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A Partial History of Connecticut College

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A Partial History of Connecticut College

(conncollegehistory.lilahrap.com)

An Honors Thesis presented by
Lilah Raptopoulos

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors in the Major Field

Connecticut College
New London, Connecticut
May 2011

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/// ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ///

It seems too obvious to say that this project would not have been possible without the people who make up the Connecticut College community – it was built out of their foundation.

My gratitude belongs primarily to my two most important faculty mentors, Theresa Ammirati and Blanche Boyd. Dean Ammirati's office was my first home at Connecticut College: a place of refuge from a new, scary place. Her sympathy for students goes unparalleled; her quest to stimulate our intellects is admirable. She is marvelously fair. She also gave me deadlines, and for that I am eternally grateful.

I came to Connecticut College primarily to work with Blanche Boyd. She has great faith in her students, and a tremendous ability to strip us of our bad writing habits. When I wrote my first big story for the *College Voice*, she read it out loud in class, and for the first time, I was proud of my work. Blanche has made me feel comfortable calling myself a writer.

Thank you to the experts in the history of Connecticut College. To Nova Seals, for her endless patience, humor, and knowledge of the College's history. To Blake McDonald, a kindred spirit, for giving me a starting point. To reference librarian Jim MacDonald for his off-the-record guidance. To Ted Hendrickson, our community's accidental historian, for his shared nostalgia for the history of New London and the College.

So many professors at this college have contributed to my intellectual growth – among them is John Gordon, my first interview, who has a brilliant ability to cut through fluff. Thanks to him, I have removed “etc.” and “utilize” from my vocabulary forever. Additionally, Postdoctoral Fellow Allison de Fren helped cultivate my interest in media studies, and introduced me with glee to the term “hypermedia.”

This project gave me a good excuse to for conversation with a group of fascinating individuals. I am grateful to Oakes Ames, Jane Bredeson, and Claire Gaudiani for welcoming me into their homes, and to Betsy Carter Bannerman '62, Nancy Blitzer '45, Robley Evans, Norman Fainstein, Josh Friedlander '00, Lee Higdon, Carrie Kent '72, Rob Knake '01, Stephen Loomis, Nelly and Bernard Murstein, Peggy Sheridan '67, and Frank Tuitt '87 for their time, insights and honesty.

I think now's the time I mention my friends, who are intelligent, interesting, creative, provocative, unique, and distracting people that I love dearly. I'm grateful to Jacques Swartz, my ever-present, effervescent editor, for being wonderfully patient and full of ideas. And I'm very grateful to my family for deciding to have another kid. I thank Mom for her wisdom, Dad for his fairness, Elena for her perceptiveness, and Vanessa for her pride: they have given me the confidence I needed to ever attempt a project this large.

Finally: to Frederick H. Sykes, idealist and dreamer, and my favorite character in the history of Connecticut College.

///DEDICATION ///

My thesis is dedicated to the staff of the Connecticut College student newspapers, past and present. My experience on the staff of the *College Voice* has been the most fulfilling of my life. This project has given me a newfound respect for the student newspaper: it is the truest, most uncensored primary record of the College's history.

/// INTRODUCTION ///

In 1986, Dean of Students Alice Johnson attempted to write a social history called *In Their Own Words*, which combined her personal experience with archival research and students' lived experience of Connecticut College. The unfinished manuscript sits in a box in the Connecticut College Archives, in the second floor of Shain Library, waiting to be published.

This project is a new attempt at recording the history of Connecticut College that I have presented as a hypermedia narrative. It's multimedia, on a website, not in a book, as an attempt to give readers authority over how they choose to consume the story. The idea was born out of a few things: the first is a penchant for storytelling and a deep curiosity about the history of Connecticut College, my college. The second, my self-designed interdisciplinary major in New Media Studies, a humanities-based look into how new technology, specifically the Internet, is affecting the way people consume and interact with their news. The third, a four-year stint writing for, thinking about, and publishing the goings-on of our college as an editor of the student newspaper, *The College Voice*. And the last is a force that all graduating students feel: a desire to conclude four full years of intellectual and personal self-discovery.

As I began to put the pieces of this story together, I struggled to find the larger narrative within them. I started off with questions to direct my research: what characterizes Connecticut College? What are aspects of the experience to which students, faculty, staff and administrators can all relate? I hoped the College had a definable spirit, and wanted to pinpoint that spirit through stories from its history.

This question has no simple answer. As Oakes Ames put it to a consultant reiterating the question *what's special about Connecticut College*, "Look, this college isn't just like a white

canvas on the wall with a red slash across it, a piece of abstract art. It's not like that. It's got all kinds of pieces and parts, and the sum of them is what makes it special.”¹

Ames realized that despite the deep truth of this statement, it wasn't a tagline, and for a capital campaign, they needed to spotlight *one thing* that made Connecticut College special. They chose the faculty; an honorable focus. This thesis has more room to explore the question.

My thesis aims to push beyond the promotional material launched outside the college gates and create a focused, more realistic account of how members of the Connecticut College community have experienced this school day-to-day through its history. As years go by, its stories get lost in the impending present, or glossed over and reconfigured into shared myths. And yet the stories are the building blocks of our understanding of this college now, and in its centennial year, I have felt a strong impulse to seek them out and write them down.

The real *point* here, as I've learned from this journey and from Marshall McLuhan, is in the medium: to experiment with hypertextuality and with our sense of narrative by creating a story designed to give the consumer this power of choice. But as my research concludes, I have found that the spirit of this college can be understood through a few substantial characteristics. I will not share them now.

This narrative is speckled with hyperlinks that help tell the story through more than prose: pictures, scans of diary entries, video clips, digital recordings, and newspaper excerpts, to name a few. Consumers can choose where they want to start, where they want to go, and what, if anything, they want to click. The late writer David Foster Wallace was infamous for his liberal use of footnotes and endnotes to, as he once told Charlie Rose, parallel a new lived experience. “There is a way, it seems to me, that reality is fractured now, at least the reality that I live in,” he

¹ Personal Interview, Oakes Ames.

said. “The difficulty about writing about that reality is that text is very linear, it’s very unified. I, anyway, am constantly on the lookout for ways to fracture the text that aren’t totally disoriented. You can take the lines and jumble them up, and that’s nicely fractured, but nobody’s going to read it. There’s got to be some interplay between how difficult you make it for the reader and how seductive it is for the reader so that the reader is willing to do it.”² He also wrote to his editor, “I pray this is nothing like hypertext, but it seems to be interesting and the best way to get the exfoliating curve-line plot I wanted.”³

It’s understandable that Wallace wanted to protect his work from being associated with hypertext. It is a messy subgenre that feels still very unfinished: the poetry is ambiguous and untrustworthy, the fiction is often disorienting, and a hypertextual narrative embraces the very medium that Wallace disdains. And yet this is a generation, even more so now, that embraces Google as a lifestyle: we consume content by link surfing and searching concepts online. My goal here is to reflect this technology by taking a history not entirely told, based in the past, and presenting it in a way that adheres to the fractured way my generation comfortably consumes content now.

My endnotes are hypertextual to allow a more immersive, explorative experience upon consuming. With every trip to the College Archives, with every interview, I am putting together pieces of a story that’s impossible to tell in full. Any researcher, from any generation, can relate to this feeling of discovery; interestingly, surfing the vast, untamed virtual sphere of the Internet can produce a parallel experience on a less specialized scale.

I encourage you to consider the question: how does being given choice affect the way

² David Foster Wallace, Interview, Charlie Rose, March 27, 1997.

³D. T. Max, “The Unfinished,” *The New Yorker*, March 9, 2009 (http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/03/09/090309fa_fact_max?currentPage=all).

you perceive the story as a conclusive whole? Listen to Frank Tuitt talk about planning the Fanning Takeover in 1986, then browse photos of women lounging in the Arboretum in 1927, then read the story of the faculty uniting to fire a divisive president in 2000. How do you understand the social history of this school differently than if you were to read it in print, in order, from cover to cover?

Read, immerse, explore, and extract. Enjoy the journey.

