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Kelly Yordy
Indiana State University

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Women's First Vocational Advisers: Marion Talbot and the Early Deans of Women

Kelly A. Yordy

Indiana State University

In her progressive pamphlet, “After College, What?,” Helen Ekin Starrett (1896) recounted the story of a father whose four daughters, all Vassar College graduates, were living at home and were unsure of their purpose and what they were to do next. “I’m not so certain about this higher education for girls and women,” said the father, “for the reason that I don’t see what they are going to do with it” (pp. 5-6). Such uncertainties surrounding the vocational opportunities and aspirations of the early women college students were commonplace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the vocational guidance philosophies and practices of deans of women at colleges and universities in the early twentieth century. Specifically, this study will examine the work and legacy of Marion Talbot, long-serving Dean of Women at the University of Chicago, and it will seek to explore the question: how were women college students advised in determining their future vocations in the early twentieth century?

A succinct outline of the research methodology will be provided, followed by a thorough presentation of the relevant findings. This outline includes a brief history of women in higher education, the role of the dean of women and Marion Talbot, the need for vocational guidance, and how vocational guidance was conducted on college and university campuses—particularly at the University of Chicago. A discussion of the findings pertaining to its immediate and long-term impact on higher education will follow. Finally, the study will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Methodology

I began the research process by first meeting with the head librarian at my institution. After explaining my research question, he walked me through the appropriate search engines and created a list of the keyword searches that would solicit the most relevant results without leaving

gaps in the literature. Next, I utilized WorldCat Research Station and other related catalogs in search of germane primary and secondary sources. After selecting a wide range of journal articles and books, I perused the literature to gain a broad understanding of the topic. I then traveled to the University of Chicago archives in search of primary resources relating to Marion Talbot and vocational guidance. The information I obtained from the University of Chicago completed the data collection stage of the research process. I then analyzed the data by carefully examining each source while categorizing the information by theme through a coding process. I proceeded to outline and write the presentation of the findings.

Findings

This section will begin with a brief background of women's access into higher education, followed by an examination of the general role of the dean of women and the specific role of Marion Talbot at the University of Chicago. Next, a justification for the necessity of vocational guidance will be presented. Finally, how vocational guidance was conducted on college and university campuses—particularly at the University of Chicago—will be explained.

The Dawn of the Dean of Women

Women's access into higher education. Women were excluded from higher education prior to the nineteenth century (Solomon, 1985; Thelin, 2011). Their entrance into higher education was first granted through the female colleges in the early 1800s, and by the mid-1800s, with “the rising expectations of feminists and others who had longed to ‘go off with the boys to college,’” (Solomon, 1985, p. 43), women gained entrance into coeducational institutions. “In the next fifty years, female education did become a ‘demand of the age.’ By 1900 women had access to widely varied institutions . . .” (Solomon, 1985, p. 43).

Access did not guarantee genuine access, however (Nidiffer, 2000). Many colleges and universities gradually and reluctantly permitted women into their institutions, initially only allowing them to enroll in certain “female” departments such as domestic service or normal programs (Nidiffer, 2000). As women gained access into what were previously men-only institutions, or as new coeducational institutions were established, the need for supporting women students was realized.

Dean of women: A new position. The newly developed office of the dean of women was created primarily to support this new demographic of students. College and university presidents began to appoint female faculty members to advise, assist, and counsel the women students (Schwartz, 1997). As Holmes (1939) explained, the role of dean of women was “developed in response to the increasing complexities and problems resultant upon the introduction of co-education in some colleges and universities” (p. 1). More specifically, Holmes explained the purpose of the dean of women on college and university campuses as well as the wide range of her responsibilities:

There soon developed . . . the necessity for the proper supervision of the social life of the students; the need to prove physical ability of the women to stand the strain of work in competition with men—the health problem; the necessity for finding and maintaining suitable living quarters for the women students; and the question of a suitable education for women—the curriculum problem. (p. 17)

In her research on the early deans of women, Nidiffer (2000) found that “while male administrators often believed that admission to the institution was all that women needed, women deans grasped that the situation was more complex” (p. 3). The deans of women recognized that in addition to the physiological needs noted by Holmes (1939), women students

also had higher-level needs, “such as intellectual parity, career aspirations, leadership opportunities, and a sense of community” (Nidiffer, 2000, p. 3). More significantly, according to Nidiffer, “deans comprehended that both levels of need required consideration in order for women to have the full benefit of a university education” (p. 3).

