

The History of Women at Indiana State  
University 1870-1970:  
The White Female Perspective

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February 2013

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## **The History of Women at Indiana State University**

The history of Indiana State University is rich with the stories of women. From the beginning of The Indiana State Normal Teaching College women have been intrinsic to the success and progress of the institution and played an important role. Many of these roles reflect the progress of women's rights throughout the country. From suffrage to affirmative action, women have shaped ISU. It is impossible to curate every story and event in the history of women at ISU, but through extensive archival research their voices are now heard again. Here is their story.

Women had a substantive role in the inception of Indiana State Normal (ISN) Teachers College. Some of the earliest faculty in 1870 featured women, a number of whom held leadership roles such as Olivia Meiley, Chair of English Language and Literature program, and Ruth Morris, principal of the model teacher training school (Lynch, 1946). These early women were chosen for their reputations for keen minds and hardworking ethic and were dedicated to providing a strong teaching curriculum. Mary Bruce, professor of English and Grammar Composition was so innovative that she developed a way to teach grammar that became the program basis for many years (Lynch, 1946). Amanda Funnelle also made an impact at ISN, she worked closely with President Jones and laid the foundation for teacher training work (Lynch). Even the first class of students in 1870 consisted of 13 females and 8 males, showing strong female representation early (Lynch, 1946). Interestingly, the age for admittance was 16 for women, and 18 for men (Lynch). Seven of the original females graduated in 1872 along with two males. However, it should be noted that many of these female graduates' teaching careers were cut short by marriage, which also limited their continued education. As the institution progressed into the 1890s, women received promotions such as Lizzie Byers to head of the Mathematics Department (Lynch, and Sarah Tierney, Assistant in Psychology was granted a higher salary, both examples of merit-based recognition (Lynch).

### **A New Century: Women in the 1900s**

In the early 1900s, the women at the college found a champion in Mary J. Anderson. Anderson had studied at the University of Michigan where she became well acquainted with the work that was being done by their Dean of Women. After graduating and becoming Professor in

the Department of Grammar and Composition, she became interested in the problems of the women students. “In my work as a member of the Faculty my deepest concern was the betterment of the conditions for the women students” (Lynch). Anderson gave much time and thought to the welfare of women students, even supervising a rooming and boarding house for women students to have safe and comfortable living in 1904 (Lynch). She paved the way for proving that the service of a Dean of Women was needed. As a result, in 1905 the position of Dean of Women was created, a position first held by Martina Erickson, wife of the president at the time, President William Parsons. Mrs. Erickson then took over the work of Miss Anderson promoting the welfare of women at ISN. However, it was not until the 1920s that a women residence hall, Reeves Hall, was built.

### **The Faculty Women’s Club**

The Faculty Women’s Club (FWC) was an organization that made huge strides in women’s rights on campus. The Women’s Club gave women the opportunity to get together in a counter-space and talk about women’s issues and to promote their own voice. The club was established in 1930 and consisted entirely of faculty women. Dr. Rose Cox, Dean Charlotte Burford, Dr. Hazel Pfennig, and several others are credited with starting the club (Lynch). The earliest intentions of the Faculty Women’s Club was to maintain a club house, but very quickly the main purpose of the club changed and they began to help promote the welfare of women on campus. One of its earliest functions was having a get-to-know you party for freshman women at the start of the semester and a goodbye breakfast for senior women before they went their separate ways, which drew together the female community. The FWC soon began to participate in civic activities such as: advocating for university childcare (Childcare needs survey, 1970); coordination of gift-giving for personal events (Suggested Policies, n.d.); workshops for women on how to receive promotions; and vocal opponent of issues involving racial, social, and gender prejudices. The FWC met in the lounge of Reeve Hall, the women residence hall, and many of the events and functions such as retirement tea parties were held there (Landini, 1985). By the 1990s, the groups had expanded to 13 committees including liaison to the Women’s Resource Center, Book Groups, Status of Women, and Graduate Student Support (Faculty Women’s Club Membership Form, 1991). In 1992, the group changed its name to the Association for Academic and Professional Women (AAPW) in an effort to be more inclusive to staff (Hales, 1992). The

club also successfully lobbied the Governor for more female representation on the State College Board (Barrick, 1961). Sadly, the club was disbanded in 2001 due to low membership activity.

### **Women in the 1970s: Great Leaps for Women's Rights**

The 1970s brought many different women events in particular. A continuing education program was started for women who had foregone their education for families or careers, offering flexible schedules and remedial courses if needed (Continuing Education for Women Brochure, n.d.). The University also sponsored a number of events promoting women's issues such as speakers and discussion events (Faculty Women's Club, n. d). An Annual Women's Day was celebrated on campus as well. Another event was the Women's Art Symposium which was an annual event sponsored and planned by the Art Department (Women's Art Symposium, 1977), which highlighted women's art in a respectful and honorary manner.

### **Affirmative Action**

One of the largest changes for women at Indiana State and the rest of the country was the evolving issue surrounding affirmative action in the 1970s. The Affirmative Action Policy mandated that a committee be formed to hear cases involving alleged discrimination and further the equal employment opportunity in treatment and hiring practices regardless of gender, race, religion, and national origin, and ISU complied quickly and willingly. The committee was formed and enacted an Affirmative Action Plan in 1973 which included the required section on goals and timetables for the employment of women and minorities (Affirmative Action Report, 1975). In 1973, five women exercised their affirmative action rights and brought cases to EEOC for a hearing (Appeals to EEOC, 1973), an option they did not have previously.

In late 1974, a committee composed of members from the Affirmative Action Committee and the faculty conducted a study of salaries of women and minorities. Twenty-seven women received salary increases as a result of the study (Affirmative Action Report, 1975). The committee also successfully advocated for the open and fair posting of positions so women could have a fair chance to apply for open positions (Affirmative Action Report, 1974). Some of the functions the committee was involved in were: developed of guidelines for hiring for department chairs; established policies; created an auditing and reporting system; evaluated the effectiveness of affirmative action; and served as liaison to the federal government and women's groups (Affirmative Action Committee, 1977). Title IX regulations, implementing the Education Amendments of 1972, became effective on July 21, 1975. As a result of this legislature, the

Affirmative Action Committee recommended the remodeling of the women athletes' locker facilities, making them as adequate as the men's, a project that was completed in 1975 (Letter, 1974; Affirmative Action Report, 1975, ). As another result of the committee's work, important administrative and faculty positions were earned by women and minorities (Affirmative Action Report, 1975). The University also instituted sexual harassment guidelines, further protecting women (Guidelines for Sexual Harassment, 1980).

### **Conclusion**

From its inception, Indiana State University has had a strong female presence. From the earliest days when the school could not have functioned without dedicated, hardworking women faculty that were highly respected in their fields, to the tumultuous, but ultimately successful, fight for women's equal rights and pay in the 1970. Women have been crucial in the shaping of Indiana State University. Unfortunately, there are few records in the University Archives since the 1980s that directly discuss women's issues, but it is certainly not for a lack of advocacy on the part of the students or administration. Women are highly valued at Indiana State and there is an institutional commitment to continue to promote women's rights and equality through the Office of Diversity and the Office of Affirmative Action. Given this dedication to women students, faculty, and staff at Indiana State, they will continue to grow and thrive as a respected part of the campus community.

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