The website component of this thesis can be found at

<http://conncollegehistory.lilahrap.com>

chapter one : idealism

Dean Irene Nye was brought into Blackstone on the cold afternoon of September 25, 1915 by President Frederick Sykes, who led her through mud and debris to her sleeping place: a bed in the first dorm on campus, and barely finished. The dorm and adjacent New London Hall were the only buildings between campus and the Thames River. The wind whipped at them fearlessly. Nye greeted the first students with a candle; the dorm still had no hot water or electricity, and so this instrument was used to navigate and read.⁴⁵

Nye was a thin woman who wore a low, untamed bun and carried a PhD in Classics from Yale. She was the first in a stream of female professors at Connecticut College who chose career over marriage; highly educated in a male-based curriculum, she committed wholly to an infant in this, a woman's college with new ideals. Until her retirement in 1940, Nye was a Housemother, a professor of Classics, and Dean of the Faculty. "There is no need to elaborate on those first days, nor to enumerate the many things we did without," she wrote. "The spirit of youth filled the air; the college was young, the students were young, some of us were young and we all thought we were."⁶

"Because there was no grass, wooden planks made paths over the rough, muddy grounds of the Quad," remembered Julie Warner Comstock, a student of the first class of 1919. The first refectory was Thames Hall, and Comstock wrote that "the first meals were eaten to the rhythm of the carpenter's hammer. Faculty and students dined together on the *terra firma* area while Dr.

⁴ Irene Nye, Chapters in the History of Connecticut College in its First Three Administrations, 1911 – 1942, 1-15.

⁵ Gertrude Noyes, A History of Connecticut College, 26-30.

⁶ Irene Nye, Chapters in the History of Connecticut College in its First Three Administrations, 1911 – 1942, 9.

Sykes moved buoyantly among them, pouring cocoa from a silver pot. The smell of paint and fresh plaster was everywhere.”⁷

As the story goes, a group of women in the Hartford College Club came together in 1910 to gauge statewide interest in creating a four-year college for women in Connecticut. They were led by Elizabeth Wright, a Wesleyan alumna distressed by the University’s recent decision to stop accepting women. Barely over ten thousand of the nation’s women had college degrees, but more women were seeking higher education than ever without enough institutions to house them. The idea was practically and economically sound, the interest was high, and roughly two-dozen Connecticut towns showed interest. A high school principal named Colin Buell spearheaded a commitment from New London, and donation offers flooded in. They had land, eighty acres from Frank Loomis Palmer; they had buildings, funded almost completely by millionaire Morton F. Plant. They had a Board of Trustees, which Wright joined. And that Board had Frederick H. Sykes, a Canadian-born English professor then at Teachers College of Columbia University. Nye called Sykes “an idealist and a dreamer, but at the same time a man of substantial flesh and blood, vigor and humor.”⁸ She called him an illuminating lecturer, a charming conversationalist and host, with an inspiring vision of the college’s future, a faith in women, and “devotion, rarely equaled, to the cause of their education.”⁹ If the job of a first president is to set stable and dream-worthy foundations, physically and politically, then Frederick Sykes did his job ardently.

⁷ Julie Warner Comstock, “Half a Century: Being a Chronicle commemorating the Golden Anniversary of the Connecticut College Alumnae Association from 1919-1969,” *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, August 1969, 3.

⁸ Nye, *Chapters in the History of Connecticut College in its First Three Administrations, 1911 –1942*, 26.

⁹ Irene Nye, “Address by Irene Nye in behalf of the Frederick H. Sykes Memorial Association, presenting to the college a portrait of Dr. Sykes” (Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives, Connecticut College (hereafter cited as College Archives), Presidents of the College Box 1, Frederick H. Sykes File, June 13, 1921).

Most importantly, Frederick Sykes did not overemphasize the definition of woman widely held at the time, one simply of wife and homemaker. Sykes believed that with the growth of cities and technologies, the idea of “home” was expanding. To take care of a home was to improve tenements, clean up cities, and improve worker conditions. Through “our public schools, libraries, hospitals, parks, streets and municipal utilities, our semi-public institutions like churches, we have slowly developed a second or larger home shared with the whole community,” he said in a speech about the changing nature of home.¹⁰

“Man will come into his fullest life when both homes are all that they should be.” He believed that all students needed vocational training: a child who liked to draw, for example, could find a career in architecture; one who loved to put things together could find a job in mechanics. “If you want to reach the brain of children, you must do it through the hand,” he said. “If you disregard the use of the eyes and hands in education, you are placing a brake upon the mental development of the child. We want a school system that will deliver trained, intelligent, interesting boys and girls into avenues of employment in our complex civilization, capable of high efficiency as workers, of high wages, of earlier marriages, of better homes. This means vocational training for girls as well as boys. They must learn more to earn more.” And to solidify his belief in the abilities of women, he continued, “Some men think their economic life is threatened by the competition of women – their political life by votes of women – their domestic life by the independence and personality of the new life, like the mole who first saw a subway and did not like it because it was not ‘the kind mother used to make.’”

¹⁰ “Dr. F. H. Sykes Discusses the Changing Home ; Only Woman Can Make the New Civilization Humane, He Says” (College Archives, Frederick H. Sykes File, newspaper clipping undated).

Nye identified with Sykes' desire to create new rules for women's higher education as "something more than an imitation of the type of men's colleges that prevailed 25 years ago." Sykes envisioned a relevant college that prepared women to join the world's causes immediately upon graduating. He saw, as she wrote, "a college that looked forward not backward; a college of breadth in its ideas and sympathies; truly religious but not sectarian, scientific, dynamic, democratic; a college for women for women, not a college for children merely old enough to be women; a college that from the first, by reason of its ideals and aims, by reason of its faculty even if small, should be individual."¹¹ And the task was adventurous: wrote Nancy Barr Mavity, the college's first English and Philosophy professor, "Things were not finished—they were beginning; they were not always smooth and comfortable—but their mere incompleteness gave them zest. Here we were, blessedly, preciously without traditions—ours was a new world, an opportunity to make education a part of modern life."¹²

The first 125 women of Connecticut College were self-defined pioneers. Students launched Student Government and a college newspaper almost immediately. United States soldiers were months away from entering the Great War, and United States women were still years away from earning the right to vote. Wrote an alumna, "There was never any question that we would govern ourselves. We just assumed that. It was not a question of 'rights,' but a feeling of its being up to us - our responsibility."¹³ A *Connecticut College News* editorial from April 12, 1918 called "When petticoats vote" urged students to vote in the coming Student Government elections. "Our fourth term has come, and on Friday elections begin," it read. "It is the privilege

¹¹ Irene Nye, "Some Personal Reminiscences of Dr. Sykes," *Connecticut College News*, October 12 and 26, 1917.

¹² Nancy Barr Mavity, "Dr. Barr Writes of First Days at C. C.; Recalls Pioneer Ideals," *Connecticut College News*, June 8, 1923.

¹³ "Early Years: A High Adventure," *Connecticut College Alumni Magazine*, August 1969.

and duty of EVERY student to vote - carefully and conscientiously...our mothers have fought for our political equality. Some of us have already reaped the fruits of their labors: most of us still await them. But one and all, we should be ready to use them when they come. Let us summon all our powers of discussion, discretion and judgment, in the coming elections, and give the world a sample of what we shall do in our State, when petticoats vote.”¹⁴

To avoid complacency, Connecticut College established an honor system that articulated the ideals that were to be considered honorable to the new community, including academic excellence, trust, and mutual respect. As today, however, not every system worked perfectly: one student wrote a Letter to the Editor in the *News* in March of 1916 called “Spirit and Initiative are conspicuously lacking at the meetings of college organizations” that read, “Let us speak up at a meeting if we have a good objection to a motion under discussion. The objection may be of value. Let us not sit still and let something pass over our heads just to get the meeting over with, and then when we get outside begin to object for all we’re worth.”¹⁵ Another letter, written in December of 1919 reads, “Why have an honor system if we do not observe it? The honor system is the most important element in the spirit of Connecticut College, and, therefore, should be guarded and adhered to carefully. Let us not hark back to high school days of the teachers’ rule. Let us show ourselves that we have outgrown that stage and are ready to judge ourselves.”

Although Sykes called them women, the all-female classes of Connecticut College called themselves girls. They lived in textured granite, Collegiate Gothic dorms traditional of New England colleges, with slanted roofs, stone chimneys, balconies and heavy oak doors. These

¹⁴ “When Petticoats Vote,” Editorial, *Connecticut College News*, April 19, 1918.