The roles and responsibilities of the deans of women were vast indeed. However the presidents rarely prescribed a job description to the deans, as they simply wanted the deans of women to take care of the “women’s issues” on campus (Holmes, 1939; Nidiffer, 2000; Rosenberry, 1915). The University of Chicago was no exception, and Dean Marion Talbot created an extensive list of her responsibilities for President Harper. These functions included: (a) correspondence, (b) consultation (i.e. advice to students and recommendations to administration), (c) attendance at meetings, (d) all issues pertaining to women graduate students, (e) social organizations, (f) publicity and hospitality, (g) women’s residence halls, and (h) general social and personal matters (Talbot, M., 1854-1948, *The dean of women and her functions*, Box 4, Folder 1). While Dean Talbot’s daily tasks were essential to the well-being and success of her students, the impact of her accomplishments far exceeded such tasks.

Marion Talbot: University of Chicago Dean of Women. Despite the controversy surrounding co-educational institutions in the nineteenth century, John D. Rockefeller and William Rainey Harper included education for women in their vision for the University of Chicago. President Harper recruited Alice Freeman Palmer, former president of Wellesley College, to serve as the first dean of women at the University of Chicago in 1892 (Mercado & Turk, 2009). At the insistence of Palmer, Harper recruited Talbot away from her faculty position at Wellesley College to serve in a faculty position at the University of Chicago and as Palmer’s associate in the dean of women’s office (Holmes, 1939).

In her autobiography, *More Than Lore*, Talbot (1936) described her transition to the University of Chicago:

As plans took shape for administering the new University of Chicago, Mrs. Palmer told me about what was involved and said that she wished me to assist in organizing the life of the women students and be a full member of the Faculty. (p. 146)

Because of Palmer's arrangement with Harper to spend only twelve weeks per year on campus, Talbot "had all the actual responsibilities of the position of Dean of Women on campus" (Holmes, 1939, pp. 36-37). When Palmer resigned from her position just three years later, Talbot succeeded Palmer as the Dean of Women. Talbot encountered a plethora of issues affecting women college students throughout her tenure as dean of women, not the least of which pertained to the complicated subject of women's vocational aspirations.

Women's Vocational Dilemma

Expansion from teaching as the sole occupation. As Solomon (1985) explained, women's achievement of access into higher education was not solely the result of their own efforts. The popularization of public education, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the general growth of higher education during that period all positively contributed to women's access into higher education. In her exploration of the history of the position of dean of women, Holmes (1939) maintained, "The Civil War had done much to liberate women from their traditional limitations, and had really won for American women the right to a higher education" (p. 98).

While the Civil War, among other factors, may have engendered access to higher education for women, the purpose of women's education was limited in that it existed primarily to serve society as teachers. Rosenberry (1915) explained:

Since the Civil War the enormous expansion of business has left teaching to the feminine part of the community because of the greater rewards offered men through professional life and mercantile enterprises. As long as teaching was the occupation for which ninety-nine percent of the women who went to work after college wished to prepare, it was not necessary to search about for other courses. (p. 109)

Thus, largely the extent of the courses available to women prepared them for teaching positions and further education in the domestic services (Nidiffer, 2000; Rosenberry, 1915).

