Chapter 2

Women Educating Women

Catholic Ways and Means

Pioneer Catholic colleges for women modeled themselves academically on the Seven Sisters, while also building on practices of earlier convent schools like the Notre Dame of Maryland Collegiate Institute. Despite their clear debts to other sectors of higher education, however, Catholic women’s colleges departed from Protestant and secular women’s colleges, colleges for men, and land-grant institutions in their models of governance and financing. Founded and staffed primarily by women, they faced unique challenges, including establishing both their independence from and a partnership with church authorities; gaining acceptance from mainstream accrediting bodies and other professional college administrators; obtaining suitable credentials for their sister-faculty; and, critical to the whole enterprise, funding land, buildings, and personnel. The School Sisters of Notre Dame and their young college had to meet these challenges in the service of developing a liberal arts curriculum for modern young women.

Governing Catholic Women’s Colleges

With the opening of the College of Notre Dame, Catholic nuns entered the world of US higher education for the first time. In mainstream higher-education circles, they were definitely outsiders. While cordial, leaders of mainstream women’s colleges did not accept them as professional colleagues.
Administrators and faculty in Catholic men’s colleges, meanwhile, saw them as interlopers in a formerly elite male preserve. For its first five years, the Catholic Educational Association, founded in 1899, barred women’s college representatives from its meetings. In 1904, it condescended to allow sisters to attend, but only as “interested auditors.” No women’s college appeared on its list of accredited institutions until 1918. In short, because the governing practices of Catholic women’s colleges were radical, in that most responsible posts were held by women, their prestige was low.

Governing boards of Catholic colleges were the corporations of the founding religious orders. Board members selected administrators, approved faculty appointments, made major financial decisions, and oversaw academic programs. Catholic women’s colleges frequently invited local bishops to chair their boards of trustees, but the boards themselves remained preponderantly female. Notre Dame’s board of trustees, administrators, and full-time faculty were almost entirely female, a feature that, with few exceptions, was to distinguish it and other Catholic women’s colleges for much of the twentieth century.

Male representation on boards of trustees of mainstream female colleges remained traditionally high, and men were predictably favored for top administrative posts. Leaders of elite female colleges held the title of either dean or president at the turn of the century. In attendance at Yale’s bicentennial celebration in October 1901 were five women “admitted to full standing as college presidents.” They were the deans of Barnard and Radcliffe Colleges and the presidents of Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, and Bryn Mawr Colleges. But these posts were often held by men. Scripps College, founded in California in 1926 by a woman for women, chose a man as its first president and offered a majority of its first faculty positions to men. Smith College did not welcome a woman president until the 1970s, Agnes Scott College until the 1980s. Before 1975, no woman had served as treasurer of a Seven Sister college.

Presidents, deans, and treasurers of Catholic women’s colleges were usually members of the founding orders, although there were exceptions; from 1904 until 1949, the presidents of the College of New Rochelle (New York) were clerics, and in 1910, New York archbishop John Farley became the first president of the College of Mount Saint Vincent, beginning a tradition of male presidency that lasted until 1956. Typically, however, while the dean was the “operating head” of the college, the superior of the campus convent was its legal president.

Deans of Catholic women’s colleges enjoyed considerably less decision-making authority than their mainstream male and female counterparts.
Even without official titles, bishops routinely intervened in the affairs of women’s colleges located within their dioceses. While Boston’s Cardinal William O’Connell did not sit on the board of trustees of Emmanuel College (est. 1919), he was the *ex officio* president of Regis College (est. 1927). However, he controlled internal decisions at every level in both institutions and ordered sister-administrators to seek his personal authorization “before decisions were made.” ⁶ In contrast, members of the hierarchy rarely served as presidents (even titular) of Catholic men’s colleges and were less successful in controlling institutional governance.

Catholic women’s college deans faced yet another layer of control, in that their religious superiors constituted the college’s board of trustees and the superiors of the campus convents where they resided were also the official presidents of the colleges. As its first dean, Sister Meletia Foley governed the College of Notre Dame from 1895 until 1917. Mother Theophila Bauer, by virtue of her office as superior of the campus convent, was the college president from 1895 until 1904. Her successors, who also held both positions concurrently, were Sisters Florentine Riley (1904–19), Philemon Doyle (1919–29), and Ethelbert Roache (1929–35). ⁷ After 1935, the order separated the positions of college president and superior of the local convent.

Fifty-four-year-old Florentine Riley, Meletia Foley’s good friend and contemporary, became president of the college in 1904. While Dean Foley concentrated on academic matters, faculty and curriculum development, and student campus life, Riley, a woman of proven administrative ability, administered the college’s finances and oversaw the development and maintenance of the physical plant and other nonacademic services. An alumna from the 1910s recalled a formidable team: “Sister Meletia never seemed to intrude on her [Riley’s] province and all went well.” ⁸ But lay faculty and students in this era found the college’s administrative organization baffling. In academic affairs, Foley’s successor as dean, Sister Mary I. Dillon, “was the college. . . . She was it,” a lay faculty member confidently declared. At the same time, she sensed that Philemon Doyle, the convent superior and college president, “was in charge.” ⁹ Students believed that Dean Dillon and the registrar “really ran the college together,” but “then we had a hidden Treasurer who was over in another building, and we had a hidden President, who was over in another building.” ¹⁰

When Sister Ethelbert Roache assumed the dual office of local superior and college president in 1929, the duties of each office had become weighty and complex. As college president, it was Roache’s duty to reduce the outstanding debt incurred to construct the recently opened Le Clerc gymnasium and auditorium. As local superior she was also responsible for the spiritual
and material well-being of approximately 120 sisters in the campus convent. College personnel accounted for only a fraction of this number. Teachers and staff of the campus preparatory, grammar, and primary schools, as well as sisters engaged in domestic service, also resided in the convent. So did candidates preparing to join the order. These young apprentices accounted for about one-quarter of the religious community on campus in the late 1920s.\footnote{11}

This governance structure posed challenges for religious sisters on the college faculty. As the superior of the campus convent, Roache held great authority over their personal lives. At the same time, as president of the college, she directed their professional work as teachers and scholars. Conflicts were inevitable as long as a single individual was the local superior as well as the college president. Mother Philemon Doyle, Roache’s predecessor, fully appreciated Roache’s difficult position. In 1933, as eastern provincial superior, she abolished the policy and assigned Sister Frances Smith to serve as Roache’s “adjutant.”\footnote{12} Two years later, Smith became the first Notre Dame president who was not simultaneously the convent’s superior.\footnote{13}

Tension may also have arisen between the college’s early presidents and its sister-faculty due to their different training. Faculty at the best mainstream women’s colleges always held graduate degrees, but the same expectation did not hold for their early administrators. Neither Agnes Irwin, who became Radcliffe’s first dean in 1894, nor Caroline Hazard, Wellesley’s president from 1899 until 1910, held college degrees.\footnote{14} By the time of Notre Dame dean Meletia Foley’s death in May 1917, presidents and deans of mainstream women’s colleges customarily held graduate degrees. However, no sister at Notre Dame yet held a PhD. Sisters Ignatia O’Connell (1917–22) and Melita Varner (1922–23) jointly fulfilled the dean’s responsibilities until 1923 when Sister Mary Immaculata Dillon, who had just earned her PhD at Fordham University, became permanent dean of the college, an office she held for eight years. In 1924, of the seven sisters on Notre Dame’s faculty roster, only Dillon held the PhD degree. Three sisters held MAs, and two held BAs. The college president, Mother Philemon Doyle, was not a college graduate.\footnote{15} At Catholic women’s colleges, administrators generally lagged far behind their secular colleagues in personal academic achievement. For example, Mother Grace Dammann, president of Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart (New York) between 1930 and 1945, was a Georgetown Visitation Academy graduate, but like Mother Philemon in Baltimore, she did not hold a college degree.\footnote{16}