¹⁵ “Spirit and Initiative are conspicuously lacking at the meetings of college organizations,” Letter, *Connecticut College News*, March 31, 1916.

dorms were cozy, safe, and looked like home.¹⁶ The girls had a staff of four black maids and butlers who changed their sheets and prepared weekly teas in their common rooms. Remembers Comstock, “Inconveniences were temporary, and ‘luxuries’ permanent. Each campus student found her Plant or Blackstone dormitory room completely furnished not only with bed, dresser, desk and chair, but with rugs, cretonne drapes with matching couch cover, linens and bedding, and desk lamp. There was running water in every room, and all but two or three were single rooms.”¹⁷

Early classes of Connecticut College girls wore “long dark skirts, middy blouses, high laced shoes, inevitable black headbands to control long locks, and the full and all-concealing bathing suits complete with black stockings and canvas footwear.”¹⁸ They delivered mail to each other’s rooms, twice a day and once on Sunday. In those days and for fifty more years, they lived in rooms with no door locks, in dorms with house monitors. Their meals were brought tableside to square tables of eight students each, cooked by a woman named Mrs. Harris.¹⁹ The library was one room on the second floor of New London Hall. Students walked into town for laundry and shopping, and they laughed loudly, perhaps too loudly, on trolley cars, which cost 5 cents to ride: “Attention has been called not alone by the presence of numbers of girls on the cars, but, unfortunately, too often, by the shrill and rather boisterous manner in which students call out to one another from separated parts of the cars,” reads a Letter to the Editor in the *News* in March

¹⁶ McDonald, Thomas Blake. *The Architecture of Connecticut College*, p. 316.

¹⁷ Comstock, *Alumnae News*, August 1969. Page 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Draft of article for the *New London Day* (College Archives, Campus & Buildings: North Complex File, “Naming” folder, January 12 1962), 4-5.

of 1916.²⁰ They initiated the tradition of the “Stone Wall Sing,” singing together at the College’s entrance at first sight of each full moon. Such was the pattern that each girl made careful record in her diary of the day’s activities.

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In the first few years of the College’s history, the trustees held just as much authority as today, but touted that power much more explicitly. Roles were not delineated; Elizabeth Wright worked on campus as Registrar and Bursar, and two others were owners of companies that did business with the College.²¹ When that business went awry – when the price of coal increased to a rate Sykes found unfair, when bills were paid late – trustees took grave offense, the relationship strained, and the scuffles were often printed publicly in the *New London Day*.²² These first trustees grew to dislike Sykes.

When they asked for his resignation in January of 1917, they didn’t tell him exactly why, only that “no charges whatever were preferred” and “the vote was taken merely on account of a dissatisfaction which seems to exist.”²³

Sykes said no. In his response, which he sent to each member of the Board, he offered six points of criticism, a note of the faculty’s unanimous vote that he withhold his resignation.²⁴ The students and the faculty banded together against the Board, and the battle was messy. Helpless

²⁰ Untitled Letter to the Editor, *The College News*, March 4, 1916.

²¹ “Meeting of the Board of Trustees, January 22, 1917” (Connecticut College Archives, Secretary’s Record, Connecticut College for Women, Vol.1), 219-220.

²² “F. V. Chappell Says Dr. Sykes’ Charge Is Unqualified Falsehood,” *New London Day* (New London, CT), March 17, 1917.

²³ “Meeting of the Board of Trustees, January 22, 1917” (Connecticut College Archives, Secretary’s Record, Connecticut College for Women, Vol.1), 219-220.

²⁴ Meeting of the Board of Trustees, April 18, 1917” (Connecticut College Archives, Secretary’s Record, Connecticut College for Women, Vol.1), 252-259.

students expressed their worry publicly in letters to the editor, and privately in their bedrooms to their diaries.

In the warmth of her dormitory room on the night of March 15, Mildred Howard wrote in portly script, “There is quite a little trouble between Dr. Sykes and the Trustees and it has just publicly come out. The Trustees do not think President Sykes is a capable enough man for the position and have asked him to resign, but he refuses. Several of the faculty have already handed in their resignations. It will kill this college if something isn’t settled soon.”²⁵

The *News* editorial board wrote on March 27, “The question still unanswered in the minds of many people is, ‘Why is President Sykes being removed?’ This question has not been satisfactorily answered either by the reports that have come out in the daily papers or by the Trustees in their statement to the Student Council several weeks ago.”

They continued, “We are proud to know that Dr. Sykes refused to accept the invitation of the Trustees ‘to slip away’ when he was asked to resign. Instead he chose to stand, as a man should, and face any charges that could be brought against him.”²⁶ Students sent petitions to the Board demanding explanation. The trustees gave no details, so the students continued to show their support for Sykes in the only way they knew how. They went to class; they made up traditions; they stood outside Sykes’ house at quarter of seven the morning on Easter weekend to serenade him with Easter songs.

The battle of secret politics between the Board and its President ambled along. The Board refused to initially reveal their reasons for the forced resignation – instead, they had the Faculty Committee ask the President and returned at the next meeting with a statement, “In reply he requests us to inform you that such is his wish.” Next, they formed a committee to investigate

²⁵ Diary of Mildred Howard ’20 (Connecticut College Archives, Alumni Diaries box, March 27, 1917).

²⁶ Untitled Editorial, *Connecticut College News*, March 27, 1917.

why they had asked him to resign, one they called “Committee on Reasons for asking Dr. Sykes’ Resignation.”²⁷ The meeting’s minutes show that when the Board met again a month later, on April 18, the Board took Sykes’s letter of criticism, listed each, and dismissed most.²⁸ They found it unwarranted that he blame three unfinished buildings and an abandoned college road on their inefficiency. They acknowledged “unpleasant friction” between him and Wright and suggested that, in the future, a Board member should not be employed by the College. They defended not inviting Sykes to practically any of their meetings over the past year on “his want of practical judgment coupled with a somewhat insistent temperament.”²⁹ Finally, to Sykes’ accusation that the Executive Committee made administrative college decisions without telling him, the committee said it was “true, but that for reasons hereinafter set forth the President had no just ground of complaint.”

The students, the faculty, and the President were given no choice. In the early 1900s, pride and public reputation ran strong; for a lowly new college community to embarrass New London’s high-powered elite and then *win* the fight was unthinkable. The investigation committee concluded that President Sykes “showed such business incompetency as to make it desirable that he resign...on account of his proved inability, after months of fruitless efforts on their part, to act in harmony with such committee of the Board.”

Sykes left in June, and published a poetic goodbye letter in the *News*. “The soul of the College lives still, free, noble, intrepid in you,” he wrote. “It is in your keeping,—serve it

²⁷ “Meeting of the Board of Trustees, February 9, 1917” (Connecticut College Archives, Secretary’s Record, Connecticut College for Women, Vol.1), 221.

²⁸ “Meeting of the Board of Trustees, April 18, 1917” (Connecticut College Archives, Secretary’s Record, Connecticut College for Women, Vol.1), 252-259.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 256.

faithfully...With deep affection, abiding loyalty, and grateful appreciation, your first president and class-mate bids you good-bye.”³⁰

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This marked the first split within college ranks, the first test of student obligation to the young ideals of the College. Anxious about losing the leader that poured them hot drinks and assuaged their homesickness, some thought to transfer. Some worried the College would lose momentum and go dead. But most took his spirit, however idealistic, and used it as grounds to stay. Sykes personified the College: he made it a She, her own entity with her own purpose that was bigger than the people who created her. Wrote Constantine Oudin in a letter that May, “Now that our President is going, instead of inquiring of the Trustees what the standard of our college is going to be, is it not our place to help make that standard high, by coming back to the college next year, and proving our loyalty to the college ideals that President Sykes has labored so faithfully to uphold?”³¹ And one student replied, “Let no one imagine that such a decision could disprove their loyalty. Those girls who cheerfully clambered over building debris in New London Hall last year; ate their first meals by candle light, and laughing said, ‘We are pioneers!’ could not be lacking in loyalty to C.C., in the time of trouble and need of support.”³²

Sykes died suddenly and quietly, of a heart attack, that coming October 14. “Dr. Sykes is dead,” Mildred Howard wrote in her journal the next day. And two days after that, “I couldn’t write anything more last Monday. We were all so terribly shocked...There wasn’t a girl in chapel who wasn’t weeping a little and some were sobbing outright by the time we left.”³³

³⁰ Frederick Sykes, untitled letter, *Connecticut College News*, June 20, 1917.

³¹ S. Constantine Oudin, Letter to the Editor, *Connecticut College News*, May 11, 1917.

³² Mary K. Strange ’19, Letter to the Editor, *Connecticut College News*, June 20, 1917.

³³ Diary of Mildred Howard ’20 (Connecticut College Archives, Alumni Diaries box, October 14 and 16, 1917).

chapter two : liberal arts

In the time between inception and coeducation, Connecticut College campus life ran steadily on carefully built traditions. Girls studied and played, responding to two world wars and various nation-wide scares from atop a hill, while faculty kept its students safe from harm and prepared them for a changing world as they saw fit.

