Pursuing Truth

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Pursuing Truth: How Gender Shaped Catholic Education at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland.


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Entrenched social and religious values shaped the movement of Catholic women’s colleges toward becoming more democratic and racially diverse institutions. Over the course of the twentieth century, the College of Notre Dame, like many of its peers, faced challenges that affected its social and academic progress. How did it respond in the critical areas of race and social class? At its foundation in 1895, Notre Dame admitted only white students and favored financially comfortable students who, with the occasional exception, resided on campus; many of these young women had previously attended SSND academies, in Baltimore and around the country. Diversity on both fronts came slowly, for many reasons ranging from faculty, student, and parent prejudice to lack of episcopal interest to financial concerns. But the great postwar transformation of US higher education, ultimately including both racial integration and the expansion of access to students from poorer families (often at the same time), changed the College of Notre Dame as well. During the same postwar period, sister-administrators and faculty were changing their relationship with their lay peers, a challenging shift for all parties involved as lay faculty sought more democratic forms of faculty governance and sister-faculty in turn began to reconsider their own financial and professional relationship to the college.
Class at the College of Notre Dame

The reluctance of Notre Dame administrators and faculty, most of them nuns, to address class tensions within the college community, as well as the institution’s restrictive racial policy, reflected, in part, two historic features of many religious congregations of women in the United States. Many maintained a two-tiered membership structure based on social class, a feature more common in groups governed by European motherhouses, and virtually all refused to admit African American women to membership. These attributes influenced the progress (or lack thereof) in achieving class and racial diversity in colleges they founded.

Class in Women’s Religious Orders

Customs and internal policies of founding religious communities deeply affected the social culture and democratic spirit of institutions they conducted. Many, like the School Sisters of Notre Dame, had European roots, and most of these had a two-tiered membership structure. "Choir" sisters typically entered with dowries and carried out the orders’ public ministries in schools, hospitals, and social institutions. "Lay" sisters entered without dowries and performed manual labor and diverse nonprofessional services in convents, schools, and other institutions conducted by the order. Lay and choir sisters usually differed in religious dress.

In the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, lay sisters were called “house sisters.” Their white veils contrasted with the black veils worn by choir sisters, called “school sisters.” House sisters enjoyed “neither active nor passive vote,” whereas school sisters could vote in elections for superiors and stand for election to community offices. As early as the 1870s, few young women wanted to join the order as house sisters. The decline in applicants was especially alarming in the democratic United States. “We are trying to get [German] girls from our orphanages to serve in that capacity,” Mother Theresa Gerhardinger informed a Baltimore priest. Of sixty-four American candidates in 1879, only three were willing to apply as lay sisters.

While the order did not require a dowry for admission, it determined the status of applicants as school or house sisters by their social and educational backgrounds. In 1889 the chronicler for the Baltimore province reported that “the [forty] postulants were required to take an examination. The result was to decide their status as teachers, or if not qualified as such, to become house sisters.” Since house sisters wore white veils to distinguish them from
black-veiled teaching sisters, local citizens, including some clergy, disparaged them as second-class nuns who were “neither in nor out of the convent.”

To avoid such remarks, Mother Gerhardinger allowed them to wear black veils when they appeared in public but insisted that “indoors, the sisters must wear their white veils.” In 1890, house sisters gained permission to wear the black veil “by way of exception,” but, beyond that concession, their subordinate status relative to the teaching sisters continued.

By the early twentieth century, many sisterhoods in the United States had eliminated such internal hierarchies. In 1917, a revision of the Code of Canon Law governing women religious required that all orders have a single membership class, regardless of the type of work done by individual sisters. But although the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame removed the term “house sister” from the 1924 edition of its constitutions, sisters continued to use it informally. The convent annalist in the mid-1930s, for example, recorded that “Mother Philemon brought us a new house sister.” And the SSNDs worldwide did not make the abolition of the two-class structure fully official until the congregation’s general chapter in 1950. Other international groups took even longer to move to single membership status. The Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for example, did not absorb its coadjutrix (lay) sisters until 1964.

The two-tiered membership structure that characterized the School Sisters of Notre Dame thus marked most orders of women that founded and conducted colleges. The tensions that accompanied it affected, in varying degrees, the progress of the institutions they founded. Notre Dame’s experience was not unique.

**Students and Social Class**

Collegiate Institute catalogs from 1873 included a description of an unusual category of student. In addition to regular students, the institution admitted “parlor boarders,” special students who took courses at will for personal enrichment and enjoyed superior living quarters. They favored languages and the arts and were not interested in completing the program of study required for a “degree.” By completing a sequence of courses in one field, they qualified for a “certificate of honor.” These special students typically enjoyed private rooms and their own dining room, and paid tuition, room, and board charges that were 66 percent higher than those charged regular students.

In 1876, tuition, room, and board charges for regular students were $250 per year, increasing to $275 by 1902, while parlor boarders paid $300 and $450, respectively. Their presence at the school was always controversial. Faculty objected that their admission lowered the school’s academic
reputation and that they were not a positive influence on younger, full-time students. They generated badly needed revenue, however, so they remained, despite faculty protest, until the World War I era.  

“Special students” at the Collegiate Institute, and later at the College of Notre Dame, also reflected the creative flux of a higher-education system that had not yet settled into its contemporary outlines. Nineteenth-century women’s colleges routinely admitted atypical students, usually older than traditional students, who did not seek degrees but otherwise qualified for admission. “Under exceptional circumstances,” the Woman’s College of Baltimore accepted students “who desire to study without reference to obtaining a degree.” In 1877–78, Wellesley introduced a “teacher specials” program, a popular service that allowed schoolteachers to register for courses in any field without obligation. When Radcliffe College received its charter in 1894, it enrolled 136 special students, “mature women who are at work in special lines.” Special students at Mount Holyoke College in this era included graduates of other colleges seeking “special lines” of study, schoolteachers who were at least twenty-one years of age and had taught school for a year or more, and music students who agreed to elect some courses in other fields. “When desired,” special students received certificates of work satisfactorily completed.  

The discussion of special students highlights another clear class distinction on campus: between those who boarded (at the typical or the parlor level) and those who instead commuted as “day students.” The Collegiate Institute remained a “select” boarding school in the late nineteenth century, although there were always a few day students. The college’s sequestered location reinforced this near requirement during the early decades. While by the 1890s downtown Baltimore had electrified streetcars, public transportation in the city’s outskirts was minimal. In 1922, according to a prospective student, “there was no transportation—it was a road, there wasn’t even any bus up there at that time.” Dean Meletia Foley had aimed to build a residential college, a Catholic equivalent of the Seven Sisters. For financial reasons, however, Notre Dame had always welcomed some applicants on a day basis. An 1896 circular described the new college and the preparatory school as “A Model School for City Students,” where day students could enjoy a “substantial dinner” for $1.50 per week. However, Rev. John Griffin recalled that in 1900 the campus was “all boarding school, with perhaps eight or ten day students in the entire school from the baby grade to senior year in college.”  