Their Catholic religion, celibate communities, sequestered lifestyle, distinctive garb, and (in some cases) lack of formal higher education presented some difficulties for sister-administrators seeking acceptance as professionals
by secular college educators. Far more intractable were their struggles with bishops across the country who opposed the enrollment of nuns in graduate programs in secular universities, insisting that they attend only Catholic institutions. Delegates to the 1914 meeting of the Catholic Educational Association, nearly all male academics, resolved that secular colleges and universities were not “fitting places” for nuns. By the 1920s, a few liberal bishops allowed sisterhoods with motherhouses in their dioceses to send members to secular universities for graduate education. But these exceptions only proved the rule. By the 1950s, US sisterhoods were joining forces to defy episcopal restrictions imposed on them but not on male orders. These gendered confrontations, conducted through the Sister Formation Movement, were determined, widespread, and ultimately successful. Not only did they advance the professional quality of college faculties, but they also laid indispensible groundwork for the women’s rights movement within the Catholic Church that commenced in the 1960s.

**Women’s Orders and Collegiate Economics**

As Theophila Bauer and Meletia Foley considered opening a Catholic college for women in the 1890s, they followed news reports of the fate of two colleges in neighboring states in the wake of financial depressions and bank failures. Ingham University in Le Roy, New York, had evolved from a female seminary. Founded in 1835, the seminary became a collegiate institute in 1852 and gained a university charter in 1857. It never recovered from monetary losses incurred during the Panic of 1873, and closed in 1895. Evelyn College, in Princeton, New Jersey, opened in 1887 with no endowment. A severe decline in enrollment and donors during the Panic of 1893 forced its closure in 1897. Avoiding such a fate was a priority for the sisters, but putting a Catholic women’s college on firm financial footing was extremely challenging. Little material help was likely to come from church authorities. In order to establish a church-affiliated school, the religious order, male or female, needed to gain the approval of the local bishop. While he typically welcomed such a project, he rarely offered material support for it. Any available episcopal assistance in the form of real estate, buildings, or money was more likely to redound to men’s colleges.

Early women’s colleges frequently benefited from the philanthropic interest of affiliated churches and wealthy parishioners. Matthew Vassar, for example, liberally supported the college he founded. Rockefeller benefactions allowed Wellesley College, burdened with debt in 1900, not only to retire it but also to build a sizable endowment within a few years. Prospects
for similar lay assistance for early Catholic female colleges, however, were poor. Working-class parishioners had little interest in supporting colleges that their own children could not afford to attend, while their affluent coreligionists preferred to send daughters to elite mainstream women’s colleges rather than unproven church institutions.

Another possible source of financial aid was wealthy alumnae. In the social milieu of the late nineteenth century, female education was not a philanthropic priority among American women. A few women did, however, begin to give to the colleges that had educated them. An alumnae association for the College of Notre Dame and the campus preparatory school, organized in 1896 by the Collegiate Institute graduates Zerline Stauf ’82 and Mary Coale Dugan ’79, aimed “to establish and maintain among the students of the school a permanent interest in one another and in the prosperity of their Alma Mater.” It got off to a rocky start, however, since graduates of the preparatory school wanted to raise funds to benefit their school, not the tiny new college. Nonetheless, in a spirit of unity, to celebrate “a new era in the life of Notre Dame of Maryland, it having developed in the year 1899 [sic] from a Collegiate Institute into a College,” the association pledged to raise $5,000 to endow a permanent scholarship for one student’s tuition, room, and board for one year, “in the interest of the higher and Christian education of women.”

The college alumnae association attempted for many years to control the disposition of funds it raised by designating them for specific purposes rather than contributing them without restriction to a general endowment fund that would generate income for needs identified by administrators. For example, in the 1910s it established the Sister Maris Stella (Wehage) Memorial Book Fund to honor a popular mathematics professor. In 1924 it raised $10,000 to endow the Sister Mary Meletia Memorial Fund, a lecture series, with the explicit understanding that the college president would consult the association’s officers when selecting lecture topics. As a result, in the 1920s, Notre Dame was able to offer only four unendowed $150 tuition scholarships annually, and during the Depression it had to reduce these modest awards further. In 1935 it offered one full and several partial tuition scholarships, and a few small assistantships. At this point, the alumnae association agreed to concentrate its fundraising efforts on student scholarships. The larger alumnae chapters in Baltimore, Washington, and New York took up the cause. Although most of these scholarships were unendowed, they greatly improved the college’s ability to attract excellent applicants.

Where, then, were the necessary resources to come from? One place was tuition. The cost to attend secular women’s colleges varied by geographic
location and institutional prestige. While in 1907 tuition at eastern colleges like Radcliffe and Bryn Mawr was $200, it was only $75 at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College (Virginia) and Rockford College (Illinois). Mount Holyoke College charged lower tuition and fees than comparable eastern colleges because it continued to require every student to do up to fifty minutes of institutional housework daily, thus reducing operating costs considerably. By this time, comparable colleges like Wellesley had dropped assigned housework. Others, like Bryn Mawr, had never introduced it.

Without cash endowments, early Catholic women’s colleges relied heavily on tuition revenues. Since their students came from middle- and working-class families, tuitions were lower than those of most mainstream colleges. Catholic female colleges did not expect students to do any domestic work beyond caring for their own rooms. At the turn of the century, the College of Notre Dame relied on lay sisters to do much of the domestic and maintenance work. Annual fees for tuition, room, and board at Notre Dame in 1902 totaled $275; tuition alone held at $100 for many years. The College of Saint Angela (New York) charged its boarders $350 in 1904. And while elite men’s colleges tended to raise tuition only very slowly (Harvard College’s stayed at $150 from 1870 to 1914), charges rose significantly over time at mainstream and Catholic women’s colleges alike. In the 1930s Bryn Mawr students paid $775 annually for room and board, while Notre Dame students paid between $550 and $750. Differences depended on the quality of housing selected, with private rooms with baths in choice locations carrying substantial premiums.

Tuition alone, however, could never account for the entire cost of operating a college; those that tried this risky route, like Evelyn College, failed. Consistent financial support needed to come from somewhere, and if not wealthy lay or clerical donors, there was only one real place left to look. Catherine E. Beecher, founder of many Protestant girls’ academies and unfriendly toward the Catholic Church, nevertheless admitted ruefully, “It is a remarkable fact that, if we except Roman Catholic nunneries, I know not of even one case in this nation where a woman is supported as an educator by an endowment given by a woman.” Beecher had identified the essential financial element in the development of Catholic women’s colleges in the twentieth century: the religious order. Colleges like Notre Dame looked mainly to their founding orders for the contributed services of sisters as faculty members and staff, as well as for loans and funds to acquire real estate, erect buildings, and pay the salaries of lay faculty.

Sisters viewed these collective gifts as feminist expressions of religious philanthropy. “Endowments have not been received,” Mary Dillon admitted
in 1919, “but each member of the community has brought her offering of personal fortune be it great or small;—and thus Notre Dame stands a monument of women’s spirit of sacrifice.” As the number of young Americans joining religious orders grew steadily for much of the twentieth century, superiors were confident that there would be sufficient young sister-faculty prepared to succeed retiring generations. College presidents and deans were able to rely heavily on these “living endowments” until a severe decline in applicants to sisterhoods commenced nationally in the early 1960s.

