

Timeline of Women's Graduate Education at Lehigh

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❖ **Pre-1900s**

- **1881** - During a faculty meeting, President Lamberton presents a letter from Ms. Elsie E. Warner regarding whether any arrangements had been made to admit women to courses of study (1)

❖ **1900s**

- **1902** - Methods of Teaching History and Civics is offered as the first teaching specific summer extension course, allowing adults to further their education (1)
- **1909** - 15 of the 24 students enrolled in summer extension courses are women (1)

❖ **1910s**

- **September 1913** - Maud E. Welsh inquires about pursuing an M.A., but President Drinker refers her inquiry to trustees, where it is left unanswered. (2)
- **February 1917** - Professor R. W. Hall prompts faculty to vote in favor of recommending to the Board of Trustees that women be allowed to pursue graduate degrees, which would be granted to women on the same conditions as men. (2)
- **September 1917** - Faculty are informed that trustees laid the question of women's graduate education aside for future consideration. (2)
- **December 1917** - The question is referred back to the faculty. (2)
- **1918** - Professor Percy Hughes persuades faculty to allow women to enter graduate programs, "in part to alleviate the shortage of male teachers caused by World War I." (3)
- **February 1918** - Faculty "re-passe[s]" its resolution and adds the following proviso: "as at present, classes in which women are students shall largely be limited to the late afternoon and to Saturdays, so that the general character of campus life shall not be affected by this innovation." (2)
- **Fall 1918** - Women are admitted as Lehigh graduate students for the first time. (1)

❖ **1920s**

- **1921** - Bessie Edna Kast's graduate thesis, "The Education of Women in Pennsylvania" is published. It is available in the Lehigh archives.
- **1921** - Mary Alice Schwaninger, Bessie Edna Kast, and Edna Grace Tatnal are the first women to receive M.A. degrees from Lehigh. Schwaninger pays her class dues and is subsequently the first woman to join the Alumni Association. (1)
- **1928** - Women's enrollment for the decade peaks at nine students. (2)

- **1928** - “Lehigh Snobbish to Petticoats But Nobody Knows Why” appears in the Brown and White. The story regards Registrar Curtis’ diminishing of women who inquire about enrolling at the university. (4)
- **1929** - The initial rule that limits women’s class times to late afternoons and Saturdays is changed: “Women may be admitted as graduate students on the same terms as men, except that registration in courses open to undergraduate shall be subject to special approval of the head of the department concerned.” There is no evidence that the innovation leads to “harm of campus life.” (2)

❖ 1930s

- **1930** - Women’s enrollment breaks into double digits for the first time with 21 graduate students for the 1930-1931 academic year. (2)
- **1936** - The Graduate School is officially established. (5)
- **1936** - The 1936-1937 academic year marks peak graduate women’s enrollment for the decade at 38 students. (2)
- **April 1936** - The Board of Trustees sanctions the resumption of doctoral work in Lehigh’s graduate programs. (6)
- **1937** - The prerequisites for 100 levels are revised. Women are not allowed to listen in on or attend any courses ranked below 100. (4)
- **1939** - The decade closes with 21 women enrolled in graduate study (4)

❖ 1940s

- **December 1941** - “Women at Lehigh: Graduate Students Attend University” appears in the Brown and White. The short article remarks on the fact that only 16 women are enrolled at Lehigh during the fall semester, making the gender ratio 100 men to one woman. The article also refers to the women as “girls” and cites their interests as teaching or physical education. (4)
- **February 1943** - Margaret Lams, a graduate research assistant in chemical engineering, is the first woman to receive an industrial fellowship at Lehigh. The Brown and White believes she “will probably be the first of a large number of women scientists to invade the campus” due to World War II. (1)
- **March 1943** - It is announced that women will be allowed to attend all classes during the summer session, including classes about both the graduate and undergraduate levels. (4)
- **June 1944** - 18 women enroll for summer graduate courses. (4)
- **1944** - Evening adult courses attract several women to enroll. (7)

❖ 1950s

- **1954** - Evening adult courses are absorbed by the graduate school. (7)
- **April 1957** - When interviewed by the Brown and White, a university official states he believes that science offers great future opportunities for women. He

does not address the rumors about coeducation at the undergraduate level, but is quoted saying ““Women already have their feet, if not their heads, in the Lehigh door through the Graduate School and the Summer Sessions.”” (4, 18)