During her tenure as dean of the college (1895–1917), Foley devoted special attention to attracting boarding students. Daughters of financially
comfortable Baltimore families boarded at the college. She wanted these students to have a similar living style and social experience as those enjoyed by their peers in elite secular women’s colleges. College Hall, completed in 1910, reserved “a spacious suite of apartments” where students would receive proper training in the social graces. But enrollment continued to be chronically low relative to other Catholic women’s colleges, and Dean Mary Immaculata Dillon (1923–31) did not share her predecessor’s commitment to the elite residential college model. During the 1920s, public transportation was improving, and the number of applicants wishing to enroll on a nonresident basis rose. Dillon saw this group as a way to boost both enrollment and endowment, areas of special interest to higher-education accrediting agencies. For the first time, the college actively recruited day students. In 1920, resident students made up 88 percent of the college’s full-time enrollment; by 1929 they accounted for only half of its full-time enrollment of 156.

The economic distress of the Great Depression in the 1930s caused boarding enrollments to decline significantly at all women’s colleges. In 1934, for example, boarding students accounted for only 45 percent of Pembroke College’s enrollment. At the College of Notre Dame, likewise, fewer potential students could afford to board, and the college could offer little scholarship aid. Admitting more day students was the obvious solution to the enrollment crisis, and the college actively advertised for them, offering “special rates” for those in need of extra assistance. In 1937, day students made up two-thirds of Notre Dame’s enrollment. The Depression had quickly turned the boarders into a minority, a situation that continued to obtain after its end. Although the college’s total enrollment doubled during the 1940s, boarding students accounted for only one-third of the enrollment in 1948. Boarders became more numerous in the 1950s and 1960s, but day students continued to outnumber them. This imbalance distinguished most Catholic women’s colleges, especially those in urban locations where many students remained at home while attending classes.

Class Distinctions and Social Life

In the college’s early years, campus social activities included everyone. The entire college, including administrators and faculty, took weekend boat trips to Norfolk, Virginia, and Virginia Beach, “returning Monday morning in time for classes.” Administrators and faculty applauded the college’s unique “community spirit,” as evidenced in near-total student participation in religious, sports, and musical events. But as day students applied in growing
numbers, divisions appeared in some areas of campus life. Many colleges began to struggle with the question of sororities and exclusive social clubs, reflecting growing tensions between elitism and democracy, and the College of Notre Dame was no exception. Dean Foley had aimed to provide social opportunities comparable to those enjoyed by students at other women’s colleges. To this end, she encouraged students to establish an intramural sorority. By 1908, Kappa Rho Sigma was flourishing; a student editor, garbling a line from Alexander Pope, described the typical sorority meeting as a “flow of reason and feast of soul.” In fact, members spent most of their time socializing, dining, and playing card and popular parlor games like thought transference. The only extant KRS photograph, taken about 1916, shows twenty-two members. The fact that none is a native of Maryland indicates the sorority’s resident-only membership policy.

Women’s college administrators were increasingly concerned that sororities were dividing their student bodies. In 1912, the Women’s College in Brown University had disbanded these organizations, despite student protest that Greek societies in the men’s college continued unchallenged. Catholic women’s colleges typically opposed sororities, arguing that they elevated their members over other students. As Tracy Mitrano puts it, “The exclusive nature of social bonding in sororities contradicted the inclusive nature of the religious experience as it was defined in Catholic culture.” Beyond this, both secular and church-related institutions were concerned that as secret societies, both sororities and fraternities enjoyed undesirable independence from college authorities. Since the early twentieth century, Harvard College had banned fraternities and refused to recognize chapters of national Greek societies, explaining that “we want student groups . . . to operate under the authority of Harvard College and the dean’s office, rather than some other authority.”

Although KRS inducted twelve new members in early 1917, Foley’s death that year signaled the sorority’s demise. Faculty and administrators who had never shared her liking for the group argued that a recent move by KRS to affiliate with Kappa Pi Epsilon, a social sorority founded in 1895 at the University of Arkansas, threatened the college’s authority. In November 1917, they disbanded the sorority on the grounds that it was socially exclusive, and the college catalog stated that the institution did not permit “sororities with secret initiations.”

Following the discontinuance of the sorority, administrators encouraged Kymry, a campus social club founded in 1913, to become “the successor to the KRS Fraternity.” Kymry’s stated mission was “to form a more perfect union in thought and sentiment, to further the spirit of comradeship, and
to promote loyalty and good cheer among the students of NDC.” 29 However, using its “power to exclude,” Kymry admitted only resident students to membership. Thus it enjoyed all the attributes of a traditional sorority, with the exception of secretiveness. Administrators raised no objection to this discriminating clause. Now, as the only social club on campus, Kymry flourished. Given the college’s small size, the club’s total registration of 175 over the 1916–26 decade suggests a robust organization.

Even as the proportion of day students at Notre Dame rose sharply in the 1920s and 1930s, campus social activities continued to revolve around resident students. In the interwar era, day students were sensitive to social distinctions on campus, especially to being excluded from membership in Kymry. A 1928 graduate recalled that it was “supposedly the social club, but practically all the activities had to do with the girls on the campus.” 30 Day students tried to minimize their segregation. “They had a little Kymry Club or something with a club for boarders, and it didn’t bother us any,” recalled a 1940 graduate, perhaps a little unconvincingly. “We didn’t care.” 31 Kymry’s restricted membership policy persisted into the 1950s. According to the 1950 yearbook, it was “the social club of the resident students at Notre Dame [and] its goal is the promotion of loyalty and good cheer among boarders.” College catalogs in this decade also alluded to Kymry as the “resident student social organization.” 32

In academic matters and departmental clubs, students were treated equally. In campus social activities, however, they were not. The faculty “knew everybody in the school,” according to history professor Sr. Virgina Geiger, but they enjoyed less informal rapport with day students. 33 “The boarders, the resident students, had a better relationship with the sisters,” recalled a day student of the 1940s. “They were living there, and I think that made a difference.” 34 Since the Kymry Club sponsored elaborate holiday celebrations, social distinctions between day students and boarders could become painfully apparent at these times. An attendee at a formal Christmas party in the 1920s recalled that students wore evening dresses. “All the sisters came, and all the girls came. . . . There was a great . . . friendly relationship between the students and the sisters.” 35 In the 1940s, Dean Bridget Marie Engelmeyer noted in her diary that day students played a decidedly subordinate role in this annual event: “Christmas Dinner was for college boarders. Some day students served.” 36 A few years later, again without comment, she recorded that only “resident students & lay faculty” attended Kymry’s formal-dress Christmas supper. 37 A senior remembered that occasion as “a really elegant candlelight dinner, served by day-hops.” 38 Such distinctions persisted into the 1950s. In December 1951, the college annalist wrote that “Sister Superior
M. Vitalia entertained the college lay faculty and the resident students tonight with a Christmas dinner.” The Kymry Christmas party followed the dinner. Day students were not part of this “real family occasion.”