The labor involved in running a college cheaply did not rest only on sister-faculty. In 1909, the School Sisters of Notre Dame purchased 275 acres of farmland and a “fine building” in Glen Arm, Maryland, about sixteen miles from Baltimore, to serve as a sanitorium for sisters as well as a truck farm, retreat, and vacation house. Villa Marie, popularly called Notch Cliff, played a critical role in supporting the college. From the 1870s, the Collegiate Institute and its successor college had relied heavily on campus gardens, poultry, and livestock for the food needs of students and sisters, with lay sisters providing much of the manual labor. “Have you a good vegetable and fruit harvest this year?” Caroline Friess inquired of Theophila Bauer in 1891. “What is the condition of the cattle? Is it profitable?” Notch Cliff promised a more abundant and reliable supply of fresh milk, meat, eggs, and vegetables for the expanding college, lower schools, and convent. “The sisters’ farm,” supervised by Sister Florentine Riley, significantly benefited the college financially in its early years. Until the late 1910s, the entire college, faculty as well as students, enjoyed an annual three-day excursion to Notch Cliff for picnics, games, shopping, and the singing of college songs.

Revenue for the College of Notre Dame also came from the order’s other projects. The Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame was a large international organization of culturally diverse provinces. In this feature, it differed from the numerous diocesan-based sisterhoods that drew members from their local areas. While many large orders staffed social agencies, hospitals, and orphanages as well as schools, the School Sisters of Notre Dame specialized in education, staffing diocesan-owned parochial schools as well as a number of tuition academies for girls that it founded and owned. Tuition revenues from these academies helped finance new educational projects, among them the College of Notre Dame. Later, the order’s preparatory schools around the country joined the alumnae association’s 1930s scholarship campaign. Sisters conducting schools in Brooklyn, New York, raised funds for a four-year tuition, room, and board scholarship to Notre Dame for the student from one of their schools who scored highest in a competitive examination. Chatawa, Mississippi, sisters staffing Saint Mary of the Pines
School raised funds for a four-year tuition scholarship to Notre Dame for one of their graduates. Other schools followed suit. Close to home, the preparatory school on campus funded the Notre Dame Tuition Scholarship for its highest-ranking graduate.

Neither a farm nor a few scholarships, however, could resolve the growing college’s largest expense: the consistent need for new, expanded, and renovated buildings. Like other Catholic women’s colleges, Notre Dame relied heavily on its founding order to finance major capital projects. Trustees, mostly sisters, financed major building construction by borrowing from local banks and by appealing to laity, especially alumnae of schools conducted by the order, to advance the cause. The policy of most orders was to refuse to consider funding a second capital project until they had fully repaid loans taken to finance earlier buildings.

College administrators viewed this strategy as much too conservative and slow. Their religious superiors, on the other hand, viewed “the American way” of constructing buildings while concurrently raising funds to pay for them as fiscally imprudent. At the College of Notre Dame, paying off the large debt incurred in the 1870s to acquire property and construct the Collegiate Institute building preoccupied leaders of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for decades. The Baltimore sisters turned to the worldwide order of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for help. At a general chapter in September 1885, the provincial superior, Mother Theophila Bauer, appealed to her fellow delegates for financial support for the Collegiate Institute, then struggling under the weight of construction debt. She “plead[ed] so eloquently in favor of Notre Dame College before the members of the General Chapter in Munich that all the houses of the order united in giving aid to pay off the great debt that hindered and embarrassed the development of the school.” On March 21, 1892 (the year of Caroline Friess’s death), the Baltimore sisters made the last payment of $5,000 to the Equitable Society. The property was now mortgage free, although the financial situation remained tenuous.

With the order’s financial support, in mid-1895 Bauer moved quickly to add a four-story wing to the school’s original building, effectively doubling the physical space available for academic use. Known as “the Annex,” Theresa Hall accommodated the sisters’ dining and community rooms and a chaplain’s apartment on the first floor, a 250-seat chapel and two guest suites on the second floor, and private living quarters for the nuns on the third and fourth floors. The quarters on the fifth floor of the school building that had formerly housed the sisters became student housing. The striking edifice led some disenchanted sisters to protest to the Munich
generalate that the new building’s scale and furnishings were too ornate for a college operated by nuns, a criticism reminiscent of that leveled against Sister Ildephonsa Wegman when the original Collegiate Institute building opened two decades earlier. Superior General Mother Mary Herman Joseph, on a visit in late 1897, summarily rebuffed complaints “that we lived in a very luxurious home, and had many superfluous surroundings.” By 1899, bills for the construction of Theresa Hall and operating the college totaled $500,000. “With the exception of a small amount,” the sisters wrote to the Catholic World, “this was all contributed exclusively by the members of the order.”

Once final payment on the loan to construct Theresa Hall was made in 1905, the order authorized college president and local superior Florentine Riley to proceed with plans for Notre Dame’s next building, the long-anticipated College Hall. To finance this project, the order borrowed $150,000 from the Savings Bank of Baltimore, secured by a two-year mortgage on its Charles Street property; $60,000 from the Eutaw Savings Bank, secured by a five-year mortgage on property in Glen Arm and a second mortgage on the Charles Street property; and $7,500 from several other sources.

In addition to buildings, finding funds for salaries and benefits, especially for lay faculty, would be a struggle throughout the college’s history. Early on, especially, this was in part because mainstream foundation support was out of the question. In 1905, the steel baron Andrew Carnegie established a $10 million pension fund to assist retired college professors, but “sectarian” colleges were ineligible to participate. The press brushed aside protests of discrimination from leaders of Catholic colleges and seminaries, which in 1905 numbered 274 nationally. “If Mr. Carnegie’s gift does not pension Catholic teachers,” commented the Independent in 1914, “then let them find some [Catholic financier like] Thomas F. Ryan who will make the desired benefaction. . . . Of all college teachers, the Catholics least need pensions, as the most of their teachers belong to religious orders and have no families and are provided for as long as they live. There is no reason to believe that it was from any hostility to religion that Mr. Carnegie limited his gift to the benefit of colleges not tied to a religious sect.”

As the college added more full-time lay faculty, the salary issue grew in importance. In 1950, accreditors criticized the salary scale of the College of Notre Dame as not “up to the average for many colleges of this type.” It was more in line with Maryland teachers’ colleges than with liberal arts colleges. Professor Elizabeth Morrissy had taught at Notre Dame for thirty years and was the college’s only full professor and its highest-paid faculty member. In 1950, her salary of $4,500 did not reach the $4,700 median salary for full
professors at Goucher College.49 The loyalty of lay faculty like Morrissy who remained at the college despite its low salary scale impressed accreditors.