Not all women were satisfied with teaching as their singular vocational prospect, however, nor were all women gifted for this occupation. According to Rosenberry (1915):

[It] became evident that a number of young women were going into teaching, not because of an inherent love for the work, or a selfless passion for training young minds and lives, but because it was the obvious and about the only thing which a young college woman who had her own living to make could do. (p. 110)

In her report to the president, Marion Talbot posited, “There are unquestionably many college women who look forward to teaching as a profession, but they are not so numerous as is popularly supposed, and their proportion is steadily growing less” (University of Chicago, 1904, p. 139). Talbot (1910b) credited the Industrial Revolution as the “most striking” factor in the changing interests of women in recent decades (p. 10). Because many of the traditional household activities transitioned to the factory system, some women with financial and other means had become free to consider vocations outside of the home and beyond the classroom (Talbot, 1910b).

“After college, what?” College women were beginning to sense their broadening vocational options, but perhaps because of this shift, many women were unsure of their

vocational aspirations post-college (Starrett, 1896; Talbot, 1910a). As a result, women graduates who did not have a clear occupational plan felt misplaced and disoriented in the post-college world (Nidiffer, 2000; Starrett, 1896). In her pamphlet “After College, What?” Starrett (1896) lamented the struggle of the recent woman college graduate: “Were the secrets of the heart revealed, it could surely be shown, that in the case of thousands of educated girls and women . . . the first year or years after leaving school or college were years of deep and perplexing unhappiness” (p. 9). Marion Talbot’s personal experience typified this arduous post-graduation period:

Marion Talbot came out of college to a world with which she had little in common, and to a life of comparative leisure to which she was entirely unaccustomed. It would evidently be highly desirable to choose a definite occupation for which her preparation fitted her; but the choice would have to be made in spite of difficulties and uncertainties . . . Here, then, was Marion Talbot with a college degree and an absorbing desire to make herself and her education useful, but with as barren an outlook for such a future as one can imagine. (Talbot & Rosenberry, 1931, p. 5)

Talbot’s experience, while short-lived, was not uncharacteristic of the women graduates of that era (Nidiffer, 2000), and as she and others were granted occupational access to college campuses across the country, they began to collaborate.

The Vocational Guidance Movement

Association of collegiate alumnae. One year after her graduation from Boston University (Talbot, 1936), Marion Talbot, along with sixteen colleagues representing eight colleges and universities, convened to discuss the needs of college-educated women (American Association of University Women [AAUW], n.d.). It was at this meeting in 1881 that the

Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA) was formed. In subsequent decades the association's membership grew, and it established a branch structure, conducted research, and granted fellowships—to identify a few of their numerous accomplishments (AAUW, n.d.).

Fully aware of the need for vocational guidance for college women, the association voted to establish a committee called Vocational Opportunities Other Than Teaching at the October, 1909 annual meeting (Association of Collegiate Alumnae [ACA], 1910; Talbot & Rosenberry, 1931). The purpose of the committee was to “study the opportunities for trained women other than teaching and endeavor to secure a uniform method among colleges of keeping records of the occupational experience of their graduates” (Talbot & Rosenberry, 1931, p. 231). The committee suggested that, “ways and means be devised by universities for bringing the vocational experiences and successes of alumnae more adequately and vividly before the student body through addresses by graduates prominent in various occupations” (Talbot & Rosenberry, 1931, p. 233).

One of the committee's successful endeavors included a comprehensive study culminating in a list of institutions training educated women for occupations other than teaching (ACA, 1913). This detailed compilation was arranged alphabetically by occupations as well as by institutions and it included courses under each occupation (ACA, 1913). In part due to the advancements achieved by this committee, “concern about vocational opportunities for women was rampant by 1912” (Nidiffer, 2000, p. 120).

Deans of women as vocational advisers. The role of advising college women's vocational aspirations was, largely by default, the responsibility of the deans of women on co-educational campuses (Woody, 1929). While Starrett (1896) stipulated that “the college girl will learn to think ahead, to prepare and to plan for a life of definite and useful activity after she

leaves college” (p. 15), many college women needed assistance in navigating the newly available occupations. “And since the lesson of what to do with a college education when it is gained is of such vital importance to the college girl, how great is the moral responsibility of those who occupy the position of instructors and mentors during the college life” (Starrett, 1896, p. 25).

