August 2017

Standing Out: Women In the Marriott School

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Recommended Citation

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Standing Out: Women in the Marriott School

By Shelby Anderson
The stated purpose of the Marriott School of Business (MSB) is to “attract, develop, place, and continue to engage men and women of faith, character, and professional ability who will become outstanding leaders and positively influence a world we wish to improve.” The Marriott School has created outstanding undergraduate and graduate programs that frequently are ranked among the top of the United States and its men and women graduates are leaders with positive influence on a global scale. Engaging both men and women, however, has proven to be a challenge.

The number of women in the 2016 entry class of each Marriott School program is listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Percentage of Women per Marriott School Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Percentage of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Systems</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation Management</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAcc</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISM</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information source: marriottschool.byu.edu

Of the programs offered at the Marriott School, only two programs, (1) Recreation Management and (2) Master of Public Administration, had enrollment consisting of more than 26% women. These numbers do not solve the overall gender disparity in Marriott School enrollment because both of those programs are relatively small. In 2016, only 47 students were enrolled in the MPA Program and the Recreation Management program had 105 students. In comparison, the enrollment for women in MIT’s MBA program is 40% women, which is double the percentage for the Marriott School. More than 45% of the BYU student body are women. Thus, female BYU students are significantly underrepresented in the Marriott School.

To some, the statistics offered in Figure 1 are not a problem. A female BYU student, they would argue, has the same opportunities as a male BYU student to participate in any Marriott School program. In fact, many believe that a female candidate has a better chance of program acceptance because administrators are sensitive to the optics of low-diversity. If those things are true, they would conclude that underrepresentation of women is a choice.

However, that conclusion ignores the stated mission of the Marriott School to engage both men and women of faith and the vital contribution women can make in the business world.

Suggesting that female BYU students have the same opportunities as their male counterparts ignores the cultural expectations, academic treatment, and lack of mentors for young LDS women that contribute to the gender disparity in Marriott School enrollment.

Although the Marriott School is not perfect in recruiting an equal number of men and women to pursue a degree in business or work as faculty, improvements are being made each year. Six years ago, the Women in Business club began with just 20 members. Last year, the club had over 500 members.

The Women in Business club also provides underclassmen with the opportunity to be mentored by their fellow peers who have already been accepted into their desired major in the Marriott School and held internships. Additional clubs such as Women in the School of Accountancy and Women in Finance have been created to support and aid females striving to excel in the programs in which most students are males.
CULTURAL EXPECTATION

Mormon leaders have long encouraged women to attain an education. In 2007, then-president of the LDS church, Gordon B. Hinckley told young women, “You must get all of the education that you possibly can.” Yet the cultural expectations for LDS women differ from the advice given by President Hinckley.

After a series of interviews about the intersection of gender and career choice among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 2016, researchers presented the “religious schema” of the LDS church. Not surprisingly, the researchers concluded that LDS members are expected to marry and have children early. Then, women are expected to become the primary caretakers and men the primary breadwinners. The researchers concluded, however, that these gendered expectations hurt both men and women. Those expectations also don’t align with reality – many LDS women work outside the home.

Young LDS women face a paradox. They are encouraged to receive an education, but not expected to use that education towards a career. Yet almost half of LDS women find themselves in the workforce. With marriage and motherhood as the ultimate goal, young women sometimes do not receive the same academic expectation and encouragement as young men. Instead, young women face increased pressure to marry rather than to succeed in a business career.

As a result, LDS women often pursue what they perceive to be “family-friendly” careers. A 2003 study of young LDS women found that most women interviewed had selected gender-specific majors, like child development or education. Women not in traditionally female fields connected their major choice with their future home. There appears to be a lack of consideration for the idea that a more lucrative business career might be more “family friendly” than a job that requires more hours outside the home to achieve the same economic results. Long before a female student enters BYU, she has been raised in a culture that both underestimates the reality of employment outside the home and encourages a career path that doesn’t maximize the value of that employment.

“As students, we should be more understanding that women and men can do whatever major they want. I’ve met a lot of women in [male-dominated majors] and think they’re very strong. You have to be very confident if you want to be in a [male-dominated] major. [I hope women] see that you can follow your path and not be afraid to be only one. You just have to be confident about it, and you’ll be successful. I’ve seen a lot of women come out of their shell and become so much more confident, because they are doing something that’s not as common. I hope that people recognize that and appreciate it.”

–Holland Sorenson

Of course, any commentary on culture lends itself to criticism for being overly broad in its generalizations. In that regard, the 2016 study noted that church members living outside of Utah and raised in middle- or upper-class families often rejected the “religious schema” of LDS culture. In those families that have achieved a greater measure of economic success, the research would suggest that it is more likely for young women to receive the same academic expectations and encouragement as young men. And there are certainly thousands of examples of women who have pursued degrees in the Marriott School.
But the hard truth reflected in the research and statistics is that young LDS women simply face a bigger challenge entering a competitive professional field. Without encouragement or expectation from their families, neighbors, and peers, a young woman may only enter the Marriott School of Business because her own interests and ambition helped overcome these cultural expectations.

