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The Roles of Women on Campus: Contributing to the Development of Student Values

by Alyssa M. Tongg Weiler

INTRODUCTION

Can the student gender values at otherwise similar colleges, be significantly influenced by the mere presence of a curricular program? This research explores the relationship between institutional gender climate and student gender values by determining 1) how egalitarian students are; 2) the degree to which students think about the values of their colleges affect their own value development; and 3) what students think about the values of their colleges at five Christian colleges and universities. An egalitarian is someone with a belief in human equality, especially with respect to social, political and economic rights and privileges and would be committed to the advocacy of the removal of inequalities among people. This research will look at three schools that have a Women's Studies curriculum in place, and two colleges without. Based on student and administrator responses at the participating schools, a list of institutional factors that promote healthy egalitarian value development in students is proposed. This article will begin with a brief overview of the literature, then a description of the participating colleges. Next the survey results and other connections will be explored. This article will conclude with a list of institutional factors that help to foster and cultivate healthy egalitarian views in students.

Literature Review

Since the first college opened its doors in the United States in 1636 (when chemistry was not yet considered a respectable course of study), curriculum has been used as a tool to change our society by bringing intellectual legitimacy to scientific, racial, cultural and gender issues that had not existed before. In *The Opening of the American Mind*, Lawrence Levine (1996) provides a historical look and suggests some implications of the changes in American college curriculum. More specifically, he looks at how gradual changes from a classical curriculum for early America to a democratic curriculum for today has effected the society that we live in as well as how knowledge has changed throughout time. Levine's idea that adding something to the curriculum of a college brings cultural legitimacy to that subject is the central idea that emerges throughout the book.

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But what happens when a college does not add something to its curriculum? What happens if social values are changing, such as attitudes towards women and their roles, but curricula remain the same? Does the lack of curriculum expansion at some colleges, despite what students are exposed to off-campus, keep some legitimacy of women's social progress from being realized?

Vanessa D. Arnold (1974), author of *A Scale for the Measurement of Attitudes Toward the Social, Educational, and Economic Roles of Women*, conducted a survey of business teachers, their female students and the students' parents to find out how female business students' aspirations were affected by the values of their teachers and parents. She found that when teacher and parent values differed about the "rightful place" in society for the female students, the female students' score was found to be between the two values of the teacher and parents' score. This research shows that teacher values do have an effect on student values. If female students change their values to mirror more closely the values of their teachers, what responsibility do institutions of higher education have in promoting values that are healthy for its students? Are colleges obligated to keep their curricula current with social and political developments for the sake of students?

One example of an addition to the curriculum began when the first Women's Studies academic programs were created in 1969. This new scholarship about women was the first to use gender as a category of analysis. Several social and cultural conditions made this expansion of knowledge possible. Catherine Stimpson (1984) identifies several of these factors in her address "Where Does Integration Fit: The Development of Women's Studies" delivered at the Wheaton College Conference *Toward a Balanced Curriculum*,

- the entrance of women of all classes and races into the public labor force,
- the democratization of higher education,
- the partial decline in religious definitions of masculinity and femininity and a far wider cultural acceptance of supplementary ideologies that value equality and self realization, and
- an intellectual climate that tends to value skepticism, empiricism and secularism over tradition (14).

According to Stimpson (1984), during this time "knowledge changed from a series of absolute forms to a series of cultural constructs" (14). Women's Studies curriculum was based on an assumption that was grounded in the new way that knowledge was understood, namely that the gender patterns of masculinity and femininity are human and social constructs.

In another article by Catharine Stimpson (1993), "Women's Studies: The Idea and the Ideas" she defines Women's Studies as a "transdisciplinary intellectual and educational movement that is irrevocably altering what we know and think about women and gender" (545). Stimpson identifies three themes that have become dominant in Women's Studies programs. Women's Studies has sought:

- A particular ethic that values the freedom and the moral equality of all those who seek education and of those who offer it. Women's Studies has promised





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that such an ethic will enhance education, not smash it to pieces.

- To alter institutions so that they embody such an ethic. We have asked them to act affirmatively. One, though only one, positive act would be curricular; to incorporate, to “mainstream” new scholarship about women in ordinary syllabi.
- To change consciousness – that of individuals and of institutions. This has meant more than occasionally referring to a specific woman...it has meant a constant, serious, deepening awareness of sets of problems and ideas about women. (546)

Stimpson (1993) also lists six ideas from Women’s Studies that have entered our cultural thinking. She says, “Once blasphemies, they are now banalities” (546).