Benjamin Marshall, an austere, eloquent Presbyterian pastor, stood up straight at the pulpit each week and looked out on his students – his congregation – through little round glasses. His college was young, his predecessor, the man who embodied the pioneering liberality of the college's early days, was dead, and his thoughts focused on preparing hundreds of concerned young women for the after-effects of a brewing world war. On the first Sunday afternoon in September of 1917, in his inaugural address, Marshall set down academic guidelines.³⁴ He said that every student must have a classical education, that is, be fluent in a foreign language and versed in philosophy, logic, ethics, psychology, mathematics, and literature. He championed the role of women in society and acknowledged that they were assuming a larger place than ever before. Women were “performing, as substitute for man, more than a hundred tasks,” in some of which “she will surpass man, and hold the field against them.” But unlike Sykes, Marshall was a minister, reverent and traditional. He told his students that day that the success of the post-war era depended heavily on “the success or failure of our wives and mothers, and other home-makers.”

“Don’t,” he told them, “if you value your chances, and value the good opinion of the men of tomorrow, boast of your ignorance of housekeeping. I can well believe that the splendid

³⁴ Benjamin Marshall, Inaugural Address (Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives, Connecticut College (hereafter cited as College Archives), Presidents of the College Box 1, Benjamin T. Marshall: Inauguration File, November 23, 1917).

fellows who have dedicated themselves to the highest cause men have ever espoused, after a career in the National service with its dependence upon army and navy fare, will have no silly nor slight reason for some reasonable insistence on culinary accomplishment in the women of their acquaintance.”

Katharine Blunt, strong-willed and defiant with a PhD in organic chemistry from the University of Chicago, took over the College twelve years later in 1929. “She was a kind person,” said Nancy Blitzer ’45. “But forceful. She did get what she wanted. She was very good at raising money. And I think she was very well liked.”³⁵ The daughter of an army colonel, Blunt led her students unswervingly through a depression (during which she built twelve buildings on campus), the devastating hurricane of 1938, and the beginning of the second world war.³⁶ One reunion weekend I gave a group of alumae a tour of campus. As we passed Branford, two women from the class of ’49 remembered sunbathing on their balcony on the third floor, only to see Katharine Blunt driving by below, hollering with her arm out the window that they *get back inside!*

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, students began a twenty-four-hour watch for warplanes from the roof of Bill Hall. Ever-vigilant and full of spirit, Conn women stood at the ready.³⁷ An article in the *News* describes one student who was so flustered in a practice call to report incoming planes that she yelled into the wrong end of the phone. “No matter how much we may have cause to laugh at the little anecdotes about the wardens with which the next few days are bound to be sprinkled,” the article reads, “we cannot

³⁵ Nancy Blitzer ’45, in phone discussion with the author, March 13, 2011.

³⁶ Gertrude Noyes, *A History of Connecticut College*, 97-109.

³⁷ College Archives, “WWII War Effort: Civil Defense Aircraft Spotting 1/22/1942” vertical subject file.

help but admire the spirit which the girls are showing in volunteering to stand watch on the cold windy roof of Bill Hall to watch for the appearance of planes. The girls who watch in the early hours of the morning show particular fortitude. They bundle up in slacks and fur coats and keep warm by the activity of their tongues as they chatter good naturedly together.”³⁸

Blitzer was a freshman in 1941, and remembers volunteering to spot planes. New London was especially proximate to the war effort: there were two airfields in the region, the Coast Guard Academy next door, and the naval submarine base a swim across the Thames in Groton. The spotting went on throughout the war, and Blitzer remembers occasionally seeing and reporting planes. She also remembers a tour she and her fellow volunteers took of the sub base, which was sending submarines out to Europe regularly.³⁹

“They put steel nets in the Long Island Sound to prevent submarines from coming into New London, and we were locked in at night,” she said. “We were given instructions. If there was a bombing we were to go down to the basement of the building of the dorm, if it was poison gas we were supposed to go up to the roof! I was much more conscious of being in a wartime zone up in New London than I was at home in New York.”

She told me, “By the day after we declared war, I don’t know how many girls were pulled out of college and brought home. Their parents thought they would be safer with them or something.” I asked her if it frightened her.

³⁸ “Wardens’ Jobs Mix Comedy With Duty On Bill Hall Roof,” *Connecticut College News*, December 10, 1941.

³⁹ Corrinne Manning Black, “Half a Century: Being a Chronicle commemorating the Golden Anniversary of the Connecticut College Alumnae Association from 1919-1969,” *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, August 1969, 20-23.

To this point, Blitzer had been churning out memories effortlessly. Here she paused, and I waited through the dead space between my phone and hers. “I suppose I should have been,” she said, “But I can’t say I was ever extremely scared of anything of that sort.”

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In 1943, Blunt passed the presidency to Dorothy Schaffter – beautiful, with big brown eyes and a short, curled coif – who held the seat for barely two years. She was unmarried, and lived in the President’s House with her mother. The late dean Alice Johnson deemed her, in her unpublished manuscript, “forever to remain nameless,” as she “had managed to alienate the trustees, the faculty, the administration and the student body.”⁴⁰ Schaffter saw the College through the end of World War II, and her speeches read as generally disapproving, infused with phrases like “this may or may not interest you.”⁴¹ She was also occasionally known to feign sickness during important events to go to movies downtown.⁴²

There was an obvious discrepancy between Schaffter’s and the average Connecticut College student’s view of the world. The College was filled with primarily wealthy, primarily Caucasian girls who responded to the War with community service, not solemnity. Such was their nature to continue planning mixers, shopping downtown, and dating men – and these habits didn’t change drastically throughout the war. In one chapel talk, given in December of 1944, Schaffter asserted generalizations about the student body she represented. “I am feeling rather guilty as a result of listening to all this planning for the return to college of the young men and women who have born the brunt of the war,” she said. “Practically nothing special for women

⁴⁰ Alice Johnson, *In Their Own Words*, an unpublished memoir about Connecticut College (College Archives, Alice Johnson File), 45.

⁴¹ Dorothy Schaffter, Chapel Talks (College Archives, Presidents of the College Box 3, Dorothy Schaffter: Administration File).

⁴² Marjorie Dilley, letters (College Archives, Presidents of the College Box 3, Dorothy Schaffter: Termination (Correspondence between Marjorie Dilley and Marilyn Sworsyn Haase ’43) File).

seems to be under consideration and we at Connecticut College are smugly pursuing our course, paying no attention to the problem...If a liberal arts education is so good for you that the government permits you to continue in college throughout the war, why is it not good for some other women who have missed it because they were out fighting the war? Does it mean that we are so successful and so untouched by the war that we are just ordinarily selfish?" She signed off, curtly. "It will be fine to see all of you again in January, and I hope that your holiday will be just as much fun as you hope it to be."⁴³

Schaffter's wartime concerns were reasonable; they dealt with fairness, with asking haves to compare themselves to have-nots. But the student body had a general demeanor that she discounted, and large, campus-wide efforts that she ignored. One group of students reestablished the War Services Committee from World War I. The committee hosted a Red Cross workshop in the basement of Harkness Chapel for women to "knit, sew, [and] make surgical dressings" for soldiers. They also held mandatory meetings, like one in Palmer Auditorium on April 5, 1943, to instruct on how to respond to air raids.⁴⁴ On April 14, the Botany Club unveiled a Victory Garden in the greenhouse, full of vegetables, in response to the national food shortage crisis.⁴⁵ On April 21, the Committee mandated, as per the northeast blackout, that all windows facing the Long Island Sound use dark blackout shades, and that students "be sure that curtains fully cover the edges of the shades so there are no cracks of light showing."⁴⁶ On May 12, the *College News*

⁴³ Dorothy Schaffter, Chapel Talk (College Archives, Presidents of the College Box 3, Dorothy Schaffter: Administration File, December 12, 1944).

⁴⁴ "Prevention of War Gas Poisoning Is Topic of Meeting," *Connecticut College News*, April 7, 1943.

⁴⁵ "Victory Gardening, Landscape Gardening, An Battle Fronts are Flower Show themes," *Connecticut College News*, April 14, 1943.

⁴⁶ Marjorie Dilley, Chairman of War Service Committee, "Dark Blackout Shades Required at C.C. Now," *Connecticut College News*, April 21, 1943.

editors strongly encouraged all students to donate blood to soldiers, and printed a neighboring announcement that read, “Gas Rationing Forces Students To Study Local Bus Schedules.”⁴⁷

Blitzer remembers some students leaving to join WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) and WAC (Women's Army Corps), and that many girls participated in military drill as an activity. “I must tell you that Mrs. Roosevelt came to the College on two different occasions to review the troops,” she said. “I never could understand it, and I still don’t. Why in the world would these girls enjoy marching?”