The Kymry Club’s insensitivity extended beyond its exclusionary membership policy. Occasional entertainments provided by the club for the entire college community revealed a considerable lack of social awareness. According to a description of a 1938 Valentine’s Day party in the campus newspaper, Columns, captioned “Boarders Frolic at Poverty Party,” club members decorated the hall as “a scene of utter desolation. . . . Each member came dressed in old clothes. . . . For the refreshments a bread line was formed.” Those wearing the most “impoverished” outfits won prizes. Faculty and administrators in the audience raised no objections to the show. It was “one of the most unusual novelty parties ever held at Notre Dame,” observed a faculty member. No doubt.

With the onset of World War II, interest in campus social clubs fell off as day and resident students became active in war efforts. In 1942, as Columns reported, Notre Dame became Maryland’s first college “to have a student defense unit and to receive the first Volunteer First Aid Detachment charter granted by the American Red Cross.” By the late 1940s, distinctions between day and boarding students had considerably abated. Student government, the athletic association, and departmental clubs offered broader opportunities for all students to participate on equal terms. But while long-standing divisions between day and boarding students had faded, they had not disappeared. Concerned administrators agreed that “dayhops and residents need to be more closely united.” Thus President Margaret Mary O’Connell welcomed a 1959 student proposal that the Resident Student Association merge with the all-college Student Association. The Kymry Club retained its exclusionary membership policy until this occurred in 1964. Despite the merger, day students in the 1960s continued to believe that resident students ranked above them in campus social life. “Dayhops have no real part in the life here” was a common observation. And two decades later, 44 percent of respondents to a student satisfaction survey still reported dissatisfaction with relations between day and resident students.

The development of college-wide clubs had compensated somewhat for the social divisiveness of the Kymry Club. Notre Dame’s oldest student club was the Athletic Association. It admitted preparatory school as well as college students until 1916, when a separate college athletics association, supervised by the Physical Education Department, commenced. Because membership was mandatory, it was the largest extracurricular organization on campus, embracing both resident and day students. It sponsored two annual events:
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Field Day, a program long popular in women’s colleges, and Sing Song, an entertainment program unique to Notre Dame. 46

In 1895, Vassar College became the first women’s institution to hold a Field Day, and the event was soon “wildly popular” at its sister colleges. Typically, the college’s Athletic Department sponsored campus-wide competitions that concluded in an “elaborate meal.” According to a 1904 press report, the athletic performance levels exhibited at Notre Dame’s early Field Days matched those of its better-known mainstream counterparts: “Yesterday was field day at Notre Dame of Maryland. Although a convent school, Notre Dame is fully abreast of other female institutions in matters pertaining to physical development and holds, it is said, the record among women’s colleges for ball throwing.” 47 By the 1910s, the day featured hotly contested competitions in every campus sport. “Various kinds of drills, races, long distance throws and folk dancing” marked the day in the 1920s. 48 In its early years, preparatory school students as well as college students competed, but by 1935, Field Day was strictly a college event. 49 The college had introduced the “all year sport” of horseback riding by the 1910s, and in the 1920s, several benevolent organizations held their equestrian exhibitions on the campus. By the late 1930s, Field Day included a “horse show,” and a decade later a riding competition. 50 In addition to horseback riding, Field Day competitions by this time included baseball, archery, golf, swimming, and gymnastics. The entire college community attended Field Day banquets, where Athletic Association leaders announced new officers and distributed the day’s prizes. The class scoring highest in the day’s events received a trophy. Following the all-college dinner, students entertained with singing, dancing, and comic skits. 51 Interest in Field Day fell off sharply in the 1960s, and by the 1970s the event had disappeared. 52

Singing clubs and musical competitions were ubiquitous on early twentieth-century college campuses. Notre Dame’s 1913 Commencement Week program featured “the singing on the steps,” an event popular at women’s colleges. 53 Unique to Notre Dame, however, was Sing Song, an annual interclass musical variety show and competition. It had evolved from Stunt Night, a far less ambitious entertainment dating from the college’s first years. Sing Song debuted on March 3–7, 1927, the first event held in the new LeClerc gymnasium. With the support of Anne Kean, chair of the Physical Education Department and Athletic Association adviser, it soon developed into an extravagant show that played to standing-room-only crowds. The four college classes competed in music, theme, and stage setting. Each class presented “a marching song, a school song, a song for their sister year, and a ‘hit’ song which was original and explained their costumes.” 54 Professionals
from the Peabody Conservatory of Music and the Federated Music Clubs of Baltimore, as well as the drama critic from the Baltimore Sun, who volunteered as early Sing Song judges, agreed that the programs were of high quality.\textsuperscript{55}

Administrators and faculty concerned about discord between resident and day students saw an all-college event like Sing Song as a way to unify the student body and revive community spirit. They called on all students, resident and day, to participate in the event in some capacity each year, either as a performer or member of the production crew. “Everybody had to be in Sing Song—it was compulsory,” a faculty member later recalled.\textsuperscript{56} The entire student body, as well as all faculty, administrators, and staff, attended the shows, as did parents of students, alumnae, and Baltimore citizens. But from its inception, a sizable number of students considered the obligatory nature of Sing Song to outweigh its potential unifying benefits. In 1937, one annoyed performer queried, “Has any student who sang on that program benefited in any way whatsoever by it? I say, ‘No!’”\textsuperscript{57} Others objected to lengthy rehearsals: “The practices morning, noon, and night have made us see a close relationship between Sing Song and Sing Sing.”\textsuperscript{58} But the majority of students defended Sing Song as “the one thing which united us as a class.”\textsuperscript{59} When President Frances Smith announced that she had canceled the 1943 Sing Song performance as inappropriate in a time of war, student outrage was so intense that she hastily backtracked.\textsuperscript{60} Whatever the circumstances, she promised, the 1944 show would go on.\textsuperscript{61} Even after student participation in Sing Song became optional in 1945, most students continued to join in the show. A 1954 graduate credited Sing Song with unifying the campus: “Every kind of talent is brought out. . . . The necessity of working together is proved with a vengeance. For everybody it is a super-charging of class spirit that overflows the whole school. It is the time of the year when the school is more tightly knit and integrated than at any other time.”\textsuperscript{62}