- The need to distinguish sex, a biological condition, from gender, a social construction;
- The pernicious existence of gender stratification and discrimination;
- The fact that sexual stratification and discrimination have helped to create distorted representations of men, women and gender;
- The importance of the relationship between public and domestic worlds, productive and reproductive spheres, reason and feeling;
- The complexity of the causes, nature and extent of sexual difference; and
- The profound differences among women themselves (546).

Stimpson provides examples and evidences for Levine’s claim that simply being included in the curriculum brings about changes in attitudes of society.

William G. Tierney (1990) explores two additional ideas in “*Cultural Politics and the Curriculum in Post-secondary Education.*” The first is the relationship between the culture of a college and its curriculum. The second is how curriculum might be used as an empowering tool. The overarching premise of Tierney’s view of the organization is that the “organizations’ culture focuses the participants’ understanding of their relationship to society through an organizational web of patterns and meanings that constantly undergo contestation and negotiation” (43). Once educators understand the powerful role of the individual institutions of higher education in shaping a student’s understanding of the world and her or his place in it, Tierney says that educators “first need to accept that all organizations exist in a cultural network where ideologies operate; they then will struggle to construct their organizations based on a concern for social justice and empowerment” (50).

One way institutions of higher education can construct their internal organization to encourage student empowerment and concern for social justice is to integrate gender issues into the overall curriculum. In *Changing Our minds: Feminist Transformations of Knowledge*, the authors (Susan Hardy Aiken, Karen Anderson, Myra Dinnerstein, Judy Nolte Lensink, and Patricia MacCorquodate 1988) provide a strong argument on the broad enriching effects of Women’s Studies programs on campuses and give an outline for successful curriculum integration. Their message is that it is “necessary to strike a balance between Women’s Studies programs, which are essential for both intensive and extensive focus on women, and collective efforts to transform the traditional curriculum and to contest the masculinist premises on which it is based. Without that trans-



formation, Women's Studies programs risk continued ghettoization" (160). The authors found that it is essential to have a strong Women's Studies program in place before attempting curriculum integration. The presence of such a program also emphasizes that curriculum integration is not a replacement for Women's Studies, but an extension.

If indeed it is true that curriculum inclusion legitimizes cultural groups socially, that curriculum can be used as an empowering agent, that having a strong Women's Studies program in place increases the success of curriculum integration, and that students do learn their place in the work by their interaction with their institutional cultures, *how would the mere presence of a Women's Studies program affect the student perception of the institution's goals and values? Would these students who attend institutions that provide Women's Studies curriculum also begin to value this and therefore move to accept more egalitarian views about women's roles in education, the economy and society?* The purpose of this research is to see if student attitudes toward women at institutions that have a Women's Studies academic program in place, differ from those at institutions that do not. The relationship between student value development and perceived institutional values and climate is also explored.

WHY LOOK AT CHRISTIAN COLLEGES?

Historically Christian colleges have prided themselves on being cultivators of graduates with moral character. Most Christian colleges identify "desirable" values, outlooks and future vocations for their students, either in their mission statements or their educational outcomes. Christian colleges have also been criticized for being breeding grounds of sexist views about women's roles in the family, workplace, community and church.

Marti Watson Garlett PhD (1997) uses a series of in-depth interviews with women faculty at a variety of Christian Colleges in "Female Faculty on the Fringe: Theologizing Sexism in the Evangelical Academy" to explore some of the experiences of female faculty members as they encounter sexism in various forms. The interview data reveals that there is a deeply ingrained sexism against women in the Christian educational field that is disguised by religious practice, belief, tradition, and taboos.

Another purpose of this research is to discover how these underlying currents of sexism affect the value development of students. Do students pick up on the contradiction of the glass ceiling reality and the pro-women rhetoric of their colleges? If they do, do students also begin to mirror the values of their colleges (do these schools even have pro-women rhetoric)? On the other hand, how do student values look at Christian colleges that seem to be committed to the empowerment of women? This article will conclude with a list of suggestions that Christian colleges can apply to their own communities to help them as they make strides to becoming positive environments for women.