After that Chapel Talk, Schaffter was not even allowed to finish out the academic year.⁴⁸ By the spring of 1945, Blunt had resumed her role as President until the College found a more permanent replacement. Although Dean Johnson wrote in her memoir that Schaffter had alienated all members of the College, the *College News* was not the hotbed of dispute it had been during President Sykes’ forced resignation, nor that it would become Vietnam’s shifting social mores. This was a sign of the era: the *News* continued to cover lectures, current events, and dances, with no direct articles pertaining to the President’s misdeeds. As Marjorie Dilley wrote in her letters to one alumna, students who did know actively worked to keep the information from the general student body. The only hint of change was in an editorial on October 3, 1945 entitled “Welcome Back, Miss Blunt!” that was filled with Blunt’s past achievements – including the twelve buildings she added to campus.⁴⁹ “The seniors are the only class in college who knew Miss Blunt as president,” the editorial concluded. “As freshmen, the class of ’46 was made to feel a part of C.C. by the friendliness of the president’s tea and the continued congenial greetings

⁴⁷ “Gas Rationing Forces Students To Study Local Bus Schedules.” *Connecticut College News*, May 12, 1943.

⁴⁸ “Meeting of the Board of Trustees, May 17, 1945” (Connecticut College Archives, Secretary’s Record, Connecticut College for Women, Vol. 5) 152-155.

⁴⁹ “Welcome Back, Miss Blunt!” editorial, *Connecticut College News*, October 3, 1945.

they received on campus from their president. We liked that start; we liked Miss Blunt; we're glad she's back."

In Schaffter's resignation letter to the Board of Trustees, she wrote of dissatisfaction about "a feeling at Connecticut College that it is better than other colleges, and that little change is needed. In fact, every college today is considering extensive changes, and no man or woman who is young and progressive will be a successful president of Connecticut College under such a psychological handicap."⁵⁰

Rosemary Park stepped up from the deanship in 1948 to become the College's fifth president. She proved Schaffter wrong almost immediately. Standing no higher than five foot two, Park was descended from a family of college presidents and began as a shy young professor at the College. As Johnson remembered, "This retiring, modest, tiny woman had, over the years, become a most superior public speaker."⁵¹

Here you can see quite distinctly the differences between Park and Marshall, and between the assumed modernity of 1920s leadership and the camaraderie of 1960. That year, Park addressed the freshmen at Convocation: "By 1970, which would be six years after you have graduated from Connecticut, two out of every five women in this country will be in the labor force of the country," she told them. "They will not be sitting on any satin cushions."⁵²

She continued, "Most of you will probably live to be a hundred. If you want to keep from being a stuffy old bore for forty years, that is, between sixty and a hundred, then you've got to learn to be something now. In other words, you can't rely on preserving either your youthful

⁵⁰ "Meeting of the Board of Trustees, June 11, 1945" (Connecticut College Archives, Secretary's Record, Connecticut College for Women, Vol. 5), 160-163.

⁵¹ Alice Johnson, *In Their Own Words*, an unpublished memoir about Connecticut College (College Archives, Alice Johnson File), 47.

⁵² Rosemary Park, "Address to Freshmen, September 24, 1960," in *Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Publication, Connecticut College 1911-1961* (New London, 1961), 10.

charm or your feminine allure through a hundred. To be young and feminine at sixteen is no achievement. To be a respected person at sixty is.”

Johnson wrote of Professor Percy Maxim Lee, who had served as the National President of the League of Women Voters. Lee worked hard to kindle energy from her students. Wrote Johnson, “One aspect of the so-called Silent Generation of the ‘fifties caused her much despair, for the young women of that period struck her as not interested in anything beyond themselves.” Lee, Johnson, and Park were more progressive than their predecessors, women like Blunt, Schaffter, and Irene Nye, but it was clear that they came from the same generation: all these women were highly educated and unmarried. To choose between getting married and building a career felt unfair to many students at Connecticut College, which was established to prepare women intellectually and vocationally. Some began weighing the issue as early as 1941, when the *News* interviewed professors’ wives who worked on campus.⁵³ One woman, “Mrs. John Logan,” taught the lab sections of her husband’s art lectures. “If you know more about something than you do about washing dishes, you should use this knowledge to your advantage,” she said.

An editorial printed six years later reads, “The girl who considers the matter at all finds herself confronted with the firmly entrenched belief that there is no possibility of compromise between the two.” It concluded that things wouldn’t change “until marriages between two economically independent individuals is the rule rather than the exception, and until a system of maternity insurance and day nurseries is well developed.”⁵⁴

⁵³ “Campus Wives App[r]ove Career And Marriage Combination,” *Connecticut College News*, December 10, 1941.

⁵⁴ “Marriage or a Career?” editorial, *Connecticut College News*, March 5, 1947.

Many other students married young, especially during wartime. At Connecticut College, Blitzer dated a sailor in the Navy, marrying him the spring of her junior year. “I might say,” she said, “almost all of us were married at nineteen or twenty, and most of us are still married or widowed. There were a few divorces, but on the whole, we were all married early and for a long time.”

The faculty was a different story: many women I interviewed who worked at the College before 1970 felt pressure to put their career before their children. (“After one pregnancy, I was back at work after two weeks!” said Peggy Sheridan, laughing “And, as were the times, they didn’t say congratulations, they said, ‘Oh good, you’re back!’”⁵⁵) They also found Connecticut College to be particularly liberal, provided they could balance career and family with no complaints. Jane Bredeson, who eventually became Secretary of the College, decided after marriage that she would be a stay at home mother.⁵⁶ In 1962, the year Bredeson’s husband began teaching English at the College, Director of Admissions Robert Cobbledick offered her a job. She approached her husband, still unsure.

“I told him what happened, and asked him what he thought,” she said. “He knew me very well. He said, ‘Well, if you did that, we could hire a cleaning woman!’” She laughed heartily. “Well, about five minutes later I called Mr. Cobbledick back and said, ‘I’ll take the job!’”

When I interviewed Professors emeriti Nelly and Bernard Murstein, they told a similar story of inclusion.⁵⁷ Nelly came to Connecticut College from Portland, Oregon in 1961 after Rosemary Park offered her a position as French Instructor. Bernard had just been fired from his

⁵⁵ Margaret Sheridan ’67, Professor emeritus of Human Development, in discussion with the author, February 16, 2011.

⁵⁶ Jane Bredeson, Assistant Director of Admissions 1963-1977 and Secretary of the College 1977-1991, in discussion with the author, January 17, 2011.

⁵⁷ Nelly Murstein, professor emeritus of French, and Bernard Murstein, professor emeritus of psychology, in discussion with the author, November 2, 2010.

post as a psychology professor following a change in leadership, which he explains was the product of anti-Semitism. When Nelly was hired at Connecticut College, Bernard looked for employment in the Northeast and was refused again based on his religion. He received a job at the University of Connecticut, where he tried to find a position for Nelly but was again faced with prejudice: “I don’t want to hire a woman,” he says the French department chair told him. “I want to hire a scholar.”

Park and her successor Charles Shain shared values: President Shain took over the presidency in 1962, and, charmed by the thought of hiring a working couple with children as a model for female students, brought Bernard in for an interview. Shain asked Bernard if he had read the Feminine Mystique, and after a successful interview, hired him.

The Professors Murstein sat in adjacent chairs in the Alice Johnson Room in Crozier Williams on a November evening. Nelly wore all black, and a tight bun; Bernard wore an orange turtleneck and khakis. Nelly sat straight, hands in her lap; Bernard leaned the curve of his back against the chair. He looked straight ahead, smiling a bit. “So, in a sense, Connecticut College was a haven from misogyny and anti-Semitism at the same time. That’s why it’s kind of a miracle that we both ended up here.”

Nelly spoke next: “Although I didn’t even know what feminism was, I was probably living the life of a feminist in the sense that I was liberated by having wanted a career in the ’50s. It was a condition I had put on our marriage.” They both laughed instinctively, knowingly, no glances exchanged. “And I have to say that he was rare among the men to have not only fostered my career, but at one point to put my career ahead of his. Very, very few men would have done that at that time. I mean, he came to Connecticut College and stayed here for me, rather than accept jobs that paid a lot more, and where he could do exactly what he wanted to do. I would

say that Bernard, although we had a traditional marriage, in some ways he was a feminist.”

Bernard smiled gleefully. “It’s like the character in Moliere who discovers he’s been speaking prose his whole life and didn’t realize it,” he said. “I didn’t *think* of myself as a feminist, I just thought that everybody should have a chance to their career. But there were certain stereotypes that existed at that time, and one of them was that a real man doesn’t have his wife work. They thought it was a reflection of your manhood. Either you could support a wife or you couldn’t.”

