Democratizing Women’s Education at Rutgers
By Re-Inventing Douglass College
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Do we need a college for women at Rutgers in the 21st Century?

Over the past century, women in New Jersey have gone from having no access to public higher education to being the majority of undergraduate students in public and private colleges and universities. Douglass College has played a leading role in that transformation. Do these impressive gains signify that women’s historical struggle for access, inclusion, and equality is at an end? Has women’s advancement been so complete that women’s colleges are no longer necessary? The short answer is a definitive “no.”

Even the most cursory examination of social, economic and political indicators demonstrates that women are far from achieving full equality in the United States.

- Women continue to be under-represented in positions of leadership in public and private sectors.¹
- In the current period of increasing militarization and war-making, research indicates that voters are less willing to support qualified women candidates for the office of president.²
- Significant pay inequities continue to harm working women and their families.³
- Women are over-represented among the poor, constituting 80% of the adult poor and over 60% of the minimum wage workers in the United States.⁴

Despite the promise of “equal opportunity,” women continue to face potent barriers to full and equal inclusion in the economic, political, and social life within this country. Public institutions of higher education have a unique responsibility to help prepare women for the challenges they will face as citizens, workers, and leaders.

Research on single-sex education has demonstrated that women’s colleges play a vital role in preparing women to engage the structures of gendered and raced power in the contemporary world, encouraging women to struggle against practices of subordination, to forge ahead despite continuing obstacles, and to strive for leadership in all arenas. The mission of women’s colleges, and of Douglass College in particular, is to prepare women to struggle for more equitable divisions of power and resources and to counter long traditions that devalue and undervalue women’s capabilities and contributions to society. This mission is as pressing in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth century. That de facto modes of gender exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination operate more subtly than de jure systems makes them no less effective, as the persistent under-representation of women in leadership in the public and private sectors documents.

Differential treatment does not imply inequity and identical treatment does not guarantee equality. Efforts to redress historic and continuing injustices related to race, gender, ethnicity, and class require programs that treat some students differently than others. Creative programs designed to enable women and minority students to understand the challenges posed by continuing inequality and to equip them to address those challenges are essential if the promise of full equality is to be attained in the United States.

Douglass College is uniquely positioned to serve all interested women students at Rutgers. With additional resources, Douglass can expand its educational mission, offering to all interested students a distinctive feminist curriculum tailored to fulfill the core distribution requirements identified in the Qualls
Report, providing residential opportunities for those who seek the benefits of a supportive and intellectually-stimulating women’s college experience, and providing an enhanced array of co-curricular opportunities involving students, faculty, and staff.

Why Reinvent Douglass College?

Douglass College has far more to offer women students than a campus and residence halls. As the home of five nationally and internationally renowned research centers and institutes on women, one of the best women’s studies programs in the nation, and award-winning programs on women in math, science and engineering, Douglass has expertise in women’s education, an extensive network of faculty committed to its feminist mission, generous alumnae and friends devoted to its distinctive programs, as well as energy and innovative ideas for addressing problems of student alienation and faculty disengagement that the Task Force on Undergraduate Education correctly identifies, but for which it fails to provide any credible solution. Capitalizing on these strengths, Douglass can augment the capacity-building programs it currently offers its residential students with curricular and co-curricular offerings designed to prepare new generations of women for the challenges of contemporary life and for the responsibilities of leadership.

In keeping with the recommendations of the Task Force, Douglass will embrace university-wide admission standards and a single admitting unit, but it will also offer women students something no other public research university in the United States has—a feminist curriculum that conforms to the proposed general education requirements offered in the historic context of a women’s college, research opportunities that focus on the unique aspects of women’s lives and livelihoods, and co-curricular opportunities designed to cultivate women’s capacities for leadership.

Rutgers students could become involved with Douglass in multiple ways:

• By completing the distinctive Douglass core curriculum, grounded in feminist pedagogy and focusing on the integration of theory, practice and policy applications. (See Appendix A for a sample curriculum.)