Bridget Marie Engelmeyer considered the 1950s to be Sing Song’s golden age (see figure 6). She felt that it still “engag[ed] the student creatively and, in general, intellectually.”\textsuperscript{63} But Sing Song was already in trouble. Copyright concerns had ended the long-standing student practice of setting their verses to popular musical scores, a serious blow to the quality of Sing Song music.\textsuperscript{64} In 1956, for the first time, a performance was not sold out, and within a decade Sing Song was playing “to an uncrowded LeClerc Hall.”\textsuperscript{65} When the 1970 Sing Song attacked the college’s social code, administrators and faculty were dismayed. “The spirit evidenced both in costumes and in words was disconcerting and depressing,” commented the annalist, “because it appeared to convey sneers at many of the college’s cherished traditions. . . . This year’s
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performance, I think, has convinced many of the faculty, reluctantly, that Sing Song should end.”66 While a late 1980s catalog described Sing Song in glowing terms as “a guaranteed sell-out that brings alumnae back to campus each spring,” in fact it was barely alive.67 “It came to the point where you had a fifth of the class participating,” recalled a faculty member, and in 1987 the entire junior class opted out.68 To the relief of administrators and faculty, 1988 marked Sing Song’s sixtieth and final performance.69 “It wasn’t a real Sing Song,” remembered a long-term faculty member, “and the competition was very weak.”70

Race at the College of Notre Dame

As with the two-tier class structure, women’s religious orders in the United States were also deeply marked by racial distinctions.71 Until the 1960s, no women’s order could be considered “integrated.” All-white religious orders received regular applications from black women, many of whom had attended their schools but were encouraged instead to join the small number

Figure 6. Sing Song dress rehearsal for “Ye Merrie Lads of Sherwood,” 1958. Photo from NDMA.
of all-black sisterhoods. Even the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, founded in 1891 by the Philadelphia heiress Katharine Drexel to educate blacks and Native Americans, admitted only white women until the 1950s (when they began to admit a small number of African American and Native American applicants). Drexel explained that in the segregated South, where her order would open and staff schools for blacks, state laws made it impossible to have racially integrated convents. Nor did she wish her order to compete for members with the nation’s two small black sisterhoods, based in New Orleans and Baltimore.

Nineteenth-century women’s colleges generally had minimal interest in promoting racial integration. Wellesley College awarded its first degree to an African American woman in 1887, Radcliffe College in 1898, Mount Holyoke College in 1898, and Smith College in 1900; the others among the Seven Sisters followed more slowly, with Barnard College in 1928, Bryn Mawr College in 1931, and Vassar College only in 1940. But unwritten racial quotas kept the number of black students very low. Overall, until the civil rights movement of the 1960s, progress toward racial integration on most US college campuses was very slow.

Catholic colleges, founded and staffed by religious orders that admitted only whites, followed this typical pattern. Of the Catholic colleges that admitted African Americans before 1925, none was a women’s institution. This discriminatory policy deeply offended African American Catholics. “Apropos our Catholic sisters multiplying ‘colleges for the daughters of the wealthier classes,’” wrote a journalist in the 1930s, “it might be remarked that non-Catholics do likewise, but are not usually so stupid as to exclude colored girls.” But during Notre Dame’s first quarter century, administrators and faculty rarely discussed the racial question. The Collegiate Institute had admitted wealthy students from Caribbean countries during the 1870s and 1880s, but black students were a different matter altogether. The School Sisters of Notre Dame had been educating black children in parochial schools across the country since the 1850s, and in Maryland they had staffed racially segregated schools in Bryantown since 1913 and in Ellicott City since 1923. But the black Catholic population was relatively small, and few families could afford to send their daughters to college. Campus racial attitudes were characteristically southern, revealing the concern that altering the racial texture of the student body would change the college in inauspicious ways. In 1899, Helene Goessmann, head of the History Department, lost her position after commenting in a lecture on the Civil War that she felt no racial prejudice and socialized freely with African Americans. “That was too much for the Southern girls,” related a 1901 alumna.
In the 1920s, the college did take a modest step toward racial integration in response to a request from a local black sisterhood. The Oblate Sisters of Providence had staffed Catholic schools for black children in Baltimore since the 1860s, but most of the sisters had little formal education. As state teacher accreditation standards rose in the 1920s, they faced a seemingly insurmountable problem, as Maryland normal schools refused to admit them. They turned to the College of Notre Dame, which assigned faculty to offer college extension courses at the Oblate motherhouse on Chase Street. By 1933, Oblates were commuting to the Notre Dame campus, where they joined white sisters in summer school classes. The college’s regular full-time lay students were not in residence during the summer, and neither they nor their parents were aware of the arrangement. This initiative made Notre Dame the first college in the Baltimore area to admit blacks to on-campus programs. During the academic year, however, to avoid the certain opposition of undergraduates and their parents, Oblate Sisters had to take their extension courses in their own convents. Nonetheless, the ice was broken, and by the late 1940s, Oblate Sisters were attending extension classes on the Notre Dame campus “as day students during the week.”

Meanwhile, Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart in New York had become the first Catholic women’s college to publicly address the issue of undergraduate racial exclusion. Its president, Grace Dammann, RSCJ, had invited George Hunton, a leader in the Catholic interracial movement, to address the college community on racism as a moral question. Inspired by his speech, Manhattanville students composed a set of resolutions and published them in pamphlet form. All Men Are Equal generated intense interest on Catholic college campuses nationwide. In 1938, when Manhattanville announced its intention to admit its first black student, alumnae mobilized in protest. Dammann responded with “Principles versus Prejudices: A Talk Given to the Alumnae on Class Day, May 31st, 1938.” Her eloquent affirmation of the moral imperative of racial integration, widely circulated among leaders of Catholic women’s colleges, was a national call to action, and by the early 1940s, twenty-one Catholic women’s institutions were admitting at least a few black students.

