



New Study Finds Women's Colleges Are Better Equipped to Help Their Students

The predominance of women in undergraduate education may lead people to mistakenly believe that there is no longer any need for women's colleges. However, a study by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research (IUCPR) suggests that students at women's colleges are better served in their educational pursuits than their peers at coeducational institutions. In addition, educational gains made by students at women's colleges counter claims that women lag behind their male counterparts in subjects like math, science and engineering.

Jillian Kinzie, associate director of the IUCPR and National Survey of Student Engagement Institute for Effective Educational Practice, and a group of IUCPR researchers conducted the study. The study relied on data from the NSSE, a survey of college students that assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development. The researchers found that students at women's colleges spend more time on productive activities and gain more from their college experience compared with women at coeducational institutions. For example:

- First-year students and seniors at women's colleges report challenging academic experiences and more integrative learning;
- First-year students at women's colleges perceive greater support for success;
- Women's colleges are more "transfer-friendly";

- Women's colleges support high student-faculty interaction leading to positive educational differences for women students;
- Classroom conditions at women's colleges encourage first-year students and seniors to collaborate more with peers, actively participate in class and integrate ideas;
- Women's colleges foster an environment that fuels women's understanding of self and others, a willingness to work with others and the development of skills associated with career success and leadership.

Presidents of several women's colleges have praised Kinzie and IUCPR's study, including Hollins University President Nancy Gray.

The study's findings are of particular interest to educational policy leaders who have the ability to shape the future of women's colleges. Administrators at women's colleges are frequently challenged to demonstrate their school's effectiveness and the advantages of attending a same-sex school. Kinzie's research will help administrators at women's colleges demonstrate that women who attend same-sex colleges have an advantage over their peers who attend coeducational institutions.

"There hasn't been much recent research comparing women's college experiences," Kinzie said. "This research looks at the quality of the whole experience, and it clearly demonstrates the quality of the learning environment at women's colleges. We need to re-educate every generation about why we have these institutional types."

The study also dispels the notion that students at all women's colleges are at a disadvantage because there are no men, Kinzie said. She added that those students looking to be supported and empowered as women in an intellectually challenging environment should look at women's colleges.