The deans of women embraced this responsibility and “began to believe that they could, through guidance, role-modeling, and exposure to new ideas and possibilities, change the career aspirations of young women away from the traditionally female, traditionally underpaid vocations” (Nidiffer, 2000, p. 93). In light of this recent awareness, “Vocational concerns were frequent subjects of conversations at professional meetings, and several deans addressed the lack of vocational opportunities on their campuses” (Nidiffer, 2000, p. 95).

The question remains, though: how did the deans of women address the need for vocational guidance, and how did they implement vocational guidance on their campuses? In her 1915 work *The Dean of Women*, Rosenberry, who served as the Dean of Women and Associate Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, dedicated one of eight chapters to vocational guidance. In this chapter, she described the importance of the role of dean of women as a vocational adviser and outlined a recommended course of action for deans of women:

There are certain definite things which a dean of women may do in the matter of vocational education. First of all, she should see to it that each year there is held a vocational conference, at which the newer forms of teaching . . . shall be discussed, as well as occupations other than teaching. For each subject there should be available a specialist, who stands high among her colleagues, who shall tell what preparation is necessary, what resources, mental and material, are wise, and what openings are actually at hand in her field. After she has presented her subject, there should be provided an

informal conference hour in which those young women who are especially interested shall have the opportunity to receive the speaker's individual attention and by questions and answers make the best possible use of the advice and information thus brought to them. (p. 120)

In addition to vocational conferences, Rosenberry (1915) also advocated for a systematic approach to counseling women in their vocational futures. According to Rosenberry, the dean of women, or one of her staff, "must be ready at all times" to discuss vocational options with individual students (p. 124). Anticipating the large quantity of possible conversations this availability might generate, Rosenberry suggested a card catalog system to organize the information. She even provided an example of a "Vocational Direction" card, which included pertinent demographic information, major and minors of study, and two questions: "Do you expect to be self-supporting?" and "What vocation do you prefer?" (p. 124).

In her final counsel to deans of women, Rosenberry (1915) urged:

The person giving advice should, of course, have had a wide knowledge along the line of . . . vocational education . . . One's information must be broad and deep before one attempts to turn young women into fields where returns are still uncertain and the demand inconstant . . . To divert young women out of the beaten path into the field of pioneer work must be done with the greatest care, after every factor on both sides—that of the work and of the worker—has been considered long and earnestly. (p. 125)

Clearly, women's recent extension into occupations other than teaching was a germane topic to the deans of women at the time.

These practical solutions offered by Rosenberry (1915) were later supported by Woody (1929) in his extensive work, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*. Woody

recommended that vocational guidance be provided by the office of the dean of women or the vocational services office:

It is evident from the complicated nature of the problem that it needs the service of a staff as much as the teaching of any subject in the college course. The head of vocational service must eventually be recognized as one of the faculty, must handle such course or courses as are needed to open up vocational opportunities, and bring the professor into as intimate a knowledge of the whole group of students as possible. There must be a liberal allotment of time for personal interviews. (p. 213)

While Woody alluded to the establishment of vocational services and a position of “head” of vocational services, he explained how “guidance [was] generally carried on . . . through deans of women, but specifically prepared vocational advisors have increased greatly in the past ten years” (p. 213).

Dean Talbot: Pioneer in Vocational Guidance for Women

Historians appropriately recognize the ACA, and specifically its committee on Vocational Opportunities Other Than Teaching, for igniting the vocational guidance movement for college women in the early 1900s (Dollar, 1992; Nidiffer, 2000). One would be amiss, however, to disregard the vocational guidance advancements that occurred at the institutional level prior to the formation of the committee.

Curricular modifications at the University of Chicago. Talbot is acknowledged as a pioneer in vocational guidance for women and for achieving great advances in this area (Dollar, 1992; Holmes, 1939; Nidiffer, 2000). Preceding these efforts, however, Talbot also recognized the necessity for curricular adjustments to meet the changing needs of college women as they considered a wider array of vocational options (Talbot, 1910). According to Holmes (1939),

Talbot “worked out a plan for modifications in the curriculum so as to adapt it more perfectly to the changing domestic and social conditions in the life of women” (p. 99). In an effort to “direct women, in terms of fitness, into other lines than teaching” (p. 231), Talbot and Rosenberry (1931) maintained that it was important, “in considering the curriculum, [to] give earnest attention to the question of addition of courses which shall meet these needs” (p. 231).