By 1960, the salary scale had risen to $5,500–$6,000 for full professors; $5,000–$5,400 for associate professors; $4,500–$5,000 for assistant professors; and $4,000–$4,400 for instructors.50 Again, accreditors called on the college to make raising faculty salaries a top priority. A faculty committee of three laypersons and one religious sister examined salary and promotion data at comparable institutions, and in March 1961 presented a proposed new salary scale. The trustees raised the full-time faculty salary scale by 7 percent for 1961–62 and by an additional 20 percent effective in September 1962.51 Although these steps nudged the college’s salary scale closer to those of other private colleges, President Margaret Mary O’Connell acknowledged that progress was slow.52 In 1966–67, the top of Notre Dame’s full-professor salary range was 16 percent below the minimum salary for that rank at nearby Goucher College.53 At this time, the full-time faculty included sixteen full professors, thirteen associate professors, fourteen assistant professors, and twenty instructors. Part-time faculty numbered twenty-five lecturers and laboratory instructors. Dean Bridget Marie Engelmeyer attributed Notre Dame’s poor showing relative to other women’s colleges in AAUP salary reports in this decade to O’Connell’s focus on construction: “More money should go into the academic program and less into housekeeping if we want to have the college approach what it was relatively.”54

In 1971, the college board of trustees elected Sister Kathleen Feeley to the presidency.55 Raising faculty salaries was among the new leader’s top concerns, but the college’s deteriorating financial situation slowed progress in this area. When, in 1975, she allotted $20,000 from the college’s Leigh Pangborn Endowment Fund to aid faculty research projects, the faculty appreciated the modest step.56 Another comparative study of faculty salaries, undertaken by the Rank, Tenure, and Salary Committee of the Faculty Senate in 1976, reported that across faculty ranks, Notre Dame’s lay faculty still received “not only the lowest salaries in Maryland, but salaries which fall far below any kind of ‘norm’ for the state.”57 Acknowledging the institution’s limited financial resources as well as its diminishing corps of sister-faculty and their contributed services, the Faculty Senate proposed “an increase of at least 15% for the academic year 1977–1978,” rather than 25 percent, the minimum they deserved.58

A $5 million Second Spring Development Fund campaign commenced in 1978, with faculty salaries, facility improvements, and scholarships as its top priorities. Trustee Henry J. Knott immediately contributed a $2 million deferred gift for scholarship aid.59 The scholarship fund also benefited
significantly in 1981 when Knott established the Marion Burk Knott Scholarship Fund, since 45 percent of its income benefited students attending the College of Notre Dame, Loyola College, and Mount Saint Mary’s College, Emmitsburg. In 1981, the college awarded its first Knott Scholarships and the Second Spring Development Fund campaign reached its goal. The year was also made memorable by the establishment of the first endowed faculty chair, funded by Esther Eberstadt Baldwin ’15 and the National Endowment for the Humanities. While this represented a major step, it also marked nearly a century of creative efforts by college administrators to establish a top-quality academic program on a shoestring budget.

Developing a Faculty for Catholic Women’s Colleges

In the late nineteenth century, women’s colleges seeking to be on a par with the best male institutions had to build faculties of comparable quality. “For the success of the experiments that the college is to try, and for which, to a considerable extent, it exists, the best teachers must be had,” stressed Smith College English professor Mary Jordan. However, qualified women were still few in number and male professors were not much interested. “At present,” Jordan wrote, “teaching women is not so attractive to men as teaching men, other things being equal.” In order to lure them to “segregated women’s colleges” they had to receive higher salaries than those paid to female faculty members. In 1887, for example, Mount Holyoke Seminary trustees, preparing to open Mount Holyoke College, concluded that its faculty would have to be entirely female, since “an endowment of $200,000 would not be sufficient for the employment of male professors.” Ten years later, a professor of music was the sole male on the faculty.

A movement among women’s institutions to add men to their faculties and presidencies gained momentum, and by the 1920s, higher-education authorities generally agreed that women’s colleges with predominantly female faculties were probably academically deficient. When William Allan Neilson became president of Smith College in 1917, one-third of the faculty was male. By the end of his term in 1939, that proportion had risen to one-half. Prominent educators increasingly agreed that a women’s college that lacked a significant number of male faculty was “too much of a convent.”

Women’s colleges not only typically hired men at higher faculty ranks but also paid them more than equally qualified women. In the 1940s, Dean Virginia Gildersleeve of Barnard College reserved faculty openings at the higher ranks for men: “She knew that she would always have an ample pool of talented women to fill the lower ranks,” notes the historian Rosalind...
Rosenberg. Forty years later, approximately two-thirds of the full professors at Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges were men. The practice of preferring men over women for faculty openings at higher ranks, and offering men higher salaries at all ranks, discouraged many women from undertaking professional careers in higher education.

By midcentury, some Catholic women’s college administrators agreed that the very high proportion of women on their faculties placed the institutions at a competitive disadvantage. “The better the college for women, the healthier ballast of scholarly men it will invite to its faculty,” maintained Madeleva Wolff, CSC, president of Saint Mary’s College, Indiana. A majority of the faculty in Catholic women’s colleges, however, resided in the large convents that continued to be campus landmarks for almost a century. A religious community of celibate, professional female educators was ever before the eyes of students. The 1920 census reported that seventy-four sisters resided on the Notre Dame campus, a number that reached ninety-eight by 1931. At this time the campus convent housed faculty and administrators of the college, teachers and staff of the campus preparatory and elementary schools, and superiors, staff, and candidates of the religious order. Of fifty-four full-time faculty members at the College of Notre Dame in 1950, nearly two-thirds were nuns, a proportion slightly below the average for Catholic women’s colleges nationally. A 1955 survey of 2,074 faculty members at sixty-seven of these institutions revealed that, on average, nuns made up 74 percent of faculties, and women also dominated lay faculties. Notre Dame students took the skewed gender composition of the faculty for granted, although they agreed that men’s “approach to education is vastly different from a nun’s, or even a woman’s.” Financial considerations hindered reform, and in 1987 nuns and laywomen (who also commanded much lower salaries than men) still accounted for about 75 percent of Notre Dame’s full-time faculty.

The Early Faculty

Catholic women’s college leaders recognized from the start that hiring part-time lay faculty to supplement their small full-time faculty was only a stopgap solution to a critical problem. To be registered with the New York Regents in the late 1890s, colleges needed six or more full-time faculty members, enough courses in liberal arts and sciences to make up four years of college work, and a minimum admission requirement of a four-year high school course. Preparing a sister for the faculty, though, was difficult because earning a PhD meant temporarily removing her from the order’s workforce.
However, opportunities for women to earn advanced degrees at local universities were beginning to widen in the early 1900s. Johns Hopkins University admitted women to its graduate school in 1907, Catholic University followed in 1911, and Fordham University in 1916. The order’s Baltimore superiors moved immediately to assign sisters to enroll in graduate programs at these institutions in preparation for joining the College of Notre Dame’s faculty.

Hiring large complements of full-time lay faculty was always financially out of the question. Religious sisterhoods would educate sisters for college faculties and then contribute their services to the colleges. But until sufficient numbers of sisters held graduate degrees, colleges like Notre Dame had little choice but to employ relatively costly lay faculty. “Our classes are working up, so as to merit a degree,” remarked the College of Notre Dame annalist in 1897. “This necessitates more teachers. As Mother [Superior] has no one to offer us, we have decided on engaging outside help.” Most of Notre Dame’s first faculty were sisters who had taught in the recently closed Collegiate Institute. None as yet held bachelor’s degrees. This was typical of early Catholic women’s colleges. Among the sisters on Trinity College’s pioneer faculty, for example, only one held a degree, an MD that she had earned before joining the order.

The development of the early faculty at the College of Notre Dame benefited immensely from the exceptional intellectual and social leadership of its founder and first dean, Sister Meletia Foley. The longtime faculty member Rev. Edmund Shanahan remembered “the vigorous impress of her spirit, something of her dash and courage, not to forget her straightforwardness in preparing her charges for the life beyond the college,—all this was plainly discernible in the student body. . . . She was a human dynamo that gave the school its prestige and power.” She held firmly to her principles, yet possessed a democratic style that the faculty valued. Alumnae memories similarly portray a strong leader. As one put it, “When convinced she was right, she was absolutely fearless and seemed to love a daring sense of right in others.” Although students respected her, some found her intimidating. “Many feared Sister Meletia,” observed an early graduate. “Many learned through contact with her the fine art of self-defense.” She was “an exacting task master,” another recalled. “Gentleness was close to severity. She inspired the meek and leveled the proud.”

