



EDUCATION AND COMPENSATION: MAKING STRIDES IN BOTH

Recent Data Indicate Women Approaching Parity

Women have made enormous strides in education. Over the past century, the majority of high school graduates have been women and in the past 20 years, women have moved ahead of men in terms of the shares of Bachelor's and Master's degrees earned.

But although the margin is narrowing, one area that has yet to achieve parity is compensation.

Women's earnings as year-round, full-time employees are only 74 percent of their male counterparts, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Hitting the Books

As **Figure 1** indicates, the number of female college graduates has steadily increased. In 1900, only 5,200 Bachelor's degrees were conferred to women. But by 1997, that number had skyrocketed to 652,400 Bachelor's degrees.

The number of earned Bachelor degrees for

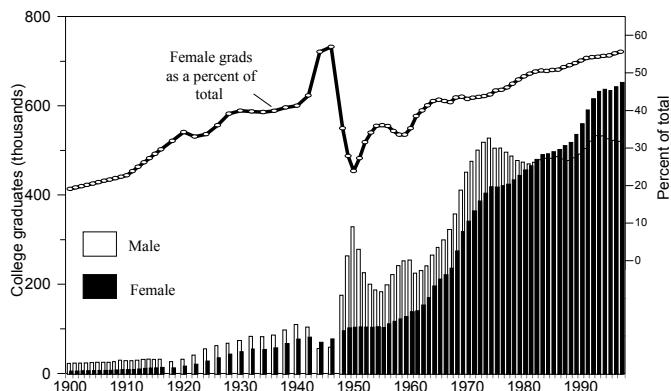
women rose so rapidly that in 1982, women graduates began outnumbering male graduates.

Male enrollment, however, has not been as consistent. Financed by the G.I. bill, World War II veterans returned home to complete their education, explaining the rise in male college graduates in the early 1950's. But by the mid-1970's, male enrollment tapered off.

Not only did female enrollment increase on the undergraduate level, but on the graduate level as well. Seeking an education in fields that were held solely by men in the early 1900's, women wanted more than just their Bachelor's degrees, setting their sights on the fields of Medicine and Law.

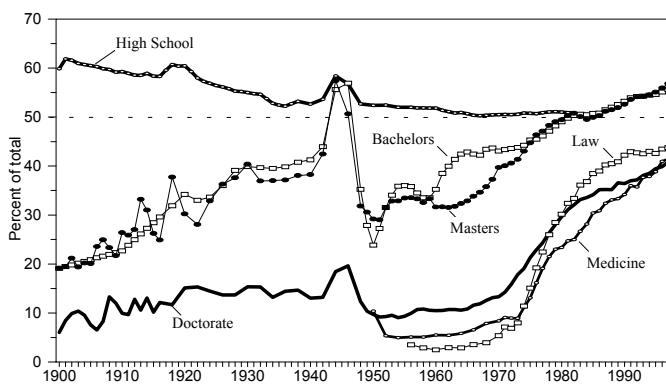
Figure 2 shows that enormous strides have been made toward parity in both Medicine and Law. In 1950, only 600 women received degrees in Medicine. By 1997, that number had increased by more than 1000 percent to 6,500 degrees in Medicine. In

Figure 1. –College Graduates, by Sex



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1999

Figure 2. –Proportion of Degrees Conferred Received by Women



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1999.

1960, only 200 women earned Law degrees. By 1997, that number rose to some 17,500 Law degrees.

Just three decades ago, women received less than 10 percent of the degrees in these fields. But women have advanced to such a level that they are now earning more than 41 percent of the degrees in Medicine and nearly 44 percent of the degrees in Law.

Based on these statistics, if women continue this progression in the next ten years as they have during the last ten, they will earn the same number of degrees in Medicine and Law as their male counterparts.

Hitting Their Pocketbooks

Compensation, however, is a different topic altogether. Men who work year-round, full-time have always earned more than women in the same professions. But as can be seen in **Figure 3**, that margin has narrowed considerably since the early 1970's. In 1960, the median earnings for women were a mere \$17,000 compared to the median

earnings for men at \$27,800. By 1998, that number climbed to \$27,000 for women and \$35,000 for men.

The drop in women's earnings in the early 1980's and early 1990's is due largely to economic instability; men's earnings also experienced a dropping off. Both resumed

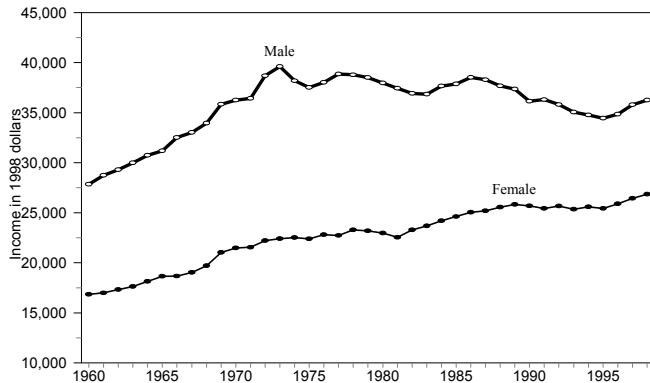
an upward trend in the late 1990's.

In 1973, women only earned 57 percent of what men earned. Less than three decades later, women earn 74 percent of what men earn.

Conclusion

Education has long been a top priority for women. Some have even postponed marriage and raising children in order to earn a graduate degree. But even with their

Figure 3. –Median Money Earnings of Year-Round, Full-Time Workers, by Sex



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, "Money Income in the United States: 1999," P60-209, September 2000.

enormous strides in education, women still do not command the same earnings as their male counterparts. There is reason to believe women will reach parity with men in terms of the number of degrees earned in the fields of Medicine and Law. But as for compensation, parity may still be a long way off.