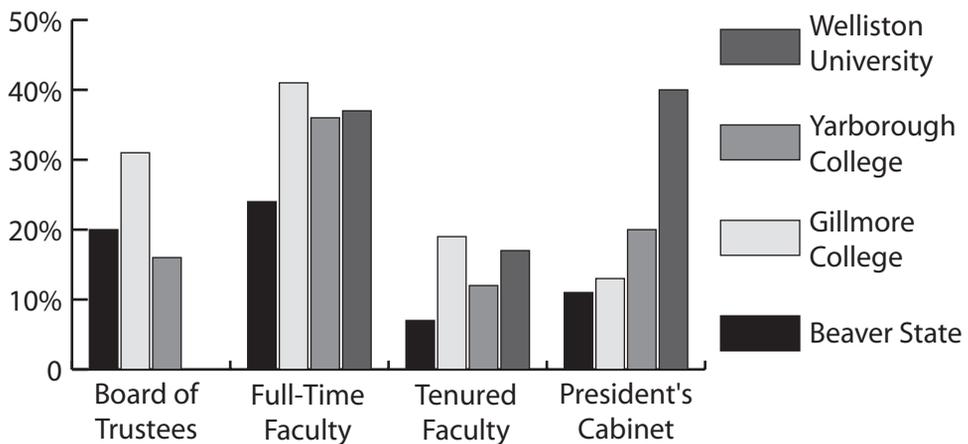
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The Investigation

389 students at five different Christian colleges throughout the country were surveyed. All of the schools included in the survey are member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), and have had their names changed in order to provide anonymity. Each has an undergraduate enrollment between 1,000 and 2,700 and also has a first-year retention rate ranging between 79% and 85%.

During the fall of 1999, a survey was distributed to juniors and seniors in general education courses. The survey was designed to measure: 1) how egalitarian students were; 2) the degree to which students thought the values of their colleges affected their own value development; and 3) what students thought about the values of their colleges. Administrators at each of the colleges were also asked questions about the climate on their respective campuses.

% of Female Representation



All participating schools had varying levels of campus gender issues outreach. On one side of the spectrum this was accomplished by holding a session during Fall Orientation dedicated to gender related issues, where the faculty who teach these sections hold separate sessions for men and women and discuss issues that are related to gender identity and role responsibilities from a Christian perspective and Women's Ministry Retreats. Other participating schools brought in special speakers and programming to engage the campus community in discussing issues relating to gender. And on the other side of the spectrum, the three schools that had special committees in place to look at the integration of women's issues into the curriculum, pay equity and Title IX compliance were also the same schools that had a women's studies curriculum program in place. Two of these three schools had women's studies academic programs newer than five years old, and one school was into its 18th year of a Women's Studies minor and also was the only school to have a female president.



The Women's Studies Programs and the Climates on Their Campuses

Beaver State

One of the two schools without a women's studies curriculum: Beaver State has a high rate of females participating in some form of student leadership. In the past thirteen years students have elected a female as student body president five times (38%). In the past, the majority of their Orientation leaders, yearbook and newspaper editors, club officers, Trustee Scholars and drum majors were female. Because of this involvement of women in student leader positions, Beaver State faces another sort of problem, according to the Vice President of Student Development: *"The truth of the matter is that we have been trying to be very intentional in developing male leadership on campus, because we saw a lack of initiative demonstrated."* She believes that the lack of women in senior management positions is more reflective of the fact that higher numbers of women have only recently joined the Beaver State faculty and staff ranks. She added in closing that historically, *"Beaver State was one of the early colleges in this country to admit women to full-time academic status in their undergraduate programs."*

Fenster Hills College

Fenster Hills College is the second of the five participating institutions without a women's studies curriculum. This is also the only institution that did not participate by providing administrator responses about the climate at Fenster Hills College.

Gillmore College

In 1982 a Women's studies minor was created, the curriculum seeks to increase student awareness about gender and women's issues. The minor requires 18 credits from a variety of disciplines ranging from religion, literature, and peace studies to history, sociology and social work.

I interviewed the Director of the Women Studies Program at Gillmore College and member of the Women's Studies Advisory Board, and asked her about the ways in which Gillmore College sends empowering messages about and to women.