At Notre Dame, Foley moved immediately to engage faculty from Johns Hopkins and Catholic University to come to the college “regularly to instruct the Sisters who taught in the science and philosophy departments.” She appointed men with graduate degrees to serve as department chairs. These part-time professors supervised sister-teachers and advised them
on courses of study and other college matters. As chair of the Philosophy Department, Edmund Shanahan found himself in the awkward position of supervising the dean herself, who offered a course related to his field. Similarly, Dr. J. J. Jenkins, from the University of Maryland School of Medicine, not only chaired the Chemistry Department but also supervised Sister Florentine Riley, a chemistry instructor. In 1897, Helena T. Goessmann, who held a PhM in history, literature, and ethics from Ohio University, chaired the History Department. She was among Notre Dame’s first full-time lay faculty members.

Foley drew on Baltimore’s rich cultural and academic resources to build the early faculty, as she had at the Collegiate Institute. She forged alliances wherever she could, persuading professors from Johns Hopkins University, the University of Maryland, and Catholic University to offer courses in various fields. Some, who were beginning their academic careers, remained only a brief time. After a year as professor of French at Notre Dame in 1905, Edward J. Fortier left to become an instructor at Yale.84 These visiting faculty supplemented a small faculty of sisters at relatively low cost and helped build a vibrant campus community. Early college catalogs, publications, and advertisements emphasized the importance of these lay faculty. The 1899 college catalog, for example, stated that “the curriculum of the school is broadened by courses of lectures, given by specialists of national reputation.” Similarly, a 1904 press release described the school’s “able and progressive faculty—specialists in every department. Lecturers of national reputation.”85

Its use of part-time professors from secular universities separated Notre Dame from other early twentieth-century Catholic women’s colleges that relied heavily on local Catholic men’s colleges for part-time instructors. In 1906, for example, the Trinity College faculty comprised nineteen Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and seven Catholic University “professors,” nearly all of them clergy.86 For many years thereafter, Trinity relied on part-time faculty from Catholic University. “It was intended from the beginning,” notes Carr E. Worland, “that the professors of Catholic University would teach selected courses at Trinity, which was the reason for the proximity of the two schools.”87 Notre Dame’s part-time faculty, in contrast, included relatively few clergy. During its first half century, only eight Jesuits from nearby Loyola College were invited to teach at Notre Dame.88 A succession of five resident chaplains, whose terms of service ranged from one to fifteen years, served the campus community in the first half of the twentieth century. However, with the exception of Rev. Lucian Johnston, who taught courses in religion and church history intermittently between 1899 and 1935, these men did not
teach at the college.\footnote{Their duties included offering daily Mass for sisters and students in the college and the lower schools, presiding over religious ceremonies on the campus, and counseling students, faculty, and staff.}

More typical of part-time faculty in the late 1890s was Johns Hopkins professor George Burbank Shattuck, whose “course of lectures on geology” carried credits toward the degree.\footnote{Ties to Johns Hopkins grew stronger after 1901 when the university moved its campus from downtown Baltimore to within easy walking distance of the College of Notre Dame. Soon the adjunct faculty from Johns Hopkins included men like the archaeologist and classicist David Moore Robinson, a perennial favorite of Notre Dame students who taught Greek from 1921 until 1935. A 1931 alumna remembered his “course in Greek literature [in translation] which everybody got into . . . who could possibly do it.”\footnote{He delighted students by ignoring the college tradition of observing a moment of silence before beginning a class. “Dr. Robinson always invoked the Greek Muse when he began his classes,” recalled Sister Maura Eichner. “He would say, ’Ida, Mother Ida, harken ere I die,’ and move into some great Greek poem, which lifted us into Greek literature.”\footnote{The fact that students could substitute Robinson’s two-year elementary course in Greek for the college’s required one-year course in a natural science ensured a consistently full enrollment.}}

By assembling a staff of outside lecturers and instructors, Dean Foley developed a solid curriculum. It was “the best that the world has to offer in the line of education,” according to Edmund Shanahan, and its diversity contributed to building a dynamic campus spirit. “Whichever way you turned,” Shanahan recalled, “bounding life and enthusiasm met you, until everything and everybody seemed to be on the wing. Even the outside lecturers on art, literature, philosophy, and travel seemed to catch the genius of the place.”\footnote{Part-time instructors, whether offering “regular classes throughout the year” or giving “special courses from time to time,” were, as the college’s 1910–11 catalog put it, all “university men specializing in the topics which made their professional reputation as teachers and investigators.”\footnote{To attract the best part-time faculty, Foley readily accommodated their preferred teaching hours. As a result, the college’s academic schedule ranged over all hours of the day, an early flexibility that, while relatively short lived, was to return in the 1970s with the introduction of continuing education, adult education, and weekend college programs.}}

From the beginning, the college also had part-time and full-time sister-faculty. Early faculty in the arts were especially proficient and appreciated by students. Marie de Ford Keller, for example, had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts before becoming a Catholic and entering
the order. As Sister Maurelian, she taught art at the college from 1897 until 1906, when she resigned from the order. She later became a prominent artist, known for her fine oil portraits. Sister Casilda Benning, a gifted harpist, chaired the Music Department from 1895 until 1938. The music student Helen Burr-Brand ’99 described her as “the Sun around whom I revolved, whose shadow I was.” Burr-Brand, later a noted harpist and music educator in her own right, remembered Foley and Benning as fully “sympathetic with a professional career for women.”

The arts curriculum was important for the college’s middle- and upper-middle-class female students, and the expansion of the university extension movement in the 1890s provided Foley with the financial assistance she needed to bring noted artists and scholars to the tiny college. The American Society for the Extension of University Teaching (ASEUT) began in 1890 with the backing of University of Pennsylvania provost William Pepper. Modeled on older English extension programs, especially the Oxford Extension Society (OES), and endorsed by leading American universities, it functioned in an advisory capacity for member institutions in devising curricula and attracting lecturers.

Among Notre Dame’s early ASEUT lecturers was Dr. Frederick Henry Sykes, a Johns Hopkins University graduate, who
taught English literature between 1899 until 1902, when he became the first president of Connecticut College for Women. In 1907, a group of Boston public school teachers, eager to qualify as high school teachers, petitioned Harvard University for the opportunity to earn Harvard degrees through a university extension program. Women constituted two-thirds of the student body when the program commenced two years later. Demand for similar opportunities spread, and a national movement to unite public and private university extension programs was soon underway. In 1915, delegates from twenty-four colleges in nineteen states attended the inaugural meeting of the National University Extension Association at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

In 1909–10, ASEUT and OES funded a series of five public lectures in the humanities at the College of Notre Dame. The British folk song artist and writer A. Foxton Ferguson and Princeton University English professor John Duncan Spaeth, a strong supporter of Dean Foley, were among the speakers. Spaeth was soon a frequent campus visitor. “Dr. Spaeth is an old friend of Notre Dame,” commented the Baltimore Sun when the college honored him at commencement a decade later. The prominent Protestant English novelist and poet John Cowper Powys, who also participated in the 1909–10 series, first came to the United States in 1904 under the Oxford Extension Public Lecture Program, and remained until 1934. He was a frequent visitor at Notre Dame, preferring to concentrate his lecture trips on “small colleges and the remoter State colleges.” While “thrilled by lecturing to Nuns and Novices,” Powys took a dim view of convents: “I would think it my duty to exert all the influence I had to stop a daughter of mine from becoming a nun.” He clearly liked Notre Dame students, though, and they considered Powys a good “friend and teacher.” While his formal lectures on “the ‘m-u-u-r-r-k-y’ gloom of Coleridge and the ‘mellow harmony’ of Keats, and the ‘aetherial wistfulness’ of Shelley” were unforgettable, the students particularly recalled informal exchanges with him on his concept of “life-illusion,” one’s vision of oneself and one’s world.