As the 1960s evolved, more couples were hired as campus professors, building on of the ideals of women like Lee and Park, who, Johnson concluded, “gave the tone to the college and served as lively examples to the students, constant reminders that to be a female did not mean you were second class, nor should you ever accept such a demeaning status. These stalwart women had great faith in themselves.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Alice Johnson, *In Their Own Words*, an unpublished memoir about Connecticut College (College Archives, Alice Johnson File), 43.

chapter three : relevance

In the fall of 1967, as the first upperclassmen arrived on campus, Connecticut College President Charles Shain looked at Alice Johnson, the Dean of Freshmen, “ran his hand around his collar, and said ‘I will never ever get accustomed to all this overwhelming femininity. Sometimes I think I’m drowning in it.’”⁵⁹

So goes Johnson’s unpublished manuscript *In Their Own Words*, a social history of the College from the late 1950s through 1983.

“Had anyone told me back then that I was about to enter into one of the most lively periods of academic, sexual, social, and political change, I would not have believed it,” she continued. “Certainly not on this tranquil green campus overlooking Long Island Sound. Here, where security was a special watch-word, nothing unforeseen could ever penetrate from the outside world. No young man would ever spend a night in a dormitory room with his lady love. It simply wasn’t done. And it was optimistically believed, it had never occurred. Neither alcohol nor drugs would ever touch the lips of these ‘fair young maidens’ as one professor once described the student body, maidens, he believed who ‘daily danced on the green.’”

Charles Shain came to Connecticut College after teaching at Carleton, a college historically coeducational. His discomfort with an all-women’s school was part of a growing social mentality that was reconstituting definitions of education for rich and poor, black and white, men and women. As the young class of freshmen entered, Shain doubtless had more than a vision: real numbers were running through his head, on the increase in college bound students and the decrease of applications to his own institution. These changing social mores were affecting more

⁵⁹ Alice Johnson, *In Their Own Words*, Unpublished Memoir about Connecticut College (Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives, Connecticut College (hereafter cited as College Archives), Alice Johnson File, 1997). 14.

than the pure lifestyle of his twelve hundred “fair young maidens” – they were threatening the economic stability of Connecticut College.

1967 was a bountiful year to be in higher education. After World War II, the US Congress had invested money in the cause: the GI Bill of 1944 offered veterans full college tuition, and in 1950, three hundred million dollars was allotted to providing colleges and universities long-term loans so they could physically expand to increase their enrollment. Between 1960 and 1969, as the baby boomers reached young adulthood, encouraged to seek higher degrees than many of their parents, seven hundred new institutions for higher education were opened to accommodate them.⁶⁰

All this and Connecticut College was declining. Between 1966 and 1969, our number of applications dropped 19 percent, which came with a similarly significant drop in accepted applicants that enrolled. In the *Alumnae News* in December of 1968, Charles Shain publicly announced that the college would become coeducational for the coming September.⁶¹ In a letter responding to one disgruntled alumna, he wrote, “Our Admissions Office finds in the visits its staff makes to high schools around the country that very few high school girls will even consider a women’s college; they say that they intend to apply only to coeducational institutions.”⁶² This cultural reality affected our institutional priorities: if men were integral to the financial future of the College, then the social issues would also need working out. So in preparation for his announcement, Shain appointed a group of eight faculty members to what was called the

⁶⁰ Susan Poulson and Leslie Miller-Bernal. (2004). *Going coed: Women's experiences in formerly men's colleges and universities, 1950-2000* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 6-10.

⁶¹ Coeducation Report of the Summer Planning Group, *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, December 1968, 17-24.

⁶² Charles Shain, draft of a letter to Madeleine Jean Huber '57 (College Archives. “CC goes co-ed” box, “President Charles Shain’s correspondence” file, January 1969), 1.

Summer Planning Committee. They spent eight months visiting other colleges, discussing advantages and potential issues, and polling students, faculty and alumnae. They published their extensive report in that same issue of *Alumnae News*, next to Shain's announcement, with an official proposal: "Connecticut College should become a fully coeducational college as soon as feasible with parity of men and women in the undergraduate student body and the faculty."⁶³

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At her house in a retirement community in Concord, New Hampshire, over cheese sandwiches and butternut squash soup, Jane Bredeson thought quietly before describing Charles Shain. She and her husband Robert, a beloved English professor, also came to the College from Carleton. During talk of coeducation in 1969, Jane was the Assistant Director of Admissions. Robert had died three years before of rheumatoid arthritis. "Oh, he and his wife were close personal friends, so it's hard to separate," she said finally. "But Charlie was informal, I would say almost laid-back. He knew Carleton as a coed college, and I think that had a lot to do with the success of coeducation. Women's colleges particularly were becoming less and less popular, and Charlie was very tuned into it, and very excited about the prospect of turning coed. And he had a delightful sense of humor. And that always helps, I think."⁶⁴

"There was determination there. Charles Shain thought it was absolutely so clearly right," said Peggy Sheridan '67, alumna, former housefellow, emeritus Professor of Human Development, and also a friend of the Shains.⁶⁵ "The time was right, and we were going to run into risk if we didn't. And he beat the crest of the wave."

⁶³ Coeducation Report of the Summer Planning Group, *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, December 1968, 17-24.

⁶⁴ Jane Bredeson, Assistant Director of Admissions 1963-1977 and Secretary of the College 1977-1991, in discussion with the author, January 17, 2011.

⁶⁵ Margaret Sheridan '67, emeritus professor of Human Development, in discussion with the author, February 16, 2011.

Why did Connecticut College choose to accept men? No interview gave me a cut-and-dried answer. Parts intertwined. The College was financially unstable because women's colleges were becoming less popular; women's colleges were becoming less popular as a result of changing social mores; social mores were changing as a response to a feeling of worldwide instability, and as a reaction to a culture of passivity that ran through the previous three decades. What it ultimately boils down to, however, was a newfound demand for relevance from the country's biggest generation of young adults.

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In the early sixties, the women of Connecticut College were still dressing up for dinner. They still had mascot hunts, Secret Santas, Pig Push mixers and 9 p.m. curfews.⁶⁶ But when they weren't walking downtown to shop at Goya's, or eating cookies with Mrs. Shain,⁶⁷ they were beginning to question the institutional rules in place. The first mention of dissent I noticed in the college newspaper was in the *College News's* newly named *Conn Census* on April 28, 1959, when Lysbeth Marigold '62 wrote an article called "Like, Hang in and Branch Out" in defense of the Beat as "a person who is trying to forget the horrors of the modern world and express an individuality which opposes the conformity that is ruining America. He is questioning our values of society and is sickened by the materialism of the times." In October of 1960, students signed and published a petition asking Student Government to modify the rules concerning male guests in their rooms.⁶⁸ In 1965, students petitioned for car privileges, asked for a system to evaluate their professors, and suggested that the health center provide open educational material on sex

⁶⁶ Betsy Bannerman '62, in phone discussion with the author, February 11, 2011.

⁶⁷ "Mrs. Shain discusses life as president's wife," *Conn Census*, December 6, 1965.

⁶⁸ "We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Student Government to modify the present ruling concerning male guests in the students' rooms," *Conn Census*, October 6, 1960.

and birth control. In May of 1966, the paper reported on the arrest of Mardi Walker, a Connecticut College student jailed in Atlanta for participating in a lunch counter sit-in.⁶⁹ By 1968, family-style waitressed “sit down” dinners had been replaced by cafeteria-style meals, dorm parietals had been extended to 1 a.m. on weekend nights, and hundreds of students were participating regularly in vigils and overnight sit-ins on campus to protest the Vietnam War. Monthly chapel services were no longer mandatory, male graduate students were attending the College in small numbers, and students were just starting to demand the option of off-campus living.

“American society today puts a premium on independent, responsible action,” wrote the editors of the *Conn Census* on February 27, in defense of more lenient dorm parietals.

“Connecticut College, by forcing its individual students to live within its rigid social structure, stifles the development of a girl’s capacity to make socially responsible decisions... We urge those now considering passage of the parietal hour resolution to recognize the necessity of granting students the opportunity for social decision which is their right. Since the world expects so much more of the college woman today, Connecticut College has to change socially as well as academically—and soon.”⁷⁰

Betsy Carter Bannerman ’62 was the Managing Editor of *Conn Census* with Marigold. We spoke on the phone about the early 1960s as a period of limbo.

“We knew that there were peace demonstrations,” she said, “in fact, we sent a group of students to Washington from our school, and several schools from the New England area did the same thing. I also remember a few of us sitting on the green, playing guitar and singing peace

⁶⁹ Karen Dorros, “Mardi Walker Reindicted In Atlanta; Southern Court Ties Up C. C. Money,” *Conn Census*, May 2, 1966.

