

## SURVEY ON COLLEGE WOMEN

What kinds of women are attending college or university today? Why are they coming to study and where are they heading after the degree? This was the purpose of a BUC Sophomore Rhetoric project in fall, 1979. A research survey was conducted among contemporary women students in the Beirut area; interviews were made and questionnaires filled out so that class members might produce some statistical facts for evidence. What triggered off this project was the challenged premise of Dr. Burton who had claimed in the sixties, that most young women have less reason, i.e. less right, to occupy precious places in higher educational institutions; he implied that their prime ambition on campus, and elsewhere, is but to find a man and to establish a family. The following results were gleaned from the completed polls.

### Single Women Students (84) Women Students with Steady Boyfriends (36)

Fifty five percent of the single women affirmed that the degree (AA, AAS, BA, or BS) is their principal target since it makes possible specific career opportunities. Forty-four percent of the singles felt that their main reason for being at college is culture, with all the mental enrichment, intellectual superiority and sophistication it can give. Only 1% admitted that college was a most effective means to combat boredom.

For those women "going steady, 73% stated as their primary purpose the degree that would lead to a good job. Twenty-seven percent thought that becoming more cultivated and more broad-minded was of number one importance.

As for **secondary purposes**, 38% of the singles asserted that they wanted a good job; 24% to meet and know new people; 21%, enjoy cultural experiences; 12%, to escape boredom; 2%, to discover new ways to improve society; 2%, because of parental pressure or to find a mate.

Thirty-six per cent of the women with steady boyfriends put "character development" and intellectual cultivation at the top of their list of second priorities; The remaining results show little difference from those of the single women, so we pass them over.

To complete the survey, 78% of all the singles and women students going steady declared that they would continue their education even if they were to get married and have a family of their own.

### Engaged Women Students (58) and Married Women Students (43)

When asked why they were pursuing their studies after engagement, 67% of the women replied that they wanted a degree to be able to work and improve the finances of their future foyer. Sixteen percent said that they came mainly for intellectual interests and enjoyment of their major

subjects. Ten percent especially wanted to enjoy the social life on campus. Seven percent enrolled to be academically equal to or personally close to their fiancés.

As for the principal purposes of those women already married, three quarters asserted that they needed the degree allowing them to work and share the financial burdens of the household. Twelve per cent claimed they came to escape boring routine at home; seven percent hoped to become academically equal to their husbands; 2% came for sheer love of their major subjects, and 2% for more contacts.

Once again, the survey of the engaged and married women students was used to discover connections between personal, sentimental life and academic life. It was shown that two thirds of the married and a bit more than half of the engaged women are very happy: they see their spouses or fiancés regularly, and these men in turn encourage their partners to study and succeed; also there is mutual understanding and consideration. Thirty-three percent of the married and 34% of the engaged women wrote that they were not so happy in their private lives: either they did not see their partners very often or had occasional quarrels with them, sometimes over their getting the college degree itself. Finally, 9% of the married, but none of the engaged, admitted being unhappy, due to a combination of the reasons listed above.

### Conclusions

From the results of the student poll, it can be concluded that the majority of all women students of the college, whatever their situation, attend college or university principally for the diploma that will provide, they believe, a passport to a good career, financial security, independent living, and personal pride. Only a quarter of all the singles (and as a secondary purpose), 16% of the engaged, and 2% of the married students interviewed, avow coming to campus for the sake of enlightenment and love of learning alone.

Judging from the survey of the singles and "steadies", there is no doubt that the less socially involved the student, the more she is likely to make it to the Honor List. Ironically, many singles have a wide variety of secondary aims at college... not the least of which is an expressed need for more interesting social contacts and new experiences with people. Therefore, it cannot be rare that most singles experience some doubts and confusion at college, often over a conflict of interests (for example, success in the right major to get the right job — 60% of all singles; success with the right people — almost 30% of all singles; perhaps to find the right mate or just to kill boredom — 13% of all). With multiple goals and a future yet to be determined, many singles may feel less secure, worry more, and concentrate less in preparation for classes; thus they may not score so well as they wished academically. Interestingly enough, those women going steady seemed to express a bit more concern for the cultural and personality development benefits of college than their peers without a definite partner.

The married and engaged women students that were polled seemed more specifically motivated, on the whole, than the singles: their main goal being need or desire to share in the financial support of homes and families already or soon-to-be established. Since many of these women already have or know what they want out of life, they



showed a tendency to be more confident or responsible academically. While most claim they study less after receiving rings, they evidently can and do concentrate more, since 43% of the marrieds and 31% of the engaged are on the Honor List and stay there. To sum up, almost all the married and engaged women stayed within their general GPA categories before and after the rings (below 2, 2-2.5, 2.6-3, above 3); thus it can be seen that marital status does not usually have a radical effect, positive or negative, on women's performance, although some improvement seemed common in most all cases in the survey.

As for happiness or feelings of personal satisfaction with life, the polls proved that these do not constitute an accurate barometer to successful academic performance. In other words, unhappy or dissatisfied women, be they single or married, need not expect a poor GPA just as their happier counterparts need not get a great GPA at college or university.

Statistics indicated that approximately 60% of all the groups of women polled were "happy." The engaged were definitely the happiest, followed closely by women with steady boyfriends; in third place came the singles, with the married trailing behind. However, 80% of the married students maintain GPA averages over 2.5; and there are many more happy singles and steadies than those who make the Honor List. It is not improbable to say, therefore, that academic success has more to do with happiness in private or social life.

Finally, although women today rarely if ever say (cf. Dr. Burton) that they come to college for the right man, men still do indeed exert significant influence on their academic performance and ambitions. For example, it was seen that so many women improved in their GPA after the rings and admitted they were encouraged to succeed by

their partners; many of the fiancés or spouses were or would be well educated professionals themselves, thus inspiring their partners to do likewise. It is not unreasonable to imagine that a good portion of the sigles would be attracted to outstanding careers and services (via the degree) so that they might find such professionals or be such professionals themselves. That is probably why so many of them are sure that marriage or engagement would not stop them from completing their education.

So, in conclusion, there is not doubt that times have changed from the Fifties and Sixties when many people, like Dr. Burton, felt that women's place in college was more a noisome anomaly than an accepted necessity. They felt that men had and should have a monopoly on the job market and, consequently, at the university. But times have also changed since Dorothy Thompson idealistically proclaimed that real university life belongs to the intellectual elite, whoever they are, those with a love for mental cultivation and personal development for their own sake.

Indeed, from the responses of today's campus women interviewed by our own students, there is a mutual need and desire to participate in the working community. And more positions are open to them if they have but the talent and will to succeed. Education is not just a matter of status and independence but so often today a financial and psychological sine qua non. Contemporary women, as a whole, want to help out with the needs of their society, and, in turn, they constitute one of society's greatest needs because they definitely have so much more to give.

**Condensed from an article prepared  
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