Notre Dame’s part-time lay instructors, and faculty from the Catholic University of America and Loyola College, regularly participated in the annual lecture series. In 1910, for example, chemistry instructor Rev. John Griffin offered several “experimental lectures” on electricity, light and color, and acoustics, along with seven lectures on world geography and history. Administrators worked to include nationally known speakers in a variety of fields. The 1910 program listed the celebrated photographer and naturalist Frederick Munson, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, who spoke on Navajo and Hopi reservation life in Arizona. In 1904, Mrs. Charles W.
Billings (Mary B. White), an 1890 Collegiate Institute graduate, established the college’s first endowed lecture series in memory of her father, Robert B. White. Professor George Shattuck from Johns Hopkins University gave the inaugural Robert White Course of Lectures on geology and physical geography in 1905.

Throughout her administration, Foley refused to distinguish between full-time and part-time faculty. The college did not adopt the conventional practice of listing regular full-time and part-time faculty on the faculty roster, with “visiting lecturers” listed separately, until 1918. On Notre Dame’s first official faculty roster, in 1913, visiting lecturers were listed with regular full- and part-time faculty. In addition to John Cowper Powys and John Duncan Spaeth, they included German professor Hans Froelicher from Goucher College and Garrett Putnam Serviss, a national writer and lecturer on astronomy. The sole woman among that year’s visiting lecturers was Julia Martinez, PhD, an 1876 alumna of the Collegiate Institute and a faculty member at the Normal School of Havana, who gained fame as “the Jane Addams of Cuba” for her work as an educator and campaigner for female suffrage. Women presented concerts and dance performances at the college, but aside from Martinez, the ranks of visiting lecturers remained entirely male until 1920.

Developing a Lay Faculty, 1920s–50s

Notre Dame relied on part-time faculty until the 1930s, when national accreditation standards for institutions of higher education restricted their employment. The practice, while not ideal, had allowed the small college to diversify its course offerings. The system proved efficient and effective in the short term until sisters with graduate degrees were available to assume departmental leadership. By this time, too, the college was taking tentative steps toward hiring lay female faculty on a full-time basis. Although always far fewer in number than sisters, these women proved to be exceptionally influential in the development of the college. Among the earliest lay faculty was Elizabeth Morrissy (1887–1981), who arrived in 1920 while still a Johns Hopkins University graduate student in economics. A 1908 Beloit College graduate, Morrissy had taught in an Iowa public high school for twelve years before enrolling at Johns Hopkins. Dr. John French, a professor of English and director of the university’s appointments bureau, accompanied her to Notre Dame to meet President Philemon Doyle and Dean Mary Dillon. With his endorsement, they hired her immediately to teach in the History Department. She received campus housing, a teaching program that
accommodated her course schedule at Johns Hopkins, and the services of the college chauffeur to drive her to and from her university classes. “If Notre Dame hadn’t done all that, I couldn’t have finished,” she recalled. “I taught full-time when I got my master’s and my doctor’s [degrees].”

Morrissy, Anne Kean of the Physical Education Department, and German instructor Zerline Stauf, then in her fifties, constituted the first group of full-time lay faculty. Morrissy’s campus housing benefit was common; faculties of early female colleges typically resided on campus, and some institutions, like Wellesley College, required that they do so. In 1898, the Wellesley trustee Alice Freeman Palmer backed a faculty appeal for “the elimination of the requirement that faculty live in college,” and within a few years, most faculty had moved off campus. Some colleges retained the policy longer, but by the 1910s, faculty resistance was widespread. “In the ideal college for girls that I would found,” a Mount Holyoke professor commented in 1913, “every woman who taught should live in her own home, or at least in her private suite of apartments.” By the 1920s and 1930s, this policy had mostly faded as a requirement, but finances kept the small band of lay faculty at the College of Notre Dame living in campus apartments and rooms in College Hall. According to an alumna of the 1930s, “those civilian teachers” were “very close, very close. They supported each other, and they were marvelous, marvelous friends. . . . Miss Morrissy would have been older, but the other ones were probably only in their thirties.” When they could afford to do so in the 1940s, they moved off campus, settling in the Homewood area near Johns Hopkins University, where they formed their own small community. “Three of the teachers lived with me,” remembered Morrissy, “and the rest of the lay faculty were there [at her home] most of the time.” As “dean” of the lay faculty, Morrissy was a powerful advocate, always looking out for their welfare.

The college’s location near universities in Baltimore and Washington made it easy to attract a cadre of full-time lay faculty in the 1940s and 1950s. Most were young, unmarried women who were finishing work for their doctorates and were willing to accept the low salaries offered by Notre Dame. These women brought their own vitality and diversity to the faculty and the campus. Their time at the college tended to be relatively brief, since it continued only until sisters had earned graduate degrees in their fields and returned to join the faculty. But a few stayed permanently. The Jewish émigré Regina Soria (LittD, University of Rome) joined the Foreign Languages Department in 1942, and Lavinia Wenger, a Moravian, who was completing work for an EdD at Johns Hopkins, arrived the following year to teach education. Both remained at the college for their professional careers.
“A new spirit was abroad among the Catholic intellectuals. At Notre Dame, it manifested itself in various ways,” Soria observed. “The curriculum was completely revised, giving strength to English, modern languages, and art, besides, of course, the already strong science department.” The nuns’ liberal educational philosophy surprised Wenger. “They were cloistered sisters then, we had a cloister up here. I wonder[ed] how they could be so generous towards the demands of the world, but they really were.”

**Sister-Faculty: SSNDs as College Professors**

A problem that had nearly derailed the college’s accreditation by the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Middle States and Maryland (MSA) in the 1920s was the education of its faculty. While part-time instructors were highly qualified, few of Notre Dame’s regular full-time faculty held PhDs. In 1925, the MSA’s Commission on Institutions of Higher Education acknowledged the college’s improvement in this area, but called on it to do more: “Your Faculty are so generally increasing their scholarship by taking graduate courses at the Johns Hopkins University and elsewhere. . . . If in the future other members of your Faculty could earn the Doctor’s degree at institutions such as the Johns Hopkins University the confidence of the Commission would be still further strengthened.”

With lay faculty representing a significant ongoing expense, the only feasible way to add more faculty with doctorates from leading institutions was to send sisters to earn graduate degrees. While most young sisters prepared for careers in parochial schools in the order’s normal school, each year several were assigned to study full time for bachelor’s degrees in other fields. Seven nuns enrolled in the college in 1932, two in 1933, and three in 1934; upon graduation they proceeded to further study for advanced degrees. Meanwhile, the college employed lay faculty as stopgaps. Elizabeth Morrissy described the strategy: “You hired a lay teacher until you had a sister ready to fill your place. That was why a lay teacher had no tenure in those days, because all Catholic schools used sisters almost entirely.”

In the 1930s and 1940s, adding sisters to the faculty and administration was a straightforward procedure. President Frances Smith and the dean reviewed the current and projected needs of the college in various academic departments and administrative offices for the board of directors, who were members of the order. The board then determined which sister-faculty to assign to full-time graduate study and approved the lay faculty hired to replace them. In 1949, for example, Smith informed the board that the college needed faculty for the Biology, Mathematics, English, Education, and Music
Departments. She looked far ahead in making her recommendations, calling on the board to assign “two young Sisters, desirable for future college use, to study for A.B. and assist with corridor duty, second and third floors.” Once they had the bachelor’s degree in hand, they could enroll in graduate programs and, in time, return to join the Notre Dame faculty. She also proposed that the board give her an assistant, “a young Sister of worth and promise who could study and prepare for the Office [of president].”