❖ 1960s

- **1961** – The university adopts a policy aiming to increase the emphasis on graduate programs, which is expected to prompt greater graduate enrollment. (1)
- **1961** - Nine women are enrolled as full time graduate students. It is the first year that detailed demographic statistics are compiled by the registrar. (7)
- **1963** - The Department of Education’s newly created intern program begins in the summer and entices more women to enroll in graduate study. (7)
- **1964** - The majority of women taking full time course loads are education majors. The remaining students are studying in fields ranging from business administration to engineering. (7)
- **October 1964** - The Brown and White makes the following announcement: “The American Association of University Women will hold a book sale from Oct. 24 to 31 in order to raise funds to award graduate women students.” (4)
- **1964** - Enrollment climbs up to 208 graduate women, an increase due in part to the graduate policy adopted in 1961. (7)
- **1965** - 252 women are enrolled in the graduate school, the highest ever. Numerous fellowship opportunities (National Defense Education Act Fellows, Packard Fellows, National Science Foundation Fellows, etc.) make it possible for more women to pursue advanced degrees at Lehigh. Nancy Rent is highlighted as the only female engineer on campus in the February 1965 Lehigh Alumni Bulletin. (7)
- **1969** - The Lehigh University Joint Committee on University Life issues “Lehigh and the Problem of Coeducation: A Study in Desirability and Feasibility.” (8)

❖ 1970s

- **November 1970** - A Brown and White article announces the Academic Affairs committee’s abolishment of Saturday classes “due to a lack of attention and attendance.” (1)
- **March 1973** - Lehigh holds a women’s career conference to discuss the changing nature of the job market, society, and the arts as related to women. Topics include the challenges women face when entering the workforce and graduate school. (4)
- **September 1974** - Dean Karakash speaks on the lack of diversity in Lehigh’s faculty and staff in the College of Engineering. He believes the admittance of women to undergraduate programs at the university will result in increased enrollment in graduate programs. (4)
- **October 1974** - Graduate student Mary Flesher suggests a cooperative housing plan to solve Lehigh’s egregious housing shortage caused by the increased size of

the student body. Flesher believes the plan also offers Lehigh women a chance to experience group living, which is typically only afforded to men. (4)

- **November 1974** - Mary Flesher, graduate student, serves as the chairwoman of Lehigh's Affirmative Action subcommittee. Flesher is quoted stating that Affirmative Action is a "positive action taken to end discrimination against women and minorities" (4, 1)
- **March 1975** - A proposal is submitted for creating a Women's Center in the University Center. Hildy Shandell, of the Women's Caucus, ensures the Center would be meant for all women on campus. "One of the objectives of the center would be to provide information to the women...also covered would be information on alternative lifestyles, career information, day care and graduate school information" (4, 8)
- **September 1975** - Lehigh's chapter of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) is chartered. "SWE is a professional educational service organization of graduate engineers and men and women with equivalent engineering experience" (4, 6)
- **March 1976** - A university advisory committee begins investigating potential discriminatory practices in a variety of areas, including the graduate program. (4)
- **April 1976** - Cheryl Sessoms, a graduate student helping with the recruitment of minority students, states that Lehigh's lack of diversity does not make it attractive to Black applicants. Graduate student Mary Flesher writes an op-ed piece for the Brown and White about the societal pressures career women face: "A woman has to choose between a life of needing and seeking reform, of manipulating the present system or some complex combination of the two. For example, she may have to set up the child care center she needs or strive to restructure graduate programs so that she may study part-time with financial support." (4, 3)
- **May 1976** - The university's Title IX report concludes that sex discrimination has caused some limited opportunities for students in the graduate program. (4)
- **March 1977** - Faculty members Elizabeth Fifer, Adele Laslie, and Jan Fergus receive a \$900 grant to travel to Women's Studies Centers at various schools throughout the Northeast. They intend to observe how these centers are managed and how programs are administered, in addition to collecting syllabi from fellow professors conducting research in Women's Studies. (4)
- **November 1977** - The Women's Resource Center reopens. Lehigh's Women in Business Organization is formed after receiving positive interest from undergraduate and graduate women. The group will aid in career development. (4)
- **December 1977** - Graduate student Carol Baylor suggests that the Women's Caucus' proposed monthly newsletter contain editorials on controversial issues facing women. She hopes to bring these topics into university conversations. (4)

- **March 1978** - Women enrolled in the College of Engineering are now eligible to borrow from the Loan Fund for Women in Engineering Studies. The Fund is intended to assist women at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. (4)
- **February 1979** - Joyce Morgan, a community counseling graduate student in the School of Education, leads a six week “assertiveness training” for women in the Women’s Resource Center. (4)
- **April 1979** - The Graduate School is investigated for discrimination. The lack of women faculty at Lehigh is attributed to the small pool of women with PhDs in business and engineering. (4)
- **September 1979** - The Women’s Center is displaced by the International Center in the University Center. (4)
- **November 1979** - Kathy Putnam is highlighted for her work as a graduate assistant and director of the International Center. (4)