⁷⁰ Editorial, *Conn Census*, February 27, 1968.

songs, and my friends from the newspaper and I stayed up all night listening to the election return. But I've been thinking that in some ways, the rules that they had for us were to keep us nested and safe from this horrible outside world, and yet their job as an educational institution was to educate us about the outside world. So it was always that dichotomy, that they had to keep us safe, but they also wanted to make sure that we would succeed in the world once we graduated.”⁷¹

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I met Peggy Sheridan in the Plant House common room on a Wednesday afternoon. She sat facing the door, black pant legs crossed, arms of her pink blazer on the arms of a big, cushioned, fireproof chair. She told detailed stories, confident and informal, occasionally motioning out the window to Blaustein or the Library, paying no heed to the regular beep, rush, slam of students running in and out of the dorm with keycards and backpacks.

“The world really felt crazy and fatalistic to students,” she said of being a student from 1963-1967. “The Cuban Missile Crisis happened my senior year [of high school]. And Kennedy was assassinated right away in the fall of my freshman year, which was a real shift on campus, the moment I felt a stir that more may be coming down the pike. The first year after I graduated I was teaching in New London, and that's when Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated. You know, the three assassinations just really popped the bubble for everybody who thought they lived in a pristine little world, where everything was going to be chummy and nice and the country club was waiting. I mean that was just *over*. It was very safe feeling when I came to college. But that whole presumed safety, jettisoned toward success, guaranteed

⁷¹ Betsy Bannerman '62, in phone discussion with the author, February 11, 2011.

bloodline or whatever all that stuff was, it no longer seemed relevant. Nothing was a shoo-in anymore.”

The Connecticut College girls were demanding immediate changes – but that change didn’t necessarily mean they were actively asking for *men*. On December 10, 1968, the front page of the *Conn Census* read “Students Favor Co-education With Exception of Class of ’72”.⁷² While 80 percent of the senior respondents favored coeducation, only 40 percent of the freshmen were completely on board. Students valued the idea of coeducation, but the freshmen had applied to Connecticut College for Women. The classes before them would be barely affected by the change – the classes after them had chosen Connecticut College, Now for Women and Men. However, despite any statistical numbers, once decided the students didn’t seem to pay the issue much mind: *Conn Census* had one short news article on the decision in February of 1969,⁷³ and little to no coverage afterward.

I asked Sheridan whether the transition to coeducation felt shocking.

“I think it was more shocking that it hadn't happened before,” she said. “When I was a student, people left campus and went to motel rooms or friends' apartments to hang out with guys. It was almost like no one was ready to look at it, and then once they did, their reaction was, ‘Finally.’ Things were very prim and proper here. Very prim and proper. Which was lovely at one level, but it’s not very realistic for young people living together.”

Reference Librarian Carrie Kent was a student through the transition, from 1970-1974. Her office is tucked into the back of Shain Library. She sat reclined in her office chair the day we met, and waved me in with a “what’ dya wanna know?” She pointed to her desk and laughed that it was a *Presidential Desk*, used by Rosemary Park and Claire Gaudiani, told me that the Camel

⁷² “Students Favor Co-education With Exception of Class of ’72,” *Conn Census*, December 10, 1968.

⁷³ “Plans Underway For Co-education,” *Conn Census*, February 11, 1969.

was chosen for reasons that were purely sexual, and got down to it: “Remember, we’re talking about the late sixties,” she said, “which meant that drinking tea and sherry was not working for students. Wednesday afternoon tea and sherry were served in living rooms, but by the time I got there someone would bring in a bucket of water and a box of tea bags and call it a day. You know, people were smoking dope, and going on marches against the Vietnam War, and working for civil rights. That whole kind of genteel thing, whatever meaning it had had was lost.”⁷⁴

In general, the faculty also supported the change. In the Summer Planning Committee’s faculty survey, 93 percent said they would welcome men students into their classes, and 75 percent said they were in favor of admitting undergraduate men to Connecticut College. Emeritus English professor Robley Evans was one of the members of the Planning Committee. He doesn’t recall any faculty who were completely opposed to the change. No one fought it strongly; no one threatened to leave.⁷⁵

“I do remember, though,” he said, “when the faculty vote was finally taken, a professor I will not name wept. He cried and cried, and said it was all over. He said (and I’m making up the exact words), ‘The pleasure of teaching at this school is finished. My students would come to me on Sunday nights and we’d have tea, and all of that’s gone,’ and he wept.” Evans laughed, loud and fast. “There really were sentimental people in that time.”

Carrie Kent’s father John was a zoology professor at Connecticut College, the first man in the department. John disagreed with the College’s decision to accept men, but didn’t vote against it because he knew it was a financial necessity. “He left University of Michigan’s medical school saying he never wanted to teach another man,” she said. “He came here to teach women.

⁷⁴ Carrie Kent ’74, Connecticut College reference librarian, in discussion with the author, December 17, 2010.

⁷⁵ Robley Evans, emeritus Professor of English, in discussion with the author, February 7, 2011.

He said two things: first, that within two years of men coming to campus, the women wouldn't be speaking in classes. Second, that high quality men weren't going to women's colleges."

Upon hearing the news, one alumna sent a letter to Shain telling him that she was "violently opposed" to the College's decision, and pledging a complete end to her financial support. "Had CC been co-ed at the time I was in high school, I never would have considered it," she wrote. "I wanted the best in education without men constantly around to complicate life and offer temptation away from my studies...where is a girl to go who wants quality education but would like to get away from the men with whom she has competed in high school and with whom she will live the rest of her life?"⁷⁶

She continued, "But most important of all, what kind of men do you really think are going to be attracted to a formerly all girls school?...they will either be girl crazy or so strange no nice girl would care to associate with them. Then what will become of our fine image!"

This alum's fears here are transparent: turning to coeducation suggests that the education she received was outdated. Allowing men will bring in competition and distraction, and will ruin CC's pristine reputation, its academic standing, or both.

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The Summer Committee anticipated these concerns. "Some women's colleges did not go coed," said Robley Evans. "I thought a lot about this as I started doing research for the committee. Are women more available for being educated as women in a coed school or privately, with the gender distinction? Everything, not just intellectual, but personal, social and so forth had to change in order to accommodate a whole new vision on the part of young women

⁷⁶ Madeleine Jean Huber '57, letter to Charles Shain (College Archives. "CC goes co-ed" box, "President Charles Shain's correspondence" file, January 11, 1969).

about what they could be!” He was talking fast, and stopped short at that moment. When he smiled, big vertical creases ran down both cheeks. “But that wasn’t our ambition, finally, in deciding to go coed.”⁷⁷

Evans is an older man with the energy of a teenager, but it feels wrong to define him as either. His face is round and eager: round glasses, big round eyes, round head, round ears that stick out ever so slightly. On the day of our interview, he was dressed in checkers, argyle and corduroy. He spoke with authority and burst into laughter often, usually in the middle of his sentences. His unrestrained literary knowledge peppered our conversation, and he used names – Chaucer, Cicero, Johnson, Blake – to represent eras and mindsets.

Evans was responsible for traveling to other colleges to compare their approach with ours. At that time, Wellesley had the largest endowment per capita student in the country, with no plans to turn coed. Vassar considered joining Yale, but chose instead to keep its independence and accept men. Goucher maintained its role as a women’s college until economic instability forced it into coeducation thirty years later. Evans found that money made the decision for most women’s colleges.

“I’m sorry to be a downer so far as offering you any high ideals, but it was very much financial.”

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“Connecticut College opened for business as a co-educational institution on September 17 with an enthusiastic and promising clientele,” wrote Dean emeritus Gertrude Noyes in the Winter 1969 *Alumnae News*.⁷⁸ The college had already begun accepting small numbers of men

⁷⁷ Robley Evans, emeritus Professor of English, in discussion with the author, February 7, 2011.

⁷⁸ Gertrude Noyes, “Conn Currents: Connecticut College *IS* Co-Educational,” *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, Winter 1969.

as special students. Graduate and Return to College students had been trickling on to campus since 1959.

“Oh, it was quite exciting in the Admissions Office,” said Jane Bredeson, sipping on a coffee.⁷⁹ “Of course, the trustees didn’t decide on full coeducation until after applications were due, and they wanted to do it right away. So we really scrambled.”

For the first year, Admissions accepted a mixed bag of men. Some faculty members tell me it took “anything in pants.” Noyes used the words “self-recruited.” Sheridan explained, “It took a certain kind of guy and a certain kind of reason that they came here. Some got very good scholarships, maybe some really liked the ratio,” she laughed, “or they were older, or started off part time. There were a variety of reasons. But we’re talking *really* small numbers.” There were thirty-eight entering freshman men in total, along with dozens more who took classes but lived off campus: four Return to College men, nineteen graduate students, and twenty-seven Wesleyan students.⁸⁰

It was a full community effort: faculty began interviewing and recruiting candidates. Economics professor Ruby Turner Morris wrote a letter in *Conn Census* urging students to “try to get your brothers – your cousins – your boy friends, fiancées – or husbands – to apply to transfer to this College... The classrooms and faculty are waiting for them; the rich social life is here; so is the lovely campus, the interesting community...Help us move to full sexual parity. NOW.”⁸¹ The Wesleyan director of admissions agreed to write the men on his waiting list, after

⁷⁹ Jane Bredeson, Assistant Director of Admissions 1963-1977 and Secretary of the College 1977-1991, in discussion with the author, January 17, 2011.