According to the 1908-1909 University of Chicago President’s Report:

In the spring of 1909, the Dean of Women, assisted by Dean Breckenridge, made a provisional scheme for modifications in the curriculum which would insist more rigidly on fundamental subjects, permit greater freedom in the choice of electives with reference to the student’s proposed vocation, and provide further development of the physical and social training.” (University of Chicago, 1910, pp. 97-98)

The proposed plan outlined the work of the undergraduate woman student falling within three groups:

1. Specifically required courses as, for example, English and physical training which are of fundamental importance.
2. General requirements, as, for example, history and science from which students choose with some freedom, and which are necessary for general training.
3. Elective courses, from which the student chooses with complete freedom. (Talbot, M., 1854-1948, Correspondence, Box 5, Folder 11)

Talbot continued by emphasizing the importance of undergraduate women entering college with a proposed course plan in mind. The choice of studies therefore, was made intelligently and with purpose, in a manner that produced the most effective and satisfactory results (Talbot, M., 1854-

1948, Correspondence, Box 5, Folder 11). Finally, staying true to her role as adviser, Talbot offered her assistance to the students:

Students are invited to seek the cooperation and counsel of the deans and members of the faculty, and women students are especially invited to consult the Dean of Women so that at the next registration they will have a carefully considered plan in mind.” (Talbot, M., 1854-1948, Correspondence, Box 5, Folder 11)

Talbot’s ability to recognize the growing needs of her students is part of what identifies her as a pioneer in the field.

Co-curricular initiatives at the University of Chicago. Following Talbot and Breckenridge’s curricular modifications in the spring of 1909, the ACA annual meeting and the formation of the committee on Vocational Opportunities Other Than Teaching occurred in October of 1909 (ACA, 1910). Because Talbot was not appointed to the committee (ACA, 1910), she could have chosen to wait for their report and suggestions for improving vocational guidance for women. However, she returned to the University of Chicago after that annual meeting and quickly began to seek understanding of the vocational needs of her students. Two months later, in December of 1909, Talbot and Breckenridge interviewed ninety-six freshmen and sophomore women to inquire about their anticipated choice of vocation (Talbot, 1910b). The purpose of this study, according to the 1909-10 University of Chicago President’s Report, was to determine the distribution of vocational choices of the college women across the academic fields offered to women. Holmes (1939) reported that in addition to learning their preferences for vocation, the purpose of the study was also “to learn their reasons for attending college . . . her home circumstances, her plan for the future, and to help her with ways and means of increasing the significance of her college experience” (p. 99).

As a result of the study, Talbot was able to create programmatic initiatives that supported women in the discovery of vocational opportunities as well as those who reconsidered their chosen vocation. These programmatic initiatives took the form of a series of vocational conferences in early 1910. All freshmen and sophomore women were invited, but because of the limited time available before course registration, seven meetings were held simultaneously on one day and nine on another day (University of Chicago, 1911). Department heads and qualified faculty spoke about “the essentials of good education, the opportunities for women in different vocations, and the facilities offered in the University for training to enter the different fields” (University of Chicago, 1911, p. 95).

Talbot took the opportunity to advise the women one step further, and reported to the president that “use was made of the knowledge thus gained, and each student was shown how even the courses which were prescribed could be related to the student’s specific needs” (University of Chicago, 1911, p. 95). In continuing the report of the successful program, Talbot maintained, “The most convincing feature of this experiment was the evident vitalizing of the college experience” (p. 95).