❖ 1980s

- **May 1981** - The university receives a \$6,000 grant from the Charlotte W. Newcomb Foundation to provide financial assistance “to mature second career women students.” The grant will apply to women who are 25 years or older and are enrolled either full or part time in their degree programs. (4, 17)
- **September 1981** - WOMEN (Women Organized to Meet Essential Needs) has its first meeting on September 14th and draws 50 people. (4)
- **February 1984** - The Women’s Task Force opens membership to students after being solely made up of faculty and staff. The community service organization hopes to promote student programs for women and bring valuable resources to graduate students. (4)
- **November 1984** - Lehigh’s first LGBTQ+ organization is founded for queer women and men on campus. The group is open to undergraduate and graduate students. (4)
- **January 1985** - The Brown and White publishes an opinion piece regarding Lehigh’s forthcoming Planning Document. The authors hope to see “strengthening programs of graduate education and research...[by] developing incentives for expanding faculty research, elevating graduate admission standards and increasing fellowship support for graduate students.” (4, 4)
- **November 1987** - Graduate students Margaret Nichols and Kim Smoyer act as co-directors of Lehigh’s Women’s Alliance. They hope to increase awareness of women’s issues. (4)
- **September 1989** - Lehigh’s Human Diversity League (HDL), formerly known as the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Organization is reestablished. The group welcomes all levels of students and all sexual and gender identities. (4)

- **November 1989** - The new graduate student center, “The Observatory,” opens for graduate student use and offers a home for graduate students outside the University Center. (4)

❖ 1990s

- **June 1990** - The final report for the Lehigh University Commission on Minorities, Commission on Women survey is published. The graduate student results show that a majority of respondents agree there is prejudice on campus in regards to race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Women are more likely to be in favor of increased efforts towards diversifying Lehigh faculty and the student body. (9)
- **November 1990** - The Brown and White includes a multi-page spread on gender relations at Lehigh. (4)
- **December 1990** - Graduate students Denise Gurer, Emir Gurer, and Linda Potosnak write in to the Brown and White to say they are happy with the new graduate newsletter after “last years fiasco.” However, they are appalled to see an ignorant article that entirely misrepresents the feminist movement. They clarify the definition of feminism and put their support behind a newsletter that addresses the issues of men and women in a professional manner. (4)
- **April 1991** - Lehigh celebrates Women’s Week from April 8th through April 12th. The Women’s Center opens on the 8th. Denise Gurer, co-chair of the President’s Commission on Women and graduate student, says the Women’s Center will help every Lehigh woman (undergraduate, graduate, and staff) handle the challenges they face at the university and beyond. (4)
- **April 1992** - Materials Science and Engineering PhD candidate Laura C. Stearns comments on how her education experience has been affected by her gender: “I rarely think about being a woman in science. I’ve certainly never been discriminated against. However, I do believe that there are few role models so that not enough women are encouraged to pursue a career in science. I hope to see this change in the next decade.” (4, 8)
- **September 1994** - Lehigh joins the National Physical Science Consortium (NPSC), whose “primary goal is to increase the number of minorit[y] [students] and women pursuing master’s and doctoral degrees in the physical science fields.” (4, 11)
- **November 1996** - Lehigh hosts Women’s Empowerment Week. (4)
- **March 1999** - Lehigh celebrates Women’s History Month and puts on a Graduate Student Conference on Women and Gender. (4)

❖ 2000s

- **April 2000** - The 2nd Women’s Studies Graduate Student Conference on Women & Gender begins a yearly tradition. (4)