Most young sisters typically earned their bachelor’s degrees on a part-time basis in colleges conducted by their orders, a relatively inexpensive arrangement. Preparing sisters for college faculties was more challenging. These sister-students often faced immense hurdles. For financial reasons, some superiors required that they teach full time in the college while they took graduate courses on a part-time basis at a local university. The arrangement had obvious drawbacks. Not only did it limit sisters’ access to the best graduate programs in specific fields, but it also greatly slowed their progress in earning advanced degrees. In 1921, for example, the Notre Dame faculty members Sisters Denise Dooley and Cordia Karl enrolled in PhD programs in chemistry and mathematics, respectively, at Johns Hopkins. “We had no time off from teaching,” observed Dooley, who did not receive her PhD until 1934. At other times religious superiors, despite the protests of college administrators, abruptly withdrew sisters from graduate programs. In 1932, for instance, the Notre Dame annalist reported that “quite unexpectedly to us,” the order had reassigned Sister Eugene Coleman, then studying for her PhD in English at Johns Hopkins and teaching part time at Notre Dame, to be “superior and principal of the high school at Prairie-du-Chien,” Wisconsin.

Another question was that of which institutions were acceptable for educating women religious. At the turn of the century, several communities needing college faculty enrolled a few sisters in secular universities. These orders invariably selected fully professed sisters, not young candidates or postulants, for these important assignments. Even so, this was an unusual step, since it required an accommodating bishop. The prevailing episcopal mindset was that as sisters acquired secular knowledge in secular universities, they lost much in the religious vein. In 1919, a well-known Catholic University professor argued that sisters’ religious spirit could not withstand “a prolonged sojourn in the chill naturalism and materialistic atmosphere of our secular universities.” A 1917 revision of the Code of Canon Law regulating female religious communities significantly tightened the traditional cloister regulations that restricted sisters’ mobility and public activities. These rules further hampered the freedom of sisters and slowed the development of qualified faculties for women’s colleges.
As professional standards for faculty rose steadily, religious superiors attempted to circumvent the cloister rules and episcopal edicts that hampered them, but not their male counterparts, in educating their members. Probably the most creative approach was that taken in the early twentieth century by a Michigan community, the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Between 1906 and 1932, superiors instructed some of the young women applying for admission to this order, who as yet had no canonical status, to enroll at the University of Michigan. Once these “postulants” held undergraduate and, occasionally, graduate degrees, they began their formal novitiate training in preparation for full membership in the order. But few communities were able to follow this model. Most, like the Religious of the Sacred Heart, a group that by 1930 was conducting eight colleges across the country, struggled mightily to honor episcopal directives on sisters’ education that varied markedly from diocese to diocese. At this time, according to an American Council on Education report, only two Catholic institutions were qualified to award doctoral degrees: Catholic University, in five fields, and the University of Notre Dame, in one field. In 1935–36, nuns accounted for 42 percent of the full-time enrollment in the Catholic University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

School Sisters of Notre Dame did enroll in graduate programs in secular as well as Catholic universities. The proximity to the college of several excellent secular universities proved beneficial; conservative clerics could hardly object to sisters studying for advanced degrees at Johns Hopkins or the University of Maryland, since they continued to reside in their order’s convents at or near the College of Notre Dame. They were in no more spiritual danger than sisters studying at Catholic University. In the summer of 1930, nine School Sisters of Notre Dame were pursuing PhDs: four at Johns Hopkins, two at Catholic University, and three at Fordham University. By 1936, following the same strategy, twelve were also attending the Chicago Art Institute and Western Reserve University. To deflect episcopal criticism, superiors continued to limit the public appearances of nuns, even for events that related directly to their professional lives. School Sisters of Notre Dame did not attend their own commencements, whether at secular or Catholic universities. In 1937, the College of Notre Dame faculty members Mary Louis Whalen (MA, chemistry) and Cordia Karl (MA, mathematics) received their degrees from Johns Hopkins in absentia. Similarly, Sister Theresine Staab received her master’s degree in music in absentia from Catholic University in 1940.

Restrictions on sisters’ professional activities were an increasing problem as they sought acceptance by the mainstream educational world. Higher-education
leaders in the 1930s increasingly criticized the faculty “inbreeding” that marked many US colleges. The difference between Catholic and secular colleges in this regard was substantial. A 1935 study of nearly seventeen thousand faculty members at two hundred public and private institutions found that, on average, 34 percent had received part or all of their training at the institution where they were teaching. The median was about 25 percent. Colleges sponsored by the Catholic Church, meanwhile, reported 49 percent, a higher figure than that of other religious denominations sponsoring at least five colleges. “If inbreeding exceeds 50 percent,” concluded the authors, “administrators should endeavor to reduce this figure.”

At Catholic women’s institutions, sister-faculty typically held bachelor’s degrees from the colleges where they taught and earned graduate degrees at a small number of Catholic universities. To avoid the perennial charge of inbreeding, colleges endeavored to assemble a lay faculty, full and part time, that held undergraduate and graduate degrees from a range of higher-education institutions. To ensure appropriate treatment of Catholic social principles, they generally favored faculty with degrees from Catholic universities for the religion, philosophy, and sociology departments. They also advised graduates seeking to earn graduate degrees in these fields to apply to Catholic universities. A few universities supported this effort. In 1921, for example, and continuing for two decades, Loyola College in Chicago offered two scholarships annually for its MSW degree program to Notre Dame alumnae. But by the 1950s, fewer bishops were impeding the enrollment of sisters in secular universities, and nuns sought graduate degrees from a wide range of institutions. By 1959, Notre Dame’s fifty-seven faculty members held advanced degrees from twenty universities.

While pressures from church officials were daunting, so too were traditional rules of life observed by female orders. The movement to relax cloister rules was a slow process. For example, the regulation that a School Sister of Notre Dame must be accompanied by another sister when she left convent grounds could present an insurmountable hurdle for a sister seeking to study at a secular university distant from one of the order’s convents. In 1938, for example, as Sister Dorothea Marengo prepared to begin her second year of study at the Art Institute of Chicago, her religious superiors transferred her to Catholic University, as “there was no companion in the West to attend the Art Institute with her.” Such “companion rules” persisted into the 1960s in many women’s communities. Not only were they difficult for individual sister-students, but they also seriously handicapped the efforts of college presidents and deans seeking to build qualified faculties with advanced degrees from universities offering the best programs in their fields.
Cloister regulations had always hampered sisters’ mobility in professional circles. And the expectation that nuns be retiring and self-effacing precluded any public recognition of their personal professional achievements. On college campuses, the professional and scholarly attainments of lay faculty were publicly announced and celebrated while, for many years, those of sister-faculty were not. American nuns rarely played active roles in mainstream forums in their professional fields in the 1920s. When Mary McGrath, IHM, professor of psychology at Saint Mary’s College (Monroe, Michigan), presented a paper on “research findings in the moral development of children” at the 1924 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the extraordinary occurrence received wide coverage in the Catholic press. As usual, one report observed, “she was the only religious on the program.” Until the 1940s, the cloister issue greatly hampered routine participation by nuns on equal terms with their mainstream faculty peers in national scholarly societies and higher-education associations.