Reform leaders and organizations pressed the College of Notre Dame for action. In a hard-hitting 1942 address to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the social activist Catherine de Hueck, a leader in the Catholic interracial movement and founder of Harlem’s Friendship House, unsettled her audience by blaming Notre Dame’s segregationist policy on racial prejudice within the religious order itself. “That we have no black members in our community was especially attacked,” Engelmeyer’s notes on the talk
recorded. Since as yet no sisterhood in the United States was racially integrated, the nuns attributed de Hueck’s comments to “zeal [that] descended to discourtesy.” But change was coming—spurred here as elsewhere in the United States by the obvious contrast between the fight against “racism” in Nazi Germany and typical segregationist practices at home. In the mid-1940s, sociology professor Sister Maria Mercedes Hartmann, a leader of the Foundation of Catholics for Human Brotherhood (established in New York to fight racial as well as religious bigotry), mobilized her faculty colleagues, religious and lay, to call on the board of trustees to admit black students immediately.

While the faculty began to press for racial integration, the student body remained divided. In the mid-1940s, Children of Mary Sodality members debated the question. Maryland was a southern state, and that fact settled the matter for some. “The South must necessarily be dealt with differently from the North,” the sodality minutes concluded; “in the South, colored colleges should be separate from the white colleges.” Alumnae, parents of students, and Catholic parishioners in large numbers shared that view. Confronted with significant opposition, President Smith and the trustees considered it foolhardy for Notre Dame to act without the permission of the archbishop of Baltimore, Michael Curley (1921–47), who opposed racial integration. As a result, the College of Notre Dame continued to admit only white students.

The students were not wrong to regard the region as “southern” and deeply segregated. Even as Baltimore’s commerce and industry developed in the decades after the Civil War, racial division in Maryland intensified. By 1940, 75 percent of the state’s black citizens lived in Baltimore and nearby counties, over half within the city itself. Many white Marylanders voted for George Wallace’s segregationist campaigns during the 1960s; Wallace won Howard County, bordering Baltimore, in the 1964 Democratic primary. Reflecting this history, the color line was firm at local colleges and universities as well as at lower schools, public and private.

Archbishop Curley concurred. Baltimore was very much a southern city, he remarked in 1932, and “whatever we may think about it, the fact is that the color line is drawn everywhere.” Sometimes he drew it himself. The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, located within the Archdiocese of Baltimore at the time, had no racial barriers until 1920, when its board of trustees, noting the “local race problem” and fearing that black students might “dominate the institution completely,” voted to exclude them. Rev. Thomas Shahan, president of the university, and Rev. Edward Dyer, president of Saint Mary’s Seminary, easily convinced Curley
that this step was essential for the institution to succeed. Despite outrage among local black Catholics, the discriminatory policy continued until 1936. In the 1940s, an aging Curley predicted a rise in racial violence as Communism spread within the black community. He also disapproved of black priests and approved racial segregation during church services and in lay church organizations. Black parishioners, unsurprisingly, did not regard him highly.

At Notre Dame, Frances Smith’s reluctance to act without prior approbation from the local bishop was typical of leaders of women’s colleges. Once they had episcopal permission, they moved quickly. Trinity College, for example, admitted its first black students in 1948, following the appointment of Patrick O’Boyle, a social progressive, as the first resident archbishop of Washington, DC. Leaders of Catholic men’s colleges were typically more independent of local bishops than their female counterparts. Jesuits at Saint Louis University, for example, admitted black students for the first time in 1944 despite Cardinal John Glennon’s vehement resistance to the racial integration of parish schools. Following Glennon’s death two years later, the Sisters of Loretto at local Webster College raised the question with his liberal successor, Archbishop Joseph Ritter. “Admit any qualified Catholic student, irrespective of color,” Ritter told them. Frances Smith and the Notre Dame trustees, on the other hand, were unable to gain episcopal authorization for such a step.

In the 1940s, the racial segregation issue increasingly preoccupied Maryland college and university leaders. Following the 1936 Maryland Court of Appeals decision in University v. Murray, the University of Maryland Law School accepted black applicants. However, the university’s main College Park campus remained segregated for another fifteen years. Although a black student had enrolled in the Johns Hopkins University graduate school in 1887, he withdrew within two years, and nearly six decades passed before the university registered its first full-time black undergraduate. The Jesuits’ Loyola College, adjacent to Notre Dame, had admitted a few black students to graduate and part-time evening programs, but its first black undergraduate did not arrive until 1950. The two local women’s colleges, Notre Dame and Goucher, enrolled black students for the first time in 1951 and 1959, respectively.

Notre Dame’s transition was eased by Archbishop’s Curley’s death in 1947. Hoping to have firm data in hand before approaching his successor, Archbishop Francis Keough, about admitting black students to the College of Notre Dame, Smith decided to poll campus constituencies. At a February 1948 assembly of the student body, she read a letter from a Massachusetts-based
organization, Catholic Scholarships for Negroes, offering a boarding scholarship for a black student admitted to Notre Dame. Students were to “pray and reflect” on whether the college should accept the offer; the following week they would be asked to sign ballots and vote “Yes,” “No,” or “Not just yet” on the question. Of 336 votes cast, 179 voted to admit blacks, 86 voted no, and 71 voted “not yet.” Smith followed the same process in her meeting with alumnae, parents, and guardians on “the burning question.” To the proposal that Notre Dame become a racially integrated college, one faculty member recalled, these groups responded with “a resounding ‘No.’ . . . People promised to take their daughters out of the college and alumnae promised not to support the college.”

Smith was disappointed. However, polling was a risky strategy on an issue that was very controversial in Maryland. Trustees of the elite Bryn Mawr School for girls, located near Notre Dame, had a similar experience when they polled alumnae and parents of students on the question. By a two-to-one margin, respondents had opposed any change in school policy; as a result, the school remained racially segregated until 1963, even as other schools began cautiously integrating. Following the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education, the process of desegregating Maryland public schools commenced. Catholic schools in a few southern Maryland counties admitted black children in primary grades, but these institutions were situated in the Archdiocese of Washington. Maryland schools within the Archdiocese of Baltimore remained segregated until 1961, when Archbishop Lawrence Shehan ordered their integration.