- **April 2002** - Dr. Karen Huang is appointed Director of Graduate Student Life and hopes to make Lehigh's graduate students feel more integrated and seen. (4)
- **November 2003** - Graduate student Safiya Jafari is highlighted in the Brown and White for her work with Umoja House. As the unofficial advisor to the residence building, she believes that Umoja House is a critical institution for making Black and Brown students feel welcome on campus. As the Paul Franz advancement intern, Jafari works with the development office, the office of admissions, and the alumni association to improve diversity at Lehigh. (4)
- **September 2004** - The Office of Graduate Student Life co-sponsors a lecture series titled "Identity and Power: Perspectives on Feminism, Fundamentalism and the Future." (4)
- **October 2004** - Chemical engineering graduate student Ajita Rajan organizes a graduate women's luncheon to discuss women's issues and the importance of voting in the upcoming election. (4)
- **March 2005** - Jenn Terfinko, LGBTQ Programs and Outreach graduate assistant and coordinator, speaks to the value of inclusive programming and the Safe Space Ally Training Program in an interview with the Brown and White. (4)
- **April 2007** - The Islamic Studies program is established, prompting graduate student Nayla Raad to emphasize the importance of breaking down harmful stereotypes about Islam. She believes the program will help begin the fight against discrimination. (4)
- **October 2007** - Graduate student Christina Diggs co-leads a Lehigh program titled "Sexual Violence in the LGBT Community." She, along with Women's Center Assistant Director Michelle Issadore, will give a presentation at the Nation Conference on Sexual Violence in our Schools. (4)
- **November 2007** - Newly hired assistant professor of physics Mary McSwain aims to develop more undergraduate and graduate courses that enrich astrophysics and astronomy majors. (4)
- **December 2007** - It is reported that 21% of Lehigh's Graduate School of Engineering student body is made up of women, putting it slightly above the national average of 18%. (4)
- **March 2008** - Megan B. Casey and Lisa M. Spagnola are two of the three recipients of the annual Kenneth A. Earhart Award from Lehigh's Emulsion Polymer Institute. Both are Ph.D. candidates in chemical engineering. (10)
- **September 2008** - Graduate student Lauren Fuhry implores the newly formed Council for Equity and Community to address the lack of openness, inclusivity, and diversity in Greek Life. (4)
- **November 2008** - Three doctoral students of English, Liz Vogtsberger, Kristina Fennelly and Colleen Clemons, organize Lehigh's inaugural "Feminism in

Practice” conference. The program intends to foster change through dialogue, action, and empowerment. (10)

- **2008** - Graduate Certificate in Women’s studies becomes available.
- **June 2009** - Hongping Zhao, a Ph.D. candidate in electrical engineering, receives the Scholarship in Optical Science and Engineering from SPIE, the International Society for Optical Engineering, for the second year in a row. (10)

❖ 2010s

- **October 2010** - Lehigh receives a \$2.6 million grant from the National Science Foundation in an effort to increase the number of women faculty in science and engineering. Known as the ADVANCE program, it hopes to achieve that increase in faculty by encouraging more women to pursue undergraduate and graduate STEM programs. (4)
- **December 2011** - English doctoral student Jenny Hyst presents a lecture titled “‘Here was peace’: Trauma, Storytelling and the Persistence of Desire in Zora Neale Hurston’s ‘Their Eyes Were Watching God.’” She received a summer graduate grant that allowed her to do research on the novel. (4)
- **March 2012** - University President Alice P. Gast writes an editorial to the Brown and White thanking the graduate women who paved the way for Lehigh’s coeducational undergraduate student body. (4)
- **October 2013** - Earth and Environmental Sciences Masters candidate Michelle Spicer is highlighted for her work on Lehigh’s ‘Experimental Forest’: “The experimental forest serves as a living lab for students at Lehigh, as well as offers fantastic opportunities for research...It’s also a historical place on Lehigh’s campus where students can go to appreciate nature and learn.” (4, 7)
- **March 2017** - Christina Hermann, graduate student in the College of Education, partakes in research with Office of Gender Violence, Education, and Support and College of Education regarding Lehigh students’ attitudes towards consent. Hermann joins Brooke DeSipio and Chris Liang to conduct focus groups to talk more about their survey findings and hopes to then reform university policies, Lehigh’s educational programs, and overall consent training. (4)
- **July 2017** - Humanities librarian and doctoral student Heather Simoneau and graduate student Katie Hurlock (along with special collections) open “Jane Austen and the Rise of Feminism: Women Writers as Agents of Change” on July 18th to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Jane Austen’s death. The exhibit will remain open until December 23rd. Hurlock completed most of the research and writing for the exhibit and hopes the exhibit can foreground important feminist themes and give the female authors on display the recognition they deserve. (4)

- **December 2017** - The Brown and White publishes “An Open Letter to President Simon” regarding concerns as to how the Path to Prominence plan will affect graduate students. (4)
- **May 2018** - English Professor Michael Kramp’s eight person filmmaking studio course premieres their documentary “Mentored: Sexual Misconduct in Graduate School” on May 3rd. Many graduate students and faculty are ready and willing to tell this story. The documentary reflects the broader cultural moment and Lehigh’s social climate. (4).

Sources:

1. Lehigh Coeducation Timeline
2. A History of Graduate Work at Lehigh
3. LAB 1996
4. The Brown and White
5. Lehigh Course Catalogs
6. LAB 1935-1936 (volume 23, no. 8)
7. Lehigh and the Problem of Coeducation: A Study in Desirability and Feasibility by Lehigh University, Joint Commission on University Life (1969)
8. LAB 1965
9. Lehigh University, Commission on Minorities, Commission on Women (1990)
10. Lehigh News