I think we have quite a few women faculty who are active, articulate, and creative members of our faculty. We have women representatives in every discipline and in the administration, although many of these women are not necessarily tenured or serve in lower administrative ranks. Promotion is still a persistent issue here, even though our salaries are handled quite equitably. Having a woman as president is an empowering message in many ways, I believe.

She describes the gender issues climate on the Gillmore College campus as active with a commitment to on-going awareness and discussions.

That said, I do think that gender issues are seen as important, complex, and worthy of consideration on all levels, from the classroom to the student paper to the





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administration. That is unique. I credit strong role models in the earlier generation of female faculty who were willing to work for a Women's Studies minor and speak out about women's issues on campus. The results of these discussions do not always fit with the feminist agenda, but the presence of these discussions on campus is important.

Yarborough College

Yarborough College established a Women's Studies program in the 1995/96 academic year. The first Women's Studies course was taught in the 1996/97 academic year. The program was established by adding one new course-Introduction to Women's Studies. New courses qualify for the program if it reflects a significant integration of gender issues within the course (approximately 1/3 of the work devoted to the issue).

When asked if there were other ways that Yarborough College sends empowering messages about and to women, the Associate VP for Academic Affairs, Curriculum and Assessment responded,

The culture among the students...is one that women are not as capable as men. It has been a number of years since a woman was student body president; when women do run they are often viewed as less capable. There is discussion of the "ring by spring" phenomenon with some persistence and educationally competent women often comment they can be made to feel uncomfortable with goals of graduate school. Women in the women's studies course often indicate they receive some degree of questioning/ridicule when they enroll and there is consensus that 'feminism' is a bad word.

I also asked her to describe the gender issues climate on the Yarborough College campus.

Because there is a majority of women on campus, there isn't any sense that this is a bad place for women- a place where women would feel uncomfortable. But there is a critical mass of women,... who see little need to be "empowered." Many seem to see marriage and children as their career/life course more than career or employment...On the other hand, there is a strong and growing group of women who are very focused on academic achievement, graduate school, and making significant contributions to the community. Of particular interest among this group are identifying role models and desiring to "figure out" the balancing act of marriage, family and work.

Welliston University

Welliston University instituted a Women's Studies minor in the 1997-1998 academic year. The minor consists of an introduction course, interdisciplinary elective courses, and a capstone course. The courses have been well enrolled averaging 20-25 students. The Women's Studies faculty has started to work on an outreach program that would integrate gender and women's issues into the culture climate of the rest of the campus population.

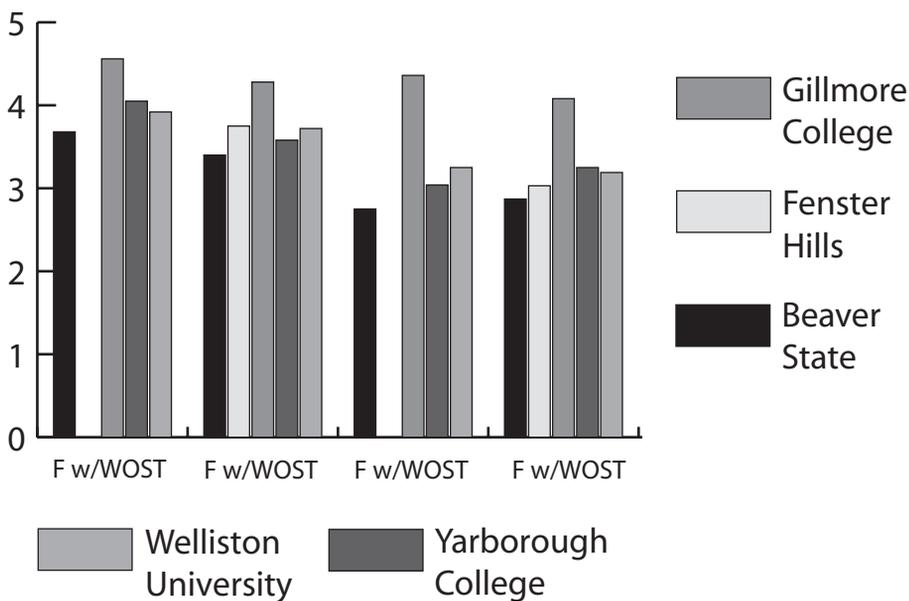
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I interviewed the Provost and asked her how the campus sends empowering messages to and about women.