• By participating in expanded co-curricular programs offered by the Institute for Women’s Leadership (IWL) and its member units, such as the IWL Leadership Scholars Certificate Program and NEW Leadership at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP).

• By enrolling in a semester “immersion program” that features academic opportunities available only through the resources of Douglass and the IWL. For example, the PLEN (Women’s Public Leadership Education Network) semester in Washington, D.C. is available only to students enrolled in a select number of women’s colleges. With focused support, new programmatic opportunities could be devised, such as a semester at the United Nations, featuring briefings by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership (Global Center) on topics such as women’s human rights, sustainable development, and the Millennium Goals.

• By serving as research assistants for eminent scholars, either through the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS), the visiting scholars program at the Institute for Research on Women (IRW), or Project SUPER (Science for Undergraduates: A Program for Excellence in Research).

• By completing an academic internship at the Center for Women and Work (CWW), Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, the Woman's Art Journal, CAWP, IRW, the Center for Women’s Global Leadership, the Margery Somers Foster Center at the Mabel Smith Douglass Library, or the Institute for Women’s Leadership.

• By getting involved with a university-wide women’s center located on the Douglass campus, which provides innovative programming for Rutgers students and serves as a clearing house for
information and services available to women students throughout the university. With support from a portion of all women students’ activity fees, this center could be directed by a faculty member with appropriate staffing and could partner with organizations such as the Society for Women Engineers, the Women’s Bar Association, the Women’s Medical Association, BPW, and AAUW to prepare women students for the demands of diverse professions.

- By residing in living-learning communities such as the Global Village, Human Rights House and LEAD House, which are specifically designed to integrate curricular, student life, and co-curricular experiences.

- By participating in the Douglass Student Government Association or writing for Caellian.

Although the current faculty reward system provides no incentives for working with students outside the classroom, participating in special programs, creating co-curricular opportunities, or becoming involved with student life activities, women faculty and faculty of color provide a disproportionate share of these “service” and “mentoring” activities. Douglass College has actively forged these faculty-student interactions, providing funds to support co-curricular initiatives, organizing faculty-student dinners and receptions at the Dean’s home, and using its staff resources to facilitate these interactions. Douglass can call upon supportive feminist faculty to help it expand programs that celebrate the teacher-scholar tradition as the key to excellence in undergraduate education.

Why a women’s college structure within a large public research university?

A good deal of recent research has demonstrated that decentralization and democratization are interrelated, whether within the nation-state or within large universities. Douglass College has been and continues to be a central site for democratizing education and for the inclusion of women in academic leadership and governance at Rutgers. All member units of the Institute for Women’s Leadership were launched and (with the exception of the Center for Women and Work) continue to be housed on the Douglass campus. The path-breaking intellectual work of these units demonstrates what can be accomplished when women are the focal point of academic endeavors. In their attention to diversity, inclusion, and social justice, they instantiate a new—and far more democratic—vision for the university.

Capitalizing on the rich tradition of women’s education and research at Douglass, Rutgers can foster a supportive, stimulating, and cutting-edge environment for women, diversify the university’s knowledge production to include issues of race, gender, nationality, and disability, and afford leadership opportunities to historically disadvantaged groups. As recent studies of race and gender relations on campus make clear, these goals are critically important; yet none will be accomplished if left to the standard operating procedures of the institution. A women’s college provides one institutional structure needed to keep the complex dimensions of racial, gender, ethnic, class, and sexual diversities in focus.

Recent research on higher education also demonstrates that students benefit from smaller units within a large research university. As communities of teacher-scholars, students, and professional staff, colleges have the capacity to:

- Stimulate flexible, innovative programs for students and assist students to integrate student life outside the classroom with classroom experiences;

- Foster and support interdisciplinary programs and experiences;

- Provide the social architecture for faculty-student interaction, fostering sustained interpersonal connections and multigenerational relationships. Particularly at Rutgers, where many students are the first generation in their family to attend higher education, colleges have the potential to
facilitate social mobility through events such as dinners, concerts, celebrations, lectures that model collegial relations and ways to operate in society and the world of work.