Talbot and Breckenridge spent an incredible amount of time interviewing the students, creating the report, planning the vocational conferences, and following up with students individually throughout the course registration process. The college women benefitted immensely from their vocational guidance efforts, including an “added zest and enjoyment to what would have proved otherwise a more or less perfunctory task” (University of Chicago, 1911, p. 95). Holmes (1939) aptly noted, “By 1910, a methodological approach to the problem of vocational guidance for women had been initiated at the University of Chicago” (pp. 99-100).

As a vanguard in this field, Talbot's work in advancing vocational guidance for college women was certainly significant to her students and to higher education, and it was personally rewarding to her as well. In reflecting upon her transition into retirement, Talbot (1936) recollected that a "well-meaning but not very successful dean of women said, 'I congratulate you—now you can do what you want to do.' I flared back, 'That is what I have been doing all these years—if it had not seemed the most worthwhile thing I could do, I would have dropped it instantly'" (p. 217).

Discussion

Impact on Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century

Marion Talbot: Women's advocate. The far-reaching influence of Marion Talbot on higher education in the early twentieth century is immeasurable. In 1915, Dean Rosenberry posited, "None of us yet perceive what vocational guidance may do; but of its value we have clean-cut convictions" (p. 126). While that may have been true to a certain extent, even prior to 1915, Talbot achieved great progress first at the University of Chicago, and then at other institutions, in the realms of vocational guidance and genuine access into higher education for women college students. As with any movement worth championing, however, Talbot experienced great personal hardship when hope seemed lost and progress appeared impossible:

It may be thought that women have now this intellectual freedom, but they have not. As I sit at my desk or by my fireside and talk with women, sometimes on the threshold of life and sometimes with years of experience behind them, I am often painfully conscious of the disappointments and sacrifices which the social and academic standards of our time impose and I long to raise my voice for true intellectual liberty for every one of these hungering minds. (Talbot, M., 1854-1948, Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 6)

Undoubtedly, Talbot's journey was marked with adversity. Her impact on higher education, however, and her legacy as an advocate for women's education is evident throughout her career. During a time when "many people, especially physicians, were objecting to collegiate training for women on the ground that it was physically disastrous" (Talbot, 1936, p. 145), Talbot maintained that women were the intellectual equals of men (Nidiffer, 2000). Accordingly, Talbot defended the coeducational classroom:

Testimony comes in continually, and from many sources, that far from lowering the standard of scholarship, the influence of women students has been such as to raise it. This is shown more directly from two angles. The proportion of women students reported for unsatisfactory work is distinctly lower than that of men, and at the other end, the proportion of women winning honors is higher. I may add that this is perhaps a source of embarrassment to some of the men who emphasize sex lines. (Talbot, M., 1854-1948, Talbot to Clough, December 18, 1919)

Although women had already proved themselves successful in the coeducational classroom, "The public was not yet wholly committed to higher education for women under any circumstances, and to admit women . . . to the same classes in which men sat, seemed to present grave dangers" (Holmes, 1939, p. 5). For some students, their own family members doubted the purpose and necessity of a college education for women. Talbot received numerous letters from concerned fathers and sought to quell their apprehensions by outlining the abundant benefits of a college education for their daughters (Talbot, M., 1854-1948, Talbot to De La Mater, November 25, 1910).

Professionalization of the dean of women position. Talbot's influence spread beyond individual students and the University of Chicago. Through her work with the ACA, Talbot was

critical in professionalizing the role of the dean of women. Because the college presidents provided minimal direction in terms of job descriptions, the deans of women, led by Marion Talbot, recognized an opportunity to professionalize their occupation. According to Nidiffer (2000):

The catalyst and central actor in this process was Marion Talbot. Her vision for the potential of dean of women, her skill at organizing professional meetings, and her contributions to the field of women's education made her integral to the professionalization process. (p. 35)

Like Talbot, the deans of women "worked hard to 'professionalize' the position of dean and to legitimize their role on the predominantly male college campuses. As women they saw their role, profession, and gender as inextricably tied together" (Schwartz, 1997, pp. 504-505). Many deans of women pursued additional training and sought professional development to enhance their skills for their new positions. As a result, in 1916, a graduate program designed specifically to train deans of women was established at Columbia University, and shortly after, the National Association of Deans of Women was established (Schwartz, 1997).

