

Why women professors?



50TH
ANNIVERSARY OF
WOMEN
AT SCU
1961-2011

Marking 50 years of coeducation at Santa Clara—and recognizing that it's not just the composition of students that has changed profoundly. Teaching scholars are a big part of the equation.

BY NANCY C. UNGER



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In 1987 early in my career as a historian, I was approached in the hall by a young woman who asked hesitantly if I was pregnant. I was full term and roughly the size of a Buick, so I allowed that, yes, I was indeed. “I just wanted to tell you,” she said, “what it means to me to see a pregnant professor on this campus.” What *did* it mean to her? For a young woman whose professors were mostly male, I was walking, talking proof that it was possible to be both an intellectual and a mother, to have a career as a teaching scholar in addition to a family. In that moment I was reminded of how important and new that reality was. As a woman, my presence on campus was significant beyond my scholarship and classroom lectures.

The last half century at Santa Clara University has been filled with “aha!” moments like that one for students and faculty alike. For the sake of accuracy, I should note that the particular encounter I described happened at another university. But that’s also a reminder that Santa Clara’s move to coeducation did not occur in a social, religious, or political vacuum. The men and women in the university’s classrooms were experiencing many challenges to tradition and being

exposed to new, more inclusive ways of thinking.

Even before women were admitted as undergraduates, a woman joined the University faculty: **Margaret Chamberlin** began teaching public speaking at Santa Clara in 1955. The admission of women in 1961 sparked rising enrollments and the construction of new buildings. Harder to measure are the gains made in human understanding.

Truly equal

The curriculum was transformed by Vatican II as well as a variety of social movements demanding that women and people of color finally be recognized as truly equal. A new spirit of inquiry, openness, and a dedication to social justice began to take hold.

That said, it took time. By 1963, there were only three women teaching at Santa Clara: in biology, the honors program, and English. And in changing the face of the University, certainly there were unique learning opportunities. **Patricia Neal** in English recounted a male student who left class early one day and then stopped by her office to explain why: “I have a problem with a woman as an authority figure.” Neal told him, “Well, you *do* have a problem.” (He enrolled in more classes with her after that and turned to her for advice on other professors to take.) It took longer for some male students to accept women professionals on a par with men. One scholar found students who strolled by her office kept asking for directions; they thought she was the department secretary. Another shared the story of a male student she had taught who stopped by to ask if he might hire her to type up his term paper for another class.

In the newly coeducational classes, young men and women sharing ideas and learning together gained profound truths about themselves as well as

1. **Diane Dreher** joined the English faculty in 1974. She’s served as department chair and associate dean of arts and sciences.

2. **Janet Flammang** began teaching political science at SCU more than three decades ago; she’s now professor and chair.

3. **Mary Emery J.D. ’63** was in the first class of women to graduate SCU Law and became associate dean and director of the law school’s library.

4. **Nicole Sault**, a professor of anthropology, took SCU students for a study tour to Chiapas, Mexico, in 1995. She’s seated at left.

As teachers and scholars, mentors and friends, who are the women at Santa Clara who have shaped the way you see the world? Share your stories as part of this article at santaclaramagazine.com—and see videos, photos, and more commemorating 50 years of coeducation at SCU.

the course content. On the academic playing field, students no longer saw members of the opposite sex through the glass darkly, as some mysterious “other.” They found truth in the defense that President **Patrick Donohoe, S.J.**, offered for his decision to admit women: “A mixed university is a much more accurate mirror of life ... and better preparation for the society the student is entering.” (Fr. Donohoe also quipped that the University admitted women “to raise the GPA!”—which it did.)

At a time when 95 percent of the nation’s doctors and 97 percent of lawyers and members of Congress were men, male students and faculty at Santa Clara were forced to take women seriously as intellectuals. Perhaps as significant, women were forced to take themselves seriously.

More than a decade later, this was still a foreign concept for a lot of people, including myself. When I entered Gonzaga University in 1974 as an insecure freshman, I was stunned to find that professors were interested in my academic development and found me worthy of their time, attention, and encouragement. With these educated, accomplished people taking my scholarly potential seriously, I had no choice but to follow suit, shedding my self-doubt along the way.

All the boats

In a variety of ways, the introduction of women into Santa Clara’s student body, faculty, and staff touched countless lives. By the mid-1970s, there were only 16 women teaching full time and six teaching part time on the 206-member faculty. Today, 40 percent of the University’s faculty are women.

As women’s presence continued to expand, it transformed the curriculum of the University and the scholarship produced. The first Women’s Studies courses were offered in 1973, and the Women’s Studies Program, predecessor to today’s Women’s and Gender Studies (now a major), was created by President **William Rewak, S.J.**, in 1980 upon the recommendation of a task force of faculty and students. History professor **Mary Gordon** headed that task force, then served as the program’s first director.

Rather than operate in isolation, the Women’s and Gender Studies program at Santa Clara remains true to its roots and is strongly interdisciplinary, integrating some 90 courses taught by faculty from across the curriculum. Offerings range from the

philosophy course “Ethics and Gender” to the economics department’s “Gender Issues in the Developing World.”

Women at Santa Clara have been dedicated to enriching traditional disciplines as well as creating new ones. And women faculty have gained reputations as leaders in various fields. **Sally Wood** in electrical engineering was the first SCU scholar to receive a National Science Foundation Young Investigator Award. **Catherine Bell** of religious studies was an internationally renowned expert on ritual and Chinese religions. The first SCU recipient of the Graves Award, given by the American Council of Learned Societies to recognize outstanding teaching in the humanities, was **Diane Dreher**—now professor of English and research associate at SCU’s Spirituality and Health Institute.

Ruth Davis, associate dean of undergraduate engineering, is dedicated to increasing the diversity of the engineering workforce, particularly to empowering girls to enter Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs. With Professor **Kieran Sullivan** of the psychology department, she has produced valuable studies on increasing retention rates among women engineering students. Notably, the School of Engineering has the highest percentage of women faculty (tenured or tenure track) in the United States, a distinction it’s held for several years.

SCU women students as well as faculty have taken advantage of the University’s commitment to educating the whole person. The result for the University? When revered Professor of Ethics **Austin Fagothey, S.J.**, considered his long tenure at Santa Clara, two events marked especially significant improvements: the arrival of GIs after World War II and coeducation. In both cases, the quality of academic life was made strikingly better by their presence. In the words of University Historian **Gerald McKevitt, S.J.**, the rising tide of women lifted all boats. scu.edu



5. **Denise Carmody** taught religious studies at SCU before, in 2000, she became the first woman to serve as provost of the University.

6. **Marilyn Fernandez** has taught sociology at SCU since 1992 and served as director of the Center for Multicultural Learning.

7. **Helen Moritz** has taught classics since 1977 and chaired three departments.

8. **Karen Fox** is an internationally recognized expert on marketing; she came to SCU in 1990 and was the first woman tenured in the Leavey School of Business.

PHOTOS BY CHARLES BARRY, FROM SCU ARCHIVES, AND THE REDWOOD