- Humanize university experience by allowing students to be known as unique individuals and affording them rich opportunities for development of their capacities.
- Mobilize external support and nurture alumnae involvement;
- Generate diverse co-curricular experiences to meet a range of intellectual and social needs. Colleges are better able to react quickly to changing student needs. Most students, three months after high school, are not ready to navigate a huge university without assistance. Indeed, recent research suggests that the “millennial generation” tends to be much more attached to parents and to want to be identified as “special.” As constitutive units of the university, colleges are far better placed to address students’ living and learning needs than academic departments or central administration.
- Help students make sense of Rutgers’ dispersed geographic sites, while fostering a sense of community and belonging within the larger university structures.

Recognizing the benefits of a residential college system, several large research universities, such as Vanderbilt, the University of Iowa and SUNY Stony Brook, are in the process of creating or launching new residential colleges, while other top universities, which have long used a college system to serve undergraduates, are now strengthening their residential colleges (e.g., Princeton; Yale; University of California at San Diego; University of California at Santa Cruz; Rice University; University of Virginia; Tulane University; University of Michigan; University of Minnesota; University of Pennsylvania; and University of Wisconsin-Madison).

By supplementing the residential opportunities at Douglass with curricular and co-curricular programs, Douglass College would be positioned to serve much larger numbers of women students.

**What Douglass College Needs to Reinvent Itself**

- To be allowed to capitalize on its name, history and mission;
- To remain a structural unit offering a distinctive feminist educational experience at Rutgers with some measure of administrative autonomy, budgetary discretion and accountability;
- To work with interested women students who wish to identify as members of a college for women through completion of a distinctive curriculum, participation in co-curricular programs, or taking advantage of living-learning residential opportunities;
- Authorization to work with Rutgers’ public relations staff to develop marketing strategies that celebrate the existence of a women’s college as a constitutive unit of a major, public research university;
- Resources to expand its curricular and co-curricular programs to all interested women students; and
- Recognition of the value and importance of women’s education.
Appendix A

The Douglass Difference: Women’s Education at the Core

An expanded and reinvented Douglass College can offer undergraduate students the opportunity to fulfill their general education requirements with a set of courses that incorporate path-breaking feminist scholarship drawn from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The brief outline below provides a glimpse of an interdisciplinary curriculum designed to foster critical analysis and innovative problem solving concerning the enormous challenges posed by race, gender, nationality, and sexuality in the contemporary world. The courses identified below are taken from course offerings for the fall 2005 semester and are intended to be illustrative rather than definitive.

I. The Foundation

A. Writing Intensive Courses

Autobiography by Women
Poetry by Women
Women Writers from 1789 to the Present

B. Critical Thinking

Gender, Culture, and Representation
Feminist Theory: Historical Provocations
Feminist Theory: Contemporary Engagements
Ethics and Leadership

C. Quantitative Thinking

Statistics in Feminist Social Science
Econometrics: Feminist Approaches

D. Scientific Inquiry

Gender and Science
Feminist Inquiry
The Biology of HIV/AIDS
The Biology and Psychology of Sex and Gender

II. The Vertical Core

A. Aesthetics

Gender, Visual Politics, and Cultural Policy
Gender and Popular Culture
The Gendered Body

B. Global Cultures

Gender and Globalization
Gender and Human Rights
Gender and Feminist Activism
Political Economy of Globalization
Gender, Migration and Diaspora
C. Interdisciplinary/Multi-Perspectival Approaches

**Feminist Practices (988-201)**
- African Feminism
- Race, Gender, Nation
- South Asian Feminism

D. Reflective Thinking

**Gender and Consumption**
- Queer Contexts: Same Sex Desire, Culture, and Representation
- Gender, Race, and Subjectivity
- Women, Work, and Social Change
- Women and the Law

E. Experiential Learning

**Internship in Women's & Gender Studies**
**Internship for IWL Leadership**
**IWL Social Action Project**

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**NOTES**

1. Women hold only 14% of the seats in the U.S. Congress and 15.6% of the seats in the New Jersey legislature. The New Jersey congressional delegation is 100% male. Although women constitute 46.5% of the U.S. workforce, they hold less than 8% of the top managerial positions. Women still constitute only a small fraction of the chief executive officers of the more than 4000 liberal arts colleges, public and private universities, and other institutions of higher education in the contemporary United States. A recent survey conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE 2001) indicates that although the total percentage of women college presidents more than doubled from about 10 percent in 1986 to 21 percent of the total in 2001, the majority of the women presidents are serving at two-year institutions, small liberal arts colleges, and women's colleges. Research 1 universities and doctoral-granting institutions continue to have the smallest percentage of women presidents (9%). The numbers of minority women in leadership are so small as to be miniscule.