In 1948, however, with nearly half the Notre Dame student body against the immediate admission of black students, and alumnae and parents overwhelmingly opposed to the idea, Smith lacked the support she needed to gain the new archbishop’s backing. As other Maryland colleges, including Loyola, began to admit some black undergraduates, Smith’s only public explanation for keeping Notre Dame segregated—“the time is not right”—incensed social reformers across the country. Protests poured in, first from Caroline Jenkins Putnam, a member of a prominent Maryland family and president of Catholic Scholarships for Negroes. Putnam had the endorsement and powerful support of Archbishop Richard J. Cushing of Boston. Within weeks of Smith’s polls, Putnam reiterated her offer of full tuition, room, board, and fees for a black student to attend Notre Dame. Advisory board member Roy Deferrari, who was serving on the board of Catholic Scholarships for Negroes, pressed Smith to accept the offer. However, she explained diplomatically to Putnam, “the situation here is so complex that no decision has yet been reached.”
The Baltimore Urban League and the Oblate Sisters of Providence, who by this point had attended the college as special students for two decades, also took up the cause. Sister Liberata Dedeaux, OSP, on behalf of a local girls’ boarding school, Saint Frances Academy, asked Smith to “accept colored girls as students in September.” Smith contacted Archbishop Keough: “May we ask your advice in regard to the enclosed letter? . . . This racial question is a problem of such serious proportions that we need your counsel and guidance.” When Keough did not reply, Smith informed Sister Dedeaux that “the Board has not yet decided what is to be done regarding this question, so I cannot act.”

Attacks on the college’s all-white policy from Catholic social activists intensified. How, asked critics, could the nation’s first Catholic women’s college justify its discriminatory stand? The civil rights leader Rev. Arthur C. Winters demanded to know how it could possibly be “imprudent or inopportune for a Catholic school to take a Christian stand in the matter.” Smith’s replies to such queries reflected the college’s financial concerns and the need for women’s orders to have episcopal approbation for such a major step. “Attacks from parents & others” also precluded change, Dean Engelmeyer wrote. Smith regretted that Notre Dame was racially segregated, she told Rev. Clarence J. Howard, editor of *Saint Augustine’s Messenger*, in March of 1950, but “as yet, I have not been able to secure the necessary permission.” That year’s Sing Song performance, meanwhile, featured students who “dressed as chocolate angels and sang Negro spirituals in a colorful ‘darky heaven.’”

By this time, Catholic Scholarships for Negroes was supporting fifty-one students at thirty Catholic colleges and universities, among them thirteen women’s colleges. Hoping to elicit a positive response from Sister Margaret Mary O’Connell, Frances Smith’s successor as president of Notre Dame, the organization once again offered a full scholarship and “incidental expenses” for a black student to attend. The new president, bolder than Smith, immediately accepted the award, and in September 1951 two black day students enrolled: a Saint Frances Academy graduate and a transfer student from Morgan State College.

Campus community spirit was notably cooler in 1955 when Sylvia Browne, the college’s first black resident student, was admitted. To deter controversy, administrators assigned her to a private room in the apartment of the lay resident director rather than to a dormitory room with a white student roommate. Despite this inauspicious start, Browne, a music major, was a popular student. Although not a Catholic, she was generous with her
talents at chapel services and other campus events. In 1959, her required senior voice recital attracted an audience of four hundred from the campus community, the Catholic Interracial Council of Baltimore, and many Baltimoreans. 115

The number of black students remained small for the next decade. Only two, both day students, graduated in 1962. 116 A racially integrated faculty developed still more slowly. In 1961, Regina Goff, a member of the Morgan State College faculty, taught in the Human Relations Institute, a summer program funded by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. She was the first African American to teach at Notre Dame, “though we are not emphasizing the fact,” wrote the annalist. 117 It was another five years before the sociologist Abraham Davis became “the first Negro to have a full-time position on our faculty.” 118 Nonetheless, the arrival of these early African American students and faculty proved to be a breakthrough in Notre Dame’s evolution into a democratic college. By the end of the decade, Catholic women’s colleges in urban centers were actively recruiting African American students. Their overtures were met with an overwhelming response. When, in 1967, Detroit’s Marygrove College offered one scholarship to each
city high school in Detroit and Philadelphia, it received a flood of applications. Within a year, African Americans accounted for one-quarter of its freshman class.119

At the College of Notre Dame, the increase in minority students was less dramatic until the 1970s. Columns still seemed slightly bemused by the prointegration “beliefs of Sister Maria Mercedes,” interviewed at the time of the March on Washington.120 The college also did not experience the kinds of sustained protests that took place on other campuses in the late 1960s, perhaps because it still had relatively few black students.121 The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s Julian Bond, at the time a state legislator in Georgia, did speak on campus about the Black Power movement in November 1968, and the next year students were offered a course on the sociology of Black Power through a consortium with two other local Catholic colleges.122 Following the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., faculty members and student leaders initiated Campus Action for Racial Equality (CARE) to advance racial integration in all areas of college life.123

In 1974, undergraduate students of color accounted for approximately 4 percent of total enrollment, a proportion that reached 11 percent a decade later.124 In 1988, Cynthia Edmunds became the first African American to be elected president of the student government.125 During the 1980s, a Black Student Association became active; 1989 saw the launch of both a BSA newsletter, Hopes and Dreams, and a mentoring program connecting black students with professional black women in Baltimore. In announcing this mentoring program, Dean of Students Mary Funke noted that there were far more resident black students than had been the case fifteen years earlier, when most had commuted.126 The BSA’s regular events during the early 1990s, including an African dance and other events in honor of Black History Month, testified to a critical mass of black students on campus.127 By 2018, students of color (including Hispanic, Asian, and biracial students) represented 55 percent of undergraduate and 34 percent of graduate students; 29 percent of undergraduates were African American.

Lay and Religious: Tension and Cooperation

While all US colleges faced issues related to class and racial diversity (or the lack thereof) on campus, Catholic colleges founded and staffed by religious orders had another realm of diversity to navigate. In founding the College of Notre Dame, the School Sisters of Notre Dame had entered a new and secular realm. Conflicts between cloister values and professionalism appeared early. In the college, lay and sister faculty collaborated in all academic
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affairs. However, the nuns’ cloister rules severely impeded social interaction between the two groups for decades. Convent regulations created divisions in campus activities. In 1948, for example, only lay faculty were invited to a dinner hosted by President Frances Smith to honor Sister Cordia Karl upon her induction into Phi Beta Kappa and Professor Elizabeth Morrissy on her appointment to the Baltimore Board of School Commissioners. In 1953, President Margaret Mary O’Connell honored Professor Anne Kean’s twenty-five years of faculty service by inviting “all the laywomen of the faculty” to a banquet. She called on sister-faculty to serve the dinner.

The entire faculty, religious and lay, regretted the inability to share meals. “That was a great deprivation that nuns could not eat with us for a long time. We felt very much for them,” recalled Professor Regina Soria. “It would have been so much better if we could have been closer than we were.” Lay faculty, too, felt isolated. According to Professor Anne Cullen, “It was . . . harder to get to know the sisters at that time. . . . There was considerable professional contact, but at social occasions, lay faculties pretty much were on their own. . . . [The sisters] were not able to be there with us when we ate.”

