

## Case Study Challenge Entry Form

### Individual Entry Information:

Title of Case Study	The Evolving Role of Women in Higher Education
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### Article Information:

Article headline: "Women feed the jump in college enrollment"  
 Byline (reporter(s)' name(s): Greg Toppo and Anthony DeBarros  
 USA TODAY publication date: September 12, 2007  
 Section (News, Money, Sports or Life): Life  
 USA TODAY page number: 6D

Article headline: "First, dispel all the myths"  
 Byline (reporter(s)' name(s): n/a; editorial  
 USA TODAY publication date: October 12, 2007  
 Section (News, Money, Sports or Life): News  
 USA TODAY page number: 8A

Article headline: "College fed stats: Men on upswing; Gender numbers put men's group on the defensive"  
 Byline (reporter(s)' name(s): Erik Brady  
 USA TODAY publication date: July 13, 2007  
 Section (News, Money, Sports or Life): Sports  
 USA TODAY page number: 1C

Article headline: 'Pre-partying' can kick off a big night of boozing; Study finds collegians often imbibe before events  
 Byline (reporter(s)' name(s): Brittany Levine  
 USA TODAY publication date: December 19, 2007  
 Section (News, Money, Sports or Life): Life  
 USA TODAY page number: 8D

Article headline: "Does God want women to stay home?; Southern Baptist seminary offers B.A. concentrating on homemaking, stirring a pot of theological questions."  
 Byline (reporter(s)' name(s): Mary Zeiss Stange  
 USA TODAY publication date: September 24, 2007  
 Section (News, Money, Sports or Life): News  
 USA TODAY page number: 15A

**Summary Statement:**

The role of women in higher education has changed dramatically throughout American history, particularly since the co-education movement of the 1960s. With women now making up the majority of the nation's total undergraduate enrollment (as demonstrated by Toppo and DeBarros) and becoming increasingly more visible at the administrative level, including holding the presidencies at half of the Ivy League institutions, both sexes are beginning to question the role reversal and wonder about its implications for the future.

While women argue that their increased visibility and success in all aspects of higher education is long overdue, some men fear that they are being marginalized. Men are needing to adjust to the loss of near-total control at the administrative, faculty, staff, and student levels and increasingly find themselves seated next to women in classes as formerly male-dominated as engineering and the sciences. Even in the realm of collegiate sports, some men – such as those cited by Brady – argue that they are being disenfranchised as women become more successful.

The increased pressure on young women to succeed in higher education, combined with the stress of deep-rooted stigmas working against them, have surely not helped women resist all of the personal problems facing the latest generation of female undergraduates. Although most women's colleges have reputations for being dry campuses, young women in the new world of the co-educational norm find themselves drinking more frequently than their male counterparts and attending more parties where alcohol is a major focus, as demonstrated by Levine. The co-education culture has also brought higher rates of sexual assault and violence against women on college campuses.

Some have proposed that the solution to these challenges facing women is to revert to more patriarchal thinking in order to protect them. Stange cites the example of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which is now offering a Bachelor's program in homemaking in order to push women to assume a more "traditional" role in society. Although certainly a rare example, the mentality of the seminary is not unheard of: In order to help women, many feel the need to set them back.

When considering the role women now play in higher education, it is crucial to view how far they have come since previous generations. High school-aged girls are finding more success than boys in fields as traditionally "male" as biology, and as the October 12, 2007 editorial notes, women are now the majority of medical school students. Yet even with their greater successes, women are still vastly underrepresented in many academic fields – and especially at the faculty and administrative levels.

The goal of this case study is to encourage students to fully examine the role that women are now playing in higher education, not only by looking at what they are accomplishing but also by asking questions about why they have not found as much success in other areas. Students should ask themselves what, if anything, continues to hold women back, and how to resolve the power struggle most effectively.

### Discussion Questions:

- How has the role of women in higher education historically been seen by men? Are concerns about a rising female majority amongst undergraduates valid when considered in the context of long-standing underrepresentation?
- How affected are women in higher education by societal and cultural pressures? Is it reasonable to draw a connection between the personal problems of college women, such as high drinking and eating disorder rates, and their role (or how they are viewed) in academia?
- What are the differences in roles for women, both students and staff, in co-educational environments and those at single-sex institutions? At the same time, what similarities exist between the experiences at co-educational institutions and women's colleges?
- To what extent are the gender disparities in higher education affected or influenced by K-12 education?
- What is the role of women in higher education in other nations and cultures? Can those examples provide any guidance in resolving the issues American women face in academia?

### Future Implications:

As women continue to earn hard-fought successes in academia and adopt traditionally "male" roles, they will be subjected to increasing pressure from society to validate their achievements. The tension between women and men will not go away easily as men see positions they could previously expect to receive being awarded to women. Radical reformations almost invariably bring more conservative backlashes, meaning programs like Bachelor's degrees in homemaking, which are implicitly if not explicitly meant to relegate female roles in society, could become more common as patriarchal thinking tries to reclaim its standing in academia.

Since today's women have begun to taste power long denied, however, it will not be easily given up due to pressure from men. Young women are now more confident in their intellectual abilities and will begin to seek out greater roles in higher education than those previously available to them. The combination of this new self-confidence and the continuing mass-retirement of male faculty members and college administrators will open up new opportunities for women to attain greater roles in academia. For those choosing to go into other fields, women will have more confidence to face negative gender stereotypes and will be more successful as a result.

**Additional Resources:**

- Solomon, Barbara Miller. In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Wenniger, Mary Dee and Mary Helen Conroy. Gender Equity or Bust!: On the Road to Campus Leadership with Women in Higher Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- Dobkin, Rachel and Shana Sippy. Education Ourselves: The College Woman's Handbook. New York: Workman Publishing Company, 1995.
- Klein, Susan S. Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity Through Education. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007.
- American Association of University Women. Gender Gaps: Where Schools Still Fail Our Children. Washington: Marlowe & Company, 1998.
- Williams, Kimberly M. Learning Limits: College Women, Drugs, and Relationships. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2000.