Convent rules adversely affected individual sisters as well as the colleges, as the experience of Sister Cordia Karl attests. She was one of Hunter College’s highest-ranking graduates in 1916. In 1921, when the Nu chapter of Phi Beta Kappa was established at Hunter, the college elected Karl retroactively to membership. Since by this time she was a novice in the School Sisters of Notre Dame, she was instructed to decline the honor. Karl went on to earn her PhD in mathematics at Johns Hopkins University and join the faculty at Notre Dame. In April 1948, the Hunter College chapter of Phi Beta Kappa “re-affirmed” her 1921 election. This time, when Karl received her Phi Beta Kappa key at Hunter’s public induction ceremony, the New York Times reported on the exceptional honor.

Collaboration, Dynamism, and Change, 1940s–50s

By the 1940s, the College of Notre Dame was becoming a dynamic institution. For faculty and students at midcentury, Dean Bridget Marie Engelmeyer (1905–2001) embodied the institution’s highest intellectual values and expectations. A Baltimore native, she attended Saint Catherine’s Normal Institute and the College of Notre Dame (BA, 1926), and entered the SSNDs in 1937. After earning an MA in English from Catholic University in 1941, she joined the English faculty, serving also as college registrar. In 1947, she became dean of the college. As dean from 1947 until 1971, she held ultimate authority over the faculty and oversaw all areas of student life, extracurricular as well as academic. As Engelmeyer frequently reminded the college community, the dean at Notre Dame was “not the Academic Dean, she [was] the Dean of
Figure 5. Dean Bridget Marie Engelmeyer, SSND, 1940s. Photo from NDMA.
the College.” She visited classes regularly, recalled a young faculty member from the 1950s, who said, “She took that as a . . . responsibility to monitor teaching that way.” Similarly, at the end of every term, she interviewed each student personally to discuss her progress, a practice “that certainly helped the intellectual level.” Students and faculty agreed that under Engelmeyer’s leadership, “the intellectual life was stimulating. . . . We felt that Notre Dame cared about things of the intellect.”

The campus’s vibrancy during the 1940s and 1950s owed much to its history under earlier administrations. During the 1920s and 1930s, Dean Mary Dillon had continued to bring national and international scholars and religious leaders to the campus. Social theorists and religious and political reformers, rare among earlier lecturers, now became prominent. Maud Wood Park, president of the International League of Women Voters, spoke in 1925 on “the enrichment of life by the power to vote,” and Rev. John A. Ryan, theologian and social reformer, lectured the following year on “the Catholic Church and the social question.” At the same time, Notre Dame faculty began to seek ways to share the college’s scholarly and cultural resources with the wider community. In 1924 the college hosted the inaugural meetings of the Catholic Drama Guild of America. By the 1930s, sister-administrators regularly attended meetings of national educational associations, and by the 1940s, sister-faculty were actively participating in professional societies and cultural conferences and enjoying greater autonomy in their personal career decisions.

Baltimore’s Enoch Pratt Library’s 1944 public lecture series featured College of Notre Dame English professor Sister Angeline Hughes, who spoke on “Irish poetry.” Sister Dominic Ramacciotti, dean of the college since 1941, resigned in 1947 to join the graduate faculty at Catholic University. In December 1949, the Demotte Galleries in New York City, the site of Pablo Picasso’s first show in the United States in 1931, opened a monthlong exhibition of the paintings of Notre Dame art professor Sister Noreen Gormley.

The college’s art faculty and curriculum broadened in the 1930s and 1940s under the guidance of Gormley and the Baltimore portraitist and muralist R. McGill Mackall (1889–1982). The longtime head of the Fine Arts Department at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Mackall was judged to be among Baltimore’s “most renowned artists during the first half of the 20th century.” He and Charles R. Rogers, assistant director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, were powerful supporters of Gormley’s interest in developing a first-rate college art program. Gormley also hoped to find a way to enrich the quality of art instruction in local Catholic schools. Soon after the founding of the Catholic Art Association in 1937 by Esther Newport, SP, an
art professor at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College (Indiana), and the artist Graham Carey, Gormley established the Catholic College Art Association of the East, to “include all our Catholic schools in a general program for Art Education, with the Catholic philosophy behind it, the Christian Art as an ideal—and emphasis on the Liturgical Arts.”

Gormley’s interest and her partnership with local arts professionals kept the college at a high artistic level throughout her tenure. Regina Soria, who had just joined the faculty, recalled her surprise: “We had [an] exhibition of [the French modernist Georges] Rouault. We had [the Mexican modernist] Rufino Tamayo come every week from New York, and André Girard.” Girard, Rouault’s student, a Resistance member who escaped from France during World War II, had a prolific career in the United States as a painter and liturgical artist. He taught at intervals at Notre Dame between 1948 and 1952, and returned to campus in 1960 to give the eulogy at Gormley’s funeral.

The 1940s saw a steady stream of European intellectuals and artists like Girard who, exiled from Europe by World War II, settled in the eastern United States either temporarily or permanently. Among them was Rev. Marie-Alain Couturier, OP, a respected artist, writer, and authority on modern sacred art and religious architecture in the 1940s and 1950s and an associate of Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Fernand Leger, Georges Rouault, and Le Corbusier. Eager to introduce Notre Dame students to leading contemporary artists, Gormley invited Couturier to teach at the college. He responded enthusiastically, offering classes in Christian art on Saturdays in the fall of 1941. He continued to lecture, stage exhibits, and paint regularly at Notre Dame until his return to France in 1945. Until about 1950, he offered courses on his occasional visits to the college.

Couturier’s presence at the College of Notre Dame, although concentrated in the 1940s, had a dynamic and lasting influence. During his periods in residence, he worked closely with faculty, instructed students, and occasionally exhibited their works. Free to come at will and to arrange his own teaching and studio schedules, he invited noted artists and writers to the campus. Typical was the novelist Julien Green, who considered Couturier his spiritual adviser. French-born of American parentage, Green lived in Baltimore during the war years. In 1942, Couturier arranged for him to give a series of spring and summer lectures on the poet and essayist Charles Peguy. While attendance at these formal events was small (only “Father C,” the nuns, and some students appeared for the March 20 lecture), Green enjoyed his time on campus for the chance it afforded him to visit the campus convent, where he engaged the sister-faculty in debates on current
church topics, among them “the abandonment of the monastic habit and the de-romanizing of the Church in America.”

As important as such visitors were to campus intellectual life, it was the full-time faculty that were the students’ key role models. According to a student leader of the late 1940s, “I don’t think we were nearly aware of the powerful influence [the sisters] had on us as women who were capable, active, assumed tremendous responsibility. . . . [It] was probably sensed by us more than anything else.” Students also looked up to the female lay faculty. The same student described Elizabeth Morrissy, chair of the Economics Department, as “very active in community and civic affairs. She really did a lot to change the world she lived in, and. . . . I felt I would like to live like that.”

The curriculum these women and their male collaborators developed aimed to foster such ambitions and facilitate their achievement.

By the end of the 1940s, the College of Notre Dame had achieved substantial goals. It had established a dedicated and well-qualified faculty despite episcopal restrictions and financial challenges, raised funds for scholarships and several substantial buildings, and developed a rigorous curriculum. In doing all this, it had benefited from the talents and drive of several exceptional early administrators, as well as from the collective support of the School Sisters of Notre Dame both locally and worldwide. In the second half of the twentieth century, the college continued to benefit from the willingness of its faculty and administration to cope creatively with fewer resources than comparable colleges. As the College of Notre Dame developed throughout the twentieth century, it dealt with other critical challenges, arising from diverse constituencies within (and sometimes barred from) its community. Its struggles and successes in dealing with difference are the subject of the next chapter.