By the mid-1930s, the professionalization of the deans of women was firmly established. According to Schwartz (1997):

[The] first deans were well-respected academic women who had committed themselves to their disciplines. While they were determined to provide counsel and support to young women, they also focused on the prerequisites of scholarship as the road to respect in academe. Accordingly, the early deans wrote books, conducted research, published articles, and established professional associations. (p. 509)

Collectively, the day-to-day elements of their positions, coupled with their research, publications, and professional involvements, culminated in advancing the position of dean of women into a legitimate, professionalized vocation that would impact the field of higher education for many years to come.

Impact on Higher Education Today

The legacy of Marion Talbot and the impact of her work, along with the work of her colleagues, certainly did not subside when the position of dean of women gradually ceased to exist in the mid-twentieth century. According to Schwartz (1997):

They laid the foundations of professional practice for higher education administration and student services, including graduate study, the development of professional associations, research on students, college environments, and student guidance and counseling . . . as a profession, they established a clear pattern of leadership, guiding unprecedented numbers of young women through the gauntlet of college life . . . The entire field of student services, from admission and orientation to student activities, to residential housing to career services, can be traced to the work of the deans of women. (pp. 504-505)

Unarguably, the work of the early deans of women left a profound and lasting impact on higher education. “There is no question that higher education would be far different without the active and necessary involvement of women as students, faculty, administrators, and leaders” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 519).

It is important to study and learn from the pioneers who paved the way for modern educators today as understanding the past provides richness and informs the identity of modern-day higher education professionals. On February 20, 1936, Marion Talbot was honored at the Convention of the National Association of Deans of Women. Her former colleagues paid tribute

to her many contributions on behalf of women everywhere: “You are a builder of womanhood. You have up-stepped woman on the planet; you have builded strong and firm; your work will stand through the ages. The world is better in womanhood because you have passed this way” (Leonard, 1936, p. 2). Whether realized or not, the work and legacy of Marion Talbot continues to influence and enrich scholars and practitioners in their work with students on college and university campuses everywhere.

Conclusion

The preceding findings and related discussion have sought to examine how women were advised and supported in vocational aspirations upon their early access into higher education, particularly at coeducational institutions. However, a plethora of opportunities for future research exist. Specifically, while the scope of this study focused largely on Marion Talbot and her vocational guidance work at the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century, a broader review would include a greater number of women deans at a variety of institutions. Furthermore, the literature revealed a shift and rejuvenation in vocational guidance for women surrounding World War I and its aftermath. If the span of this study could be widened, it would include an examination into vocational guidance for women during this time period, and perhaps into World War II as well.

Although women have both successfully and firmly achieved genuine access into higher education and have remained the majority sex of all undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions since 1979 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013), women continue to encounter barriers at the highest levels of leadership in all organizational types across the country. As Rikleen (2012) posited, “Although female graduates continue to pour out of colleges and professional schools, the percentages of women running large companies, serving as

managing partners of their law firms, or sitting on corporate boards have barely budged in the past decade” (para. 1).

Thus, an examination of the relationship between the continued absence of women in high-level leadership and the vocational guidance efforts (or lack thereof) of colleges and universities across the United States for its women students is greatly needed. One might even consider if the vocational advising efforts of the early deans of women were more intentionally driven to support women in their vocational opportunities and advancement than is occurring on today’s college and university campuses.

Undoubtedly, much has transpired for women in higher education since Helen Ekin Starrett wrote her illuminating pamphlet, “After College, What?” in 1896, including the cessation of the role of the dean of women. However, her final admonition is still relevant for higher education today:

When such instructors, such professors, such inspired helpers and sympathizers and advisers for the young are found, let colleges and universities cherish them, for they are the ones who will best help our daughters to answer that momentous question, “After College, What?” (p. 27)

By embracing the opportunity to learn from the legacy of Marion Talbot and other deans of women, college and university educators today will be able to continue equipping women to answers such questions in meaningful and enduring ways.

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