Occasionally, those excluded from social events were lay faculty. In 1961, for example, only sister-faculty received invitations to a gala reception in honor of the graduating class. The noticeable absence of the lay faculty “cast a slight chill on the atmosphere,” observed the college annalist. By this time, however, lay-religious distinctions were fading, even in advance of the reforms of religious life that followed Vatican II. At commencement exercises that year, sister-faculty sat with their lay colleagues on the stage for the first time. The following year, dining restrictions on the sisters ended, to the cheers of the entire faculty. The annalist recorded that the Faculty Seminar Day luncheon that year was “made the more exciting by the participation of the Sisters with the lay folk.”

Social interaction was not the only area where the lay-religious distinction played an important role, however. The sisters’ numerical dominance on the faculty and the order’s legal control of the college limited opportunities for lay faculty to participate in college governance. In the 1930s and early 1940s, religious superiors routinely convened meetings of sister-administrators and sister-faculty to address college policies and problems, with lay faculty not invited. Formal meetings of the full faculty, lay and religious, did not get underway until the 1940s. These early gatherings consisted mainly of policy directives from administrators and progress reports on college projects. Faculty meetings well into the 1960s, according to one sister-administrator, continued to serve chiefly as “a way for the administration to communicate
its policies to the faculty.” The faculty’s role was to implement these policies. A 1968 faculty meeting illustrates this sequence. A faculty “summer study committee,” charged with drafting a revision of the curriculum committee, presented its report, and proposed that the college establish “an academic council with jurisdictional powers.” When acting president Elissa McGuire refused to acknowledge “the competence of a faculty committee” to make such a proposal, the faculty rejected the report of its own summer study committee.

In the late 1940s, Mother M. Myles Carton, newly elected Baltimore provincial superior and chair of the college’s board of directors, briefly institutionalized the lay faculty’s second-class position in the area of governance. She considered the college to be in crisis, as student religious observance on campus was declining along with, in her opinion, the institution’s Catholic identity. “At present religion does not seem to carry over into the daily lives of students,” she complained. “The courses are too apologetic, not sufficiently practical.” She also felt that conflict among sisters on the faculty was growing, and that the order was in danger of losing its control over the college. In the fall of 1947 Mother Carton established an Advisory Council, naming herself as its chair. She appointed ten sister-faculty as regular council members and stated explicitly that “no member of the Lay Faculty may serve on the Advisory Council.” The college president and academic dean were members ex officio. As chair, Carton drew up agendas for the council’s monthly meetings, with its decisions to be “conveyed to the entire college staff at the general faculty meeting.” The council would serve to “keep finger [sic] on the pulse of the school . . . [and] keep ear to ground to keep the College vital, healthy, and right.” But members of the Advisory Council did not share Carton’s academic priorities, and meetings were typically tense. At an October 1948 meeting, for example, Frances Smith requested assistance from committee members in completing the college’s application process for affiliation with the Association of American Universities. Mother Carton, according to the meeting minutes, promptly “reminded the Council that if the college was fulfilling its purpose of Catholic education and living up to its philosophy then refusal of this secular affiliation should not discourage us.” Carton, who found Advisory Council meetings increasingly unsatisfactory, confided to Dean Engelmeyer that the college “continues to be a source of deep concern and anxiety for me.” In the summer of 1951, the council held its final meeting. But in formation, membership, and focus, Mother Carton’s short-lived Advisory Council graphically impressed on both lay and sister faculty their marginal status in college decision-making.
From the college’s founding, the number of sisters on the faculty and in administrative offices greatly exceeded that of laity. That picture changed quickly in the 1960s, as did faculty perspectives on governance, curriculum, and student life. As long as the faculty was predominantly religious, noted one sister faculty member, “our goals, our viewpoints, were very much the same.” But as the proportion of lay faculty members rose, so did diversity in faculty opinion. Notre Dame’s first organized faculty forum was a chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), established in October 1964. It was to play a critical role in advancing faculty rights and defining faculty roles in college governance. Under the leadership of Art Department chair Ruth Nagle Watkins, the chapter soon enrolled a majority of the faculty, both lay and religious. In 1967, the chapter elected a ten-member Faculty Senate to serve as “a clearing house for the views of the faculty and be a two-way bridge of advice to and communication with the administration.” Faculty elected colleagues who would represent them vigorously. Professor Anne Cullen, a member of the Modern Language Department faculty since 1959, became the Faculty Senate’s first chair. “When you think of what Notre Dame was like,” remarked a sister who joined the faculty in the 1960s, the Senate was a bold step. “We were a college run by religious sisters, and it was very authoritarian.”

Prior to its 1970 accreditation visit, the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Middle States and Maryland (MSA) asked Notre Dame’s trustees how they “maintain[ed] an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of faculty and student thinking.” Up to this point, the trustees had relied almost entirely on reports from college administrators. Now they formed a Trustee Committee on Student Affairs that would “serve at the President’s request.” They also created a Faculty Affairs Committee of trustees to meet with the Faculty Senate at least three times a year. At their first meeting with George Constable and Henry Knott from the Faculty Affairs Committee in 1970, representatives from the Faculty Senate asked that the chair of the board of trustees be informed of the Senate’s unanimous resolution that an elected faculty member join the board of trustees, preferably as a voting member.

Professor Ruth Nagle Watkins, who chaired the AAUP chapter as well as the Faculty Senate at this time, recalled the consternation that followed. Sister-administrators feared that should the resolution be approved, the faculty might decide to elect a layperson as their representative. “We thought we were moving with the times,” observed Watkins of the faculty’s proposal, “but it was too advanced at that time, without a doubt.” The board of trustees took up the Faculty Senate proposal the following year. Acting
president Elissa McGuire strongly opposed it. Quoting a “verbal recommendation” of the MSA evaluating team that the president of the college should be the only faculty member on its board of trustees, she called on Engelmeier and board secretary Sister Paula Manning, both faculty members, to resign. The trustees spurned McGuire’s proposition. They also rejected the Faculty Senate’s resolution on the grounds that the board’s bylaws required that trustees be elected by the board. In addition, they believed that the presence of an elected faculty member might divert the board from its long-range planning duties or, by creating conflicts of interest, weaken the president’s authority.