**ACADEMIC TREATMENT**

The issues facing a woman in business don’t stop once she walks through the doors of the Tanner Building. Women at any university face significant challenges within the classroom. Harvard economics professor Claudia Goldin found that female students were far more sensitive to grade results. In an introductory economics course, women who received a B in the course were about half as likely to continue as women who received an A. Women are discouraged from continuing in a difficult major because they fear imperfection. Men are far less likely to be discouraged when faced with similar, lower grades.\(^{10}\)

Goldin’s research suggests that female students lack confidence in their ability to succeed in male-dominated fields. That lack of confidence is surely amplified in a culture that doesn’t encourage or expect academic achievement for women in business careers. Consequently, women who perceive their performance is lacking are far more likely than men to be discouraged from continuing in the Marriott School of Business.

Women also must work against implicit gender bias. Yale University professors evaluated the perception of science professors on the qualifications of different genders. Regardless of their own gender, the professors rated a male applicant as more competent and professional than an identical female applicant.\(^{11}\) Women are implicitly assumed to be less able than their male peers in STEM courses. This bias bleeds into the interactions between women and their professors. Women have the same intellect and abilities as men. As women self-select out of difficult majors, the remaining women are much more likely to be the stronger students.

Female students also face difficult interactions with their Marriott School peers. As a research assistant, I have had the job of recording interactions between female and male students in male-dominated majors. Although the results of the research have yet to be published, my anecdotal observation is that female students are ignored and interrupted far more than male students. Succeeding in such environments can be difficult for female students.
AVAILABLE MENTORS

Of the 162 full-time faculty members of the Marriott School of Business, only 20 are women.\textsuperscript{12} The Marriott School of Business has gender imbalance in both the faculty and the student body. Students benefit from mentoring relationships with faculty at BYU. Research positions, teaching opportunities, and letters of recommendation are invaluable and only available through personal relationships. A 2002 study found that women have a harder time forming and developing such relationships. The study also concluded that men often find it difficult to mentor women.\textsuperscript{13}

A male faculty member is more likely to struggle as a female student’s mentor. The dearth of female faculty members, however, leaves a small pool of female mentors available to students. Recent literature has suggested individuals benefit more from sponsorship (public promotion by a high-placed individual within their organization) than mentorship. Men are much more likely to have sponsors than women.\textsuperscript{14} Female faculty sponsorship at the Marriott School of Business could provide greater opportunities for female students.

“Are you the new secretary?” the student asked. I wasn’t. One of the few women in the room, I was the new club president. I had organized and led the meeting we were both attending. They had arrived late, I surmised, and missed my welcoming remarks. I understood that he wasn’t trying to be rude, but I still felt slighted.

-Shelby Anderson

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Latter-Day Saint President Gordon B. Hinckley said in 1988 that “[church members] believe and have taught consistently from the earliest days of the Church that a woman’s greatest mission in life is an honorable and happy marriage with the rearing of an honorable and happy family... Fulfilling that mission is not inconsistent with other activities. There are tremendous opportunities for women in the Church, the community, and professionally that are consistent with and in total harmony with marriage, motherhood, and the rearing of good and able children.\textsuperscript{15}” We also shouldn’t let the ideal cloud reality. The LDS goal of marriage and motherhood is not detrimental to professional pursuits, and the reality is that almost half of the women in the church will be employed outside the home. Female BYU students ought to be encouraged to pursue degrees in the Marriott School of Business.

The responsibility to enhance female representation in business majors falls on BYU students, faculty, administration, and the general Latter-Day Saint population. As a campus and culture, we should improve our expectations for women.

My mother was the first woman in her family to graduate from college and the first member of her family to earn a doctorate degree. I was raised in a home that valued education, encouraged my personal ambition, and held my brothers and me to the same standard. Every LDS woman and man ought to be raised with strong positive expectation about academic achievement and potential.

We can also combat implicit gender bias that both men and women have against women’s accomplishments.\textsuperscript{16} Students should learn to treat the accomplishments and abilities of female
students as equal to men. Students should also examine their personal perceptions of female business students, and question their behavior towards their peers. Do their actions contribute to an encouraging and supportive environment for women? Faculty members could receive training to develop female talent and provide appropriate mentorship to female students. The Marriott School of Business might consider recruiting more full-time female faculty. Female mentors and sponsors are excellent role models for students. The difficulties faced by LDS women in navigating a complicated culture of expectation would be better understood by female leadership.

The number of women studying at the Marriott School of Business has increased in recent years. The administrative leaders of MSB are aware and working on ways to support and promote the female students in the Marriott School (as illustrated by the establishment of such clubs as Women in Business). But, faculty and students can work together to preserve and further promote this advancement for future graduating classes at the Marriott School.

Notes


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