There are visible female leaders in the administration and among the student body officers. Not only do we have female faculty in many of our 17 other departments; there are female faculty in biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, mathematics and sports medicine—all of these are areas often dominated by male faculty. We also monitor the male/female ratio in public events.

Egalitarian Score by Sex and Women's Studies Education



*WOST= Women's Studies

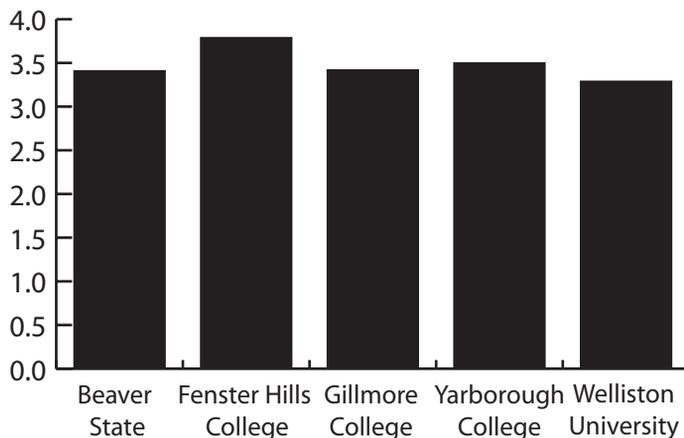
** It is important to note here that although Beaver State does not offer any women's studies curriculum, both male and female students alike, who filled out the student gender values questionnaire, had thought that they had taken a women's and/or gender studies class. This leads one to conclude that 1) these students took such a class at another institution or that 2) these students were confused by what exactly a "women's studies" class was. I suspect that the latter of these two options is more correct than the former. For example, when I was doing preliminary research about the presence of a women's studies curriculum at a number of CCCU schools, "women's studies" was understood by certain administrative contacts as anything from a Bible study group for female students, to the actual curricula program. This lack of understanding also says something about the climate of these particular campuses.



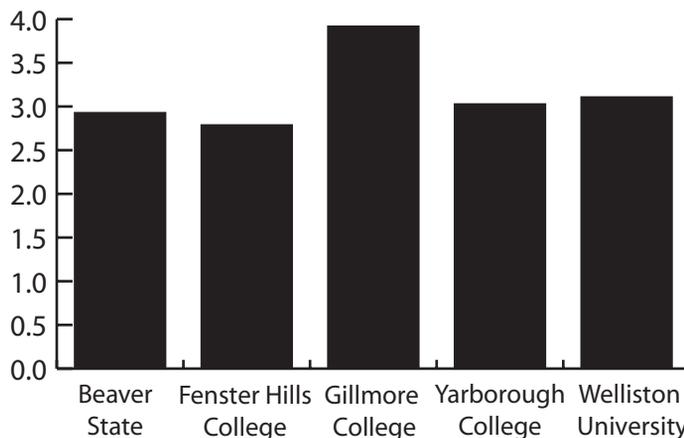


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The Values of my College Influence Me as I discover my Own Values



Student Perception of College Priority on Gender/Women's Issues



Interesting Connections

Levine's idea that adding something (in this case a Women's Studies minor) to a college curriculum adds cultural legitimacy to the subject is reflected in the different egalitarian value scores of the different colleges in this study. The Gillmore College students had the highest egalitarian value score compared to the other institutions' students.





Even Gillmore College students who hadn't taken a Women's Studies course ranked higher than the average student at the other four colleges (egalitarian value score of Gillmore students who hadn't taken a Women's studies course: females – males - 4.08). In fact in all of the campuses, males who hadn't taken a Women's Studies course were the lowest ranking group on egalitarian values score compared to females who hadn't taken a Women's studies course and both males and females who had. (The exception here is the egalitarian scores at Beaver State, which I suspect is due to a misunderstanding). It is interesting to note that even the males in this lowest ranking group at Gillmore had a higher egalitarian value score than any of the other colleges in the study.