2. Although the United States lags behind 57 nations in proportion of women in elected offices, concern for women’s political representation has receded from the public political imagination at the very moment that women are losing ground in state legislatures. In the first study of the effects of the war on terrorism on voter attitudes, Jennifer Lawless found that the sustained gender-stereotyping in the post-September 11 era was providing clear electoral benefits for men. “Citizens prefer men’s leadership traits and characteristics, deem men more competent at legislating around issues of national security and military crises, and contend that men are superior to women at addressing new obstacles generated by the events of September 11, 2001. As a result of this stereotyping, levels of willingness to support a qualified women presidential candidate are lower than they have been in decades.” (See Jennifer Lawless, “Women, War, and Winning Elections: Gender Stereotyping in the Post-September 11th Era,” *Political Research Quarterly* 57/3 (2004): 479-490, p. 480.)

3. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, white women’s earnings were 78% of white men’s earnings in 2002, while African American women’s earnings were 67% and Latina’s earnings were 54% of white men’s earnings. Job segregation by sex accounts for a good deal but not all of the pay disparity between men and women workers. Women managers, for example, earn only 72% of their male counterpart’s salaries. When researchers control for education, experience, seniority, and quality of job performance, women still earn 10% less than their perfectly “matched” male counterparts. The cumulative impact of pay inequities over a working woman’s lifetime can be staggering. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a white male can expect to earn 50 percent more over the course of his lifetime than a comparably situated white woman will earn. Although a slight decline in the pay gap between men and women has occurred over the past 10 years, the difference is due to declining male wages—not to increasing wages for women.
The term, “feminization of poverty,” was coined by feminist economists to make visible the growing concentration of poverty among women and their children in the late twentieth century. Since 1969, the incidence of poverty among adult women has grown dramatically as the incidence of poverty among adult men has declined. In 2004, 36 million U.S. citizens (seven million families), 13 percent of the population, live below the poverty line: 80% of the adult poor are women. Poverty is not equally distributed across the U.S. population: 9% of white Americans, 23% of African Americans, 21% Latino/as, 10% Asian Americans and 30% of Native Americans live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). Poverty is particularly concentrated among single women heads-of-household, that is, among women who are raising their children alone: 22% white, 35% black, 37% Latina, and 15% Asian American women heads of household live on incomes below the poverty line, which the federal government set at $8,890 for a single individual and $18,400 for a family of four in 2004. The kind of poverty experienced by women household-heads is acute; more than half are living with income less than 50% of the official poverty level.

Contrary to many popular beliefs, the vast preponderance of the poor work, but the wages they earn are insufficient to provide a decent standard of living. In 2005, the minimum wage in the United States was $5.15/hour, which would yield an annual wage of $10,700 for full-time work. Sixty-one percent of minimum wage workers are adult women; of these, more than half have children to support. A minimum wage worker who devotes 40 hours/week for 50 weeks/year to employment earns $1400 less than the poverty level if she has one child to support and $7,700 less than the poverty level if she has 3 children to support. To grasp the intensity of this level of poverty, it is helpful to consider a recent study by the Economic Policy Institute, which indicates that it takes an income of $27,000/year to afford a 2 bedroom apartment and meet basic needs in rural areas of the U.S. in 2004 and $52,000/year to have the same minimal standard of living in an urban area. Yet 24% of the U.S. labor force earns less than $8.23/hour or $16,640/year. In the richest nation of the world, the working poor, who are disproportionately women and their children, lead very difficult lives.