While disappointed, the Faculty Senate continued to argue that “the present system of communication” between the faculty and trustees was not working. After surveying eighteen colleges, the Senate noted that seven of these institutions, including five Catholic women’s colleges, already had some faculty representation on their governing boards, three as voting members, four as observers. The Senate saw no merit in the trustees’ concern that a faculty representative might “by-pass the President” or pose a conflict of interest for the board. In September 1972, the Senate again proposed that an elected faculty member join Notre Dame’s board of trustees as a voting member, adding that if the trustees found this resolution unacceptable, the Senate was amenable to “the election of a faculty member as a voiced observer.” This time, the faculty campaign met with conspicuous success. By a wide majority, the trustees resolved “that an elected faculty representative be invited to be present at Board meetings as a voiced observer, according to the norms of parliamentary procedure.” The faculty representative would not attend executive sessions dealing with sensitive matters. A jubilant Notre Dame faculty elected Ruth Nagle Watkins as its first representative. By the mid-1980s, the elected faculty representative was a member of the board’s standing committee on academic affairs.

Tenure, salary, and promotion were other areas where treatment of sister-faculty and lay faculty sometimes diverged. In 1950, Notre Dame had forty-one full-time faculty at the assistant professor rank or higher; 63 percent were sisters. Ten full professors, nine of them sisters, were considered to be tenured. Faculty at lower ranks received renewable two-year contracts. After a yearlong study of issues related to faculty rank, tenure, and salaries, a five-member faculty committee in 1966 recommended that faculty members be eligible to apply for tenure after seven years of full-time teaching, five of them at Notre Dame. Tenure would continue to age sixty-five; it could be revoked only for grave reasons. The faculty committee also proposed the establishment of a permanent committee on tenure, promotion, and salary
issues that, as a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate, would recommend to the president lay faculty qualifying for promotions. The report left unaddressed the matter of tenure for sisters, who formed the majority of faculty. In 1967 trustees asked whether sister-faculty could apply for tenure; the order’s representative replied, “Theoretically yes.”\textsuperscript{157} As it turned out, by the time the college finally resolved its tenure policy, the percentage of sister-faculty was in steep decline.

While lay faculty often felt they had little control over the college and sought to improve their involvement in governance, sister-faculty in turn began to seek benefits that at first were available only to their lay colleagues. Although, over the second half of the twentieth century, colleges like Notre Dame gradually increased salaries and fringe benefits paid to their lay faculty members, there was no corresponding change in reimbursements made to religious orders for the services of sister-faculty and staff. When President Kathleen Feeley took office in 1971, the college provided campus housing for sisters and paid the order a small annual stipend for each sister it employed. The accrediting team of the MSA called on the college to extend to sister-faculty the fringe benefits it provided lay faculty. In response, the 1972–73 operating budget included a $6,000 fund for sisters’ medical expenses, and the board of trustees approved sisters’ membership in the college’s Blue Cross/Blue Shield plan. To offset these costs, tuition for 1973–74 would rise to $1,600.\textsuperscript{158}

In this decade, sister-faculty also began to press for the professional benefits enjoyed by their lay colleagues. Professor Maura Eichner of the English Department was the first to test the policy of reserving sabbaticals for lay faculty when she applied for a semester’s sabbatical leave. At the February 1974 meeting of the board of trustees, Feeley proposed that a sister-faculty member be eligible for sabbatical benefits equal to “the [lay-equivalent] semester salary which is ‘on the books’ for her.”\textsuperscript{159} She suggested using endowment income for this purpose. Sister Bridget Marie Engelmeyer objected. “Abolishing the distinction between financial arrangements for lay and religious faculty—regarding tenure and pensions as well as sabbaticals” was perilous, she said. “Carried to its logical conclusion the trend would mark the end of contributed services [of sisters] as endowment.”\textsuperscript{160} A majority of trustees, however, approved the president’s plan.

The 1976 report of the Rank, Tenure, and Salary Committee of the Faculty Senate was entitled \textit{Up by Our Boot Straps: A Report on the State of Faculty Salaries at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland}.\textsuperscript{161} Like the 1960s faculty study, it pertained only to lay faculty salaries. The trustees now turned to the question of the salaries of the majority of the faculty: the sisters. At this
time, the School Sisters of Notre Dame order was receiving from the college a $2,375 annual stipend for each sister employed as a faculty or staff member to cover her living expenses. The trustees recommended an increase in the stipend to $3,000 for 1977–78 and called for an investigation of inequities in faculty salaries. The 1978–79 college budget set the total value of contributed services of forty-five sisters at $518,338, based on their lay-equivalent salaries. (The lay-equivalent value of a sister’s contributed services corresponded to the salary currently being paid to a lay faculty member of the same rank and years of service.) By 1979, the college was paying the order a yearly stipend of $4,264, plus a retirement benefit of $117, for each sister employed at the college. The annual stipend stood at $9,200 in 1986, and the retirement benefit at $800. These payments were comparable to those provided by many other Catholic women’s colleges across the country at this time. Mount Saint Mary’s College in Los Angeles, for example, was paying each sister on its faculty and staff $8,000 annually.

Progress continued steadily at Notre Dame of Maryland, and by 1991 the order was receiving 80 percent of the lay-equivalent salary for each member of the sister-faculty. On principle, Feeley opposed paying the full 100 percent. For nearly a century, the sisters’ contributed services had publicly witnessed to the religious order’s “ownership” of the college. She did not want to lose this crucial testimony. “Whether those [contributed] services should be 20% of the professional salary, 25%, or 15% is a subject for discussion,” she wrote. “The percentage must be significant enough to make a difference.” Despite shrinking membership, the religious order also continued to support the college generously in loans and gifts. Loans often became gifts, as, for example, when the president announced in 1987 that “the loan of $200,000 by the Generalate of the School Sisters of Notre Dame to the college last year has become a gift.” Noting that, at this time, the total annual contributed services of thirty-eight sister administrators, faculty, and staff to the college was approximately $500,000, she estimated that “an endowment of $7 million would be needed to produce this sum.” The inexorable decline in the order’s membership, however, directly affected its benevolence. The sisters’ contributed services to the college by the mid-1990s was only $141,039, a steep decline from the value of those services less than a decade earlier.

Times do change. By 2017, a college that for many decades resisted the introduction of class and racial diversity was looking back into its history for evidence that, as the title of an article on the college’s website put it, “Diversity Is Foundational.” White students made up roughly 38 percent
of the undergraduate student body in fall 2018. Since only 68 percent of full-time students lived on campus, the “day student”—now rechristened a “commuter”—is alive and well. As many of these students join in recent trends seeking professional education, conversations about the place of the liberal arts in the curriculum are ongoing. As the next chapter will make clear, the tension between the faculty’s desire for a liberal arts curriculum and the general demand for professional courses and programs has been a constant in the College of Notre Dame’s history, as it has been for nearly all US institutions of higher education.