Perhaps 18 years of a Women's Studies curriculum had affected the culture of Gillmore College to cultivate students who identify more with egalitarian values, than students at other Christian colleges. The Director of Gillmore College's Women Studies Program believes that 18 years of Women's Studies curriculum has made: 1) strong gender and racial equality program integration; 2) a campus community commitment to an on going gender values dialogue; and 3) having a female president possible. Her thoughts coincide with what authors Susan Hardy Aiken et al. (1988) found about the essentialness of having a strong Women's Studies program in place before attempting curriculum integration. The presence of such a program they found, also emphasizes that curriculum integration is not a replacement for Women's Studies, but an extension.

It should be no surprise then, that Yarborough College's and Welliston University's (both of which have new Women's Studies programs) egalitarian values score rank was in-between that of Gillmore College and the other two colleges that do not have a Women's Studies curriculum. One would imagine that as the Women's Studies programs begin to develop further on these two campuses, that the cultures of these colleges would change to incorporate more of an emphasis on women's and gender issues. This trend is already evident at Welliston University where the faculty of the Women's Studies department have begun a curriculum and campus-cultural integration program.

Institutional Climate and Student Value Development

It is clear that Gillmore College students identify with more egalitarian values than the students at the other four colleges; when the perceived values of the colleges are examined, the reasons for this noticeable difference in student values becomes clear. Gillmore College scored the highest on the statement: "My college places a priority on gender/women's issues" (Question 16). Students gave Gillmore College a 3.92 score. Just like one would expect in light of the egalitarian score data, Yarborough College (3.03) and Welliston University (3.11) ranked below Gillmore College but higher than Beaver State (2.93) and Fenster Hills College (2.79) on this statement about perceived institutional support for gender and women's issues.

It is interesting to look at how students answered the statement: "The declared values of my college influence me as I discover my own values" (Question 1), in light of the data on what students think the gender/women's issue values of their colleges are. Fenster Hills College, despite scoring the lowest on perceived commitment to gender and women's issues, scored the highest on influence on developing student values. Fenster Hills College received a score of 3.79 from its students. Yarborough College (3.50),





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Gillmore College (3.42) and Beaver State (3.41) all had similar scores, while Welliston University (3.29) received the lowest score from its students on its perceived influence in helping students develop their own values.

All of these colleges' scores (despite their particular ranking in this category) show that a student's developing values are influenced by their college cultures, what ever they may be. Therefore, it is imperative for colleges to understand this responsibility to provide the best influence possible. In regards to increasing a college's support for gender and women's issue awareness, education and integration – and therefore increasing egalitarian values of all students, we have seen a strong example in Gillmore College.

Conclusion

When all of this information is considered, there are a number of factors that emerge that help colleges to foster egalitarian values in their students.

The perceived values of the Christian colleges in this study (as they pertain to an institutional commitment to gender and women's issues at least) do affect student value development. Students at colleges that place a priority on gender and women's issues identified more with egalitarian values, than did students at other schools.

There are a number of ways that a college can show its commitment to gender and women's issues and therefore egalitarian value development in students.

- **Implement a Women's Studies curriculum.** Studies have shown, that this is essential in developing a strong foundation that should be used for curriculum integration later.
- **Have an equitable number of women in high-ranking positions on campus.** For example, Gillmore College not only has a female president, but also the highest percentage of fulltime female professors, and females on the Board of Trustees.
- **Gender and Women's issues education efforts to the rest of the campus community.** We see an example of this with the Women's Studies faculty at Welliston University and their educational outreach program.
- **A Women's/gender studies curriculum requirement.** We saw that all students, male and female alike who had taken a women's studies course had significantly higher gender egalitarian values than students who had not yet taken a course in this subject.
- **An awareness and commitment to be intentional about the leadership roles women are encouraged to play on campus.** We saw that Welliston University was very intentional about sending the empowering messages about women in leadership in the way that they monitored their convocations, and religious ceremonies.

It is important to remember that institutional climate does not change over night. It took 18 years for Gillmore College to cultivate a culture that is as supportive to and encouraging to egalitarian value development in its students. The students at Gillmore College acknowledge that the values of their college influence their own value develop-





ment. Coupled with the fact they also believe that Gillmore College places a priority on gender and women's issues, it is no surprise that these same students identified with egalitarian values more so than any of the students at the other colleges in the study. One would imagine that Yarbrough College's and Welliston University's students will identify more with egalitarian values over time, as the Women's Studies departments on their campuses develop and continue to take steps to engage the campus in a conversation about these issues.

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