enough. They are so afraid we shall break down and you know the reputation of the college is at stake, for the question is, can girls get a college degree without injuring their health?" (2) Her complex and often apparently conflicting views on women in general are exemplified by these 1870 letters: "I sympathize with father and I wish the women's rights folks would be more sensible. I think the women have a great deal to learn before they are fit to vote" (3); yet when the college refused to allow Wendell Phillips, an avid supporter of radical women's movements, to lecture, she and other students requested that he be allowed to speak. And yet in reference to another speaker she wrote: "He spoke of our having an opportunity to show what our needs and capacities were, not in a hot house, but like a tree, symmetrical in all directions. It was the best women's rights speech I ever heard. Suffrage, the ballot, or rights, were not mentioned". (4) Interestingly, it was from a commercial chemical company in Boston to which she had applied for a job after graduating from Vassar that the suggestion came for Ellen Swallow to enter the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This she did in 1871, the first woman to enter a school of science in the United States. She proceeded with confidence and ability but did demonstrate a self-consciousness of herself as a woman: "Perhaps the fact that I am not a Radical or a believer in the all powerful ballot for women to right her wrongs and that I do not scorn womanly duties, but claim it as a privilege to clean up and sort of supervise the room and sew things, etc., is winning me stronger allies than

anything else." (5) Following graduation and her marriage to a professor of mining engineering at M.I.T., the then Ellen Richards supervised the Woman's Laboratory at M.I.T., the result of a project of the Women's Educational Association of Boston. In this role, she demonstrated great and lasting professional support of women; she envisioned her students' knowledge serving as a way of social service. Interestingly, her biographer noted that the substances most often chosen for analysis in the lab were foods and cleaning materials, obviously related to the accepted sphere of women's activities. Viewed from today's perspective, the course of study in the Woman's Lab was really a form of continuing education, often tailored to suit the needs of the individual women who arrived at M.I.T. in varying states of preparation and ability. Richards demonstrated her determination to help women secure tools of usefulness by taking responsibility for the Science Section of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, beginning in 1876. Her home students frequently wrote of their ill health and fatigue -- perhaps the lingering legacy of melancholia? -- and, despite her probably^{ly} frustration, she patiently gave such advice as "If it is a relief to take your clothes off at night, be sure something is wrong (in the way you are dressing)" and urged them on to their studies. From 1887 until 1904 she engaged almost continuously in a painstaking survey of the sanitary conditions of waters in all parts of Massachusetts, an invaluable project at a time when gains in public health matters were supremely important. When she presided over the first meeting of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae in 1882, the first issue discussed was the health of college students. From 1886, she regularly attended meetings of the American Public Health Association and the National Education Association. She was intimately involved in bettering nutrition in the Boston schools from 1885. One could catalog further her professional involvements; indeed, her presence will be noted often in the events leading up to the Lake Placid conferences.

Ellen Richards frequently used the term "right living," by which she meant a deliberate, useful, self-sacrificing style of

life. One of her strongest criticisms of contemporary women was that they did not know what was good for themselves, that they were indecisive and inefficient, that they were frivolous and unable to take control of their own lives and homes in such a way as to free themselves for further service. The term "right living" appears in much of the literature of the early home economics movement; it becomes clear that Richards' personal standards are embodied in the goals of the movement.

It is difficult to tell whether it was in spite of or because of her strong principles that Richards managed to find time for a remarkably wide range of committed friendships. Her tremendous range of acquaintances and experiences, her encouragement of women to gain the tools to control their lives, and her commitment to the use of science for better living were probably the most valuable assets she brought to the beginnings of the home economics profession.

There are a number of events regularly cited by historians of the home economics movement as leading up to the first Lake Placid conference in 1899: writings on domestic economy early in the century; the establishment of land grant colleges; the manual training movement; the establishment of cooking schools, kitchen gardens, and school kitchens in the east; nutrition investigations by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the Chicago Exposition in 1895; the establishment of the School of Housekeeping in Boston in 1897. Without doubt, these events did have germinal influence on the emergence of the home economics movement. I hope to include in a discussion of these events my own observations that some misleading generalizations have been made about these events and that assumptions underlying them had far-reaching and largely unrecognized implications for the future of home economics.

The school board in Gloucester, Mass., in 1790 can be credited with wishing to include girls in two out of eight hours of teaching each day "as they are a tender and interesting branch of the community." (6) Women appear to have been taken more seriously by Catherine Beecher in her conduction of a female seminary in