Gender Matters in College Choice:

Asking the Right Questions
National Association for College Admission Counseling Pittsburgh, PA
October 5, 2006

Who we are:
Jillian Kinzie, Associate Director National Survey of Student Engagement Institute Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research jkinzie@indiana.edu
Susan Lennon, Executive Director Women’s College Coalition lenmons@trinitydc.edu

What is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)?
Undergraduate student survey that assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development.
www.nsse.iub.edu

What is the Women’s College Coalition?
The Women’s College Coalition is an association of women’s colleges and universities whose primary mission is the education and advancement of women.
www.womenscolleges.org

March 23, 2006
To All the Girls I’ve Rejected
By JENNIFER DELAHUETRY BRITZ
• Today, two-thirds of colleges and universities report that they get more female than male applicants, and more than 56 percent of undergraduates nationwide are women. Demographers predict that by 2009, only 42 percent of all baccalaureate degrees awarded in the United States will be given to men.
• We have told today’s young women that the world is their oyster; the problem is, so many of them believed us that the standards for admission to today’s most selective colleges are stiffer for women than men. How’s that for an unintended consequence of the women’s liberation movement?
• And what messages are we sending young women that they must, nearly 25 years after the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, be even more accomplished than men to gain admission to the nation’s top colleges?
• I admire the brilliant successes of our daughters.

“In what ways do gender issues manifest themselves on campus? What would a truly coeducational institution look like? We call ourselves coeducational, but the experiences of men and women are not equal, and the differences too often translate into disadvantages for women.”
Nannerl O. Keohane, President Duke University, 1993-2004
“Gender is... one of the most potent forces shaping human institutions, including education”

(Clifford, 1993)

What Really Matters in College: Student Engagement

The research is unequivocal: students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from the college experience than those who are not so involved.

Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, How College Affects Students

Gender Differences in Engagement by First-year Students (source: NSSE 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female Students More Engaged</th>
<th>Male Students More Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community service or volunteer work</td>
<td>Toured or taught other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours per week preparing for class</td>
<td>Hours per week relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours per week providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)</td>
<td>Hours per week participating in co-curricular activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations</td>
<td>Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor</td>
<td>Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language coursework</td>
<td>Number of problem sets (problem-based homework assignments) that take less than an hour to complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in</td>
<td>Research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theater performance</td>
<td>Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women Students at Coeducational and Women’s Colleges: How Do Their Experiences Compare?

Research Design
Sample
NSSE data from 42,112 randomly sampled first-year and senior women at 294 colleges and universities
4,676 women at 26 women’s colleges

Between Effects:
Do women’s colleges differ from coed institutions in terms of students’ satisfaction, and the nature and frequency of contact with faculty, and activities associated with student learning? and in terms of the degree to which they foreshadow deep learning?

Within Effects:
Do students at women’s colleges from different backgrounds differ in their experiences?

Results: Comparing Student Engagement at Women’s and Coed Colleges

• Women at women’s colleges more engaged than women at coed colleges
  – higher Academic Challenge, Seniors more likely to engage in higher order thinking
  – First Years and Seniors higher on active and collaborative learning, and student-faculty interaction, more integrative activities
  – Largest positive difference related to experiences with diversity

• Mixed perceptions on campus environment
  – First Years at women’s colleges perceived greater support for success
  – Seniors at women’s colleges perceived lower level of interpersonal support

• No difference in satisfaction

Results: Comparing Student Engagement at Women’s and Coed Colleges, (cont’d)

• Educational Gains higher for women’s college first years and seniors
  -- understanding self and others
  -- general education
  -- ability to analyze quantitative problems
  -- desire to contribute to welfare of others
Results: Within Women’s Colleges Differences

- Race-ethnic differences
  - African Amer & Asian Pacif. Amer (APA) seniors report fewer interactions with faculty
- Some major field differences; Math & Science majors highest gains in quant skills
- Transfer students at women’s colleges as engaged as those who started
- Supportive Campus Climate differences
  - Transfer students perceive support
  - African Amer seniors perceive less support than white women
- Satisfaction
  - African Amer, & APA FY & seniors less satisfied than white women
  - APA seniors and first years differ from white students in engagement
  - Women in social science highest satisfaction, seniors in professional majors less satisfied

Results: Women’s Colleges

- Results consistent with other studies showing women’s college advantage
- Women at women’s colleges more engaged, make more progress toward college outcomes
- Women’s colleges transfer-friendly
- FY & seniors at women’s colleges report challenging academic experiences, more integrative learning
- Support high student-faculty interaction leading to positive educational difference for women
- Conditions encourage FY & seniors to collaborate more with peers, actively participate in class, and integrate ideas
- Foster environment that fuels women’s understanding of self and others, working with others; skills associated with career success and leadership
- WCs help women develop quantitative skills and facilitate opportunity to interact around difference

Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice: Helping Women Find the Best Educational Fit

1. Level of academic challenge
   - In what ways do faculty challenge and support students to leave their “comfort zone” in order to excel?
   - How much time do students spend on homework each week?
   - How frequently do students make class presentations?
   - How many courses require community-service?

2. Active and collaborative learning
   - How often are things learned in class discussed outside of the classroom?
   - In what ways do students work together on solving problems in and out of class?
   - How frequently do students make class presentations?
   - What types of internships are available and are they required to graduate?
3. Student interactions with faculty members

- How many students do research with faculty?
- What does the institution do to promote student-faculty contact?
- What kind and how often do students get feedback on coursework?

4. Enriching educational experiences

- In what ways are students exposed to multiple cultures or diverse perspectives?
- To what extent are students asked to integrate diverse perspectives into assignments?
- Where are students from and how many are from other countries?

5. Supportive campus environment

- What types of support services (academic and non-academic) are available, particularly for new students?
- To what extent are leadership opportunities available to all students?

To Consider:

- If a student indicates that these undergraduate experiences are important to her, she might want to consider attending a women’s college.
- Women attending women’s colleges report higher levels of engagement than women attending co-educational institutions on the types of educational experiences identified in the above questions.
- Women students with these values who are interested in attending a co-ed college might use these questions to assess the degree to which these conditions exist in programs or majors at schools in their consideration set.

I asked her what one word she would use to describe her college experience?

She thought carefully and then replied confidently, “Challenge.” She explained that her women’s college experience had challenged and supported her to take risks, had guided her and given her the courage to navigate her way out of her comfort zone, and helped her set higher expectations for herself and achieve greater goals.

Discussion and Comments

“Gender…is one of the most potent forces shaping human institutions, including education.”
Clifford, 1993

Women’s colleges are a vital postsecondary option for women –
In many respects they are models of effective educational practice