⁸⁰ Gertrude Noyes, “Conn Curenents: Connecticut College *IS* Co-Educational,” *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, Winter 1969.

⁸¹ Ruby Turner Morris, Letter to the Editor, *Conn Census*, February 11, 1969.

making his final decisions to tell them of an opportunity at Connecticut College.⁸² Within two years, Bredeson, Director Janette Hersey and the rest of the Admissions team were traveling across the country to recruit men, slideshows under their arms that portrayed a whole new Connecticut College: slides illustrated bearded men in classrooms, couples running in swimsuits along Ocean Beach, and students painting cross legged on the green, playing guitar in smoky dark rooms, or walking around with arms flung around each other's shoulders. "Campus life is informal," their script read. "Life styles are a matter of personal decision." "Individuality is respected and encouraged."⁸³

Shain and Dean Noyes had already begun implementing a new residential system, replacing middle-aged deans, teachers and administrators called Housemothers with young married couples, renamed Housefellows.⁸⁴ In 1967, Sheridan was about to graduate. She had plans to teach in New London and marry her boyfriend Tony, who was enrolled as a return-to-college student. One day Noyes called to ask her whether she'd be interested in free housing and dining in exchange for a position as housefellow.

"Sounds great," Peggy says she told the dean, "But I'm getting married in June."

"We knew that," Noyes said back. "That's okay. The president wants to meet you and Tony."

Twenty minutes into their meeting, Shain hired them on the spot. The next year, in preparation for more men, he replaced more Housemothers with Housefellows, and gave them all extensive training.

⁸² Jane Bredeson in discussion with the author, January 17, 2011.

⁸³ "Connecticut College: Now for Women and Men" (College Archives, Slideshow, video #17, 1971).

⁸⁴ Margaret Sheridan '67 in discussion with the author, February 16, 2011.

“I think they wanted to prepare us for some of these transitions,” said Sheridan. “Of course because of racism, because of war, they really went into a heavy mental health support mode. And it was wise to bring in couples. Drugs were my real huge fear, because it was a time when people weren't sure what was okay, so everything was okay. To have Tony walk into a room as a guy and say ‘that's it’ was very different than if I had attempted to do it.”

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In the first year of coeducation, the administration did its best to specify what was designated to whom by organizing the campus with transitional tools. They didn't have the money to build a new dorm, nor the numbers to fill an old dorm, so men and women were separated by floor. The Summer Committee's housing concerns were described in the report. “Students on other campuses have shown interest in coeducational or mixed dorms. The demand for this kind of living arrangement may be a fad, but it correlates with general student demands for greater freedom in non-academic affairs, and at least one Dean of Students had suggested that men will be most attracted to women's colleges that have such informal living conditions.”⁸⁵

Twenty-seven men moved into the first floor of Larrabee in September of 1969, while the others were put on one floor of Lambdin and in a few dorm basements.⁸⁶ One year, as numbers grew, Admissions had to house men in a rented motel on Oneco Avenue.

The campus changed quite quickly once men arrived. In 1968, parietals were still in effect, and the Sheridans walked the floors of Marshall on Sunday afternoons to ensure that all doors were open. The four Wesleyan men in the basement of Freeman found parietals

⁸⁵Coeducation Report of the Summer Planning Group, *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, December 1968, 23.

⁸⁶*Satyagraha*, May 13, 1969.

particularly offensive.⁸⁷ They wrote an open letter to President Shain in the again renamed campus newspaper *Satyagraha* (“Truth force”) in May of 1969, condemning him for imposing rules typical of women’s colleges on their sense of freedom: “We feel we are mature and responsible enough to determine our own social regulations,” they wrote, “and we are quite insulted when other people impose their morals on our private lives.” The four men declared secession from the “self-defeating Conn College bureaucracy” and deemed their basement suite its own self-governing social entity called the United Republic of Freeman.

From there it grew. In 1969, the College decided to let each dorm decide whether to form visiting hours or to open parietals completely. A sheet of paper labeled “Parietal Vote” and given to Charles Shain in September of 1970 lists each campus dormitory’s vote count: 1,297, 94 percent of the student body, voted for unlimited over limited parietals. “OVERWHELMINGLY IN FAVOR OF OPEN PARIETALS!!!” is typed out across the bottom of this document, and “Save for Trustees” is penned in script along the top.⁸⁸

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In 1970, a group of parents came together, took a poll, and entered a Trustee meeting with statistics: 99.3 percent of them “did not want the students to run the college.” One father demanded answers to reports of “one girl being awakened at night by a black man who entered her room to talk,” and another of a student’s complaint “about a girl across the hall who engaged in sexual intercourse without closing her door.”⁸⁹ He was one of a small group that had given

⁸⁷ Harvey Yazijian, Stephen Detmold, Elliot Daum, and Andre Barbera, “An Open Letter to President Shain,” *Satyagraha*, May 13, 1969.

⁸⁸ “Parietal Vote” (College archives, “C.C. Goes Coed” File, September 14, 1970).

⁸⁹ Notes on the meeting of August 10, 1970 between Trustees and members of the “Parents Committee of Connecticut College Students (College archives, “C.C. Goes Coed” box, “Co-Education: A Parents’ Committee Protests Parietal Issues, 1970” file, August 14, 1970).

themselves a name, the “Parents Committee of Connecticut College Students”, and a cause: to protect their children from a new and misguided Connecticut College.

Shain had written all parents the year before to inform them of the parietal change. “First, a bit of history,” he wrote, “During the College’s first year, 1915, by Trustee and Faculty decision the chief responsibility for framing the social rules of the College was placed in student hands. In consultation with the President and deans, the student body has modified campus rules almost annually in response to changing manners and conduct in our society...I do not believe the founders of Connecticut College misplaced their confidence in that first student generation on this campus, nor do we when we express this faith in the intelligence, maturity and good manners of our present students.”⁹⁰

By October of 1970, the Parents Committee had given up on Shain and continued to hassle the Trustees directly. “What is the college’s new ‘expanded contraceptive program?’” they wrote in one letter. “Is the ‘no hitch-hiking’ rule being enforced? ... Is it true that a Chemistry Department professor manufactured and gave LSD to a student who had to be hospitalized?” They asked whether campus speakers would be dominated by “Rennie Davis types again,” referring to a famous anti-Vietnam protest leader, and signed the letter with a PO Box and no names.⁹¹

Shain shook a finger at all parties in the 1970 *Alumnae Magazine*, standing by the community he had fostered: “I remain persuaded from my investigation and consultation with all

⁹⁰ Charles Shain, letter to the parents of Connecticut College undergraduates (College archives, “C.C. Goes Coed” box, “Co-Education: A Parents’ Committee Protests Parietal Issues, 1970” file, September 8, 1969).

⁹¹ Letter to the Board of Trustees from the Parents Committee of Connecticut College Students (College archives, “C.C. Goes Coed” box, “Co-Education: A Parents’ Committee Protests Parietal Issues, 1970” file, October 5, 1970).

shades of student opinion that our best hope lies in making the present self-determining system work...[Students] are, at their best, on a search for new boundaries, for new relationships between men and women at the college level of meeting. We can't try to turn them back to a world that existed in our own childhood and youth."⁹²

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Allen Carroll was among the first batch of incoming freshmen to move into Larrabee in 1969. "All in all, we were a reasonably normal cross-section of mostly white, mostly middle-class American youth," he wrote in an essay ten years later. "Normal for 1969, at least, running the gamut from smoky-room-with-towel-under-the-door-type hippies to vacuum-every-other-day preppies."⁹³

Carroll, like most freshmen men who ended up at Conn that year, was rejected from Wesleyan after a particularly competitive year. The twenty-seven of them lived below three floors of upperclass women, who were still practicing the same social habits that they had while Conn was a women's school, taking taxis on weekends to Yale, Wesleyan and Brown to meet men. The freshmen men didn't expect to capitalize on the male-female ratio, despite alumnae anxieties and running student jokes. "After all, what reasonable young women would forsake the abundant fruits of those nearby male cornucopias for the slim pickings at home? We were statistically insignificant: objects of amusement and curiosity, perhaps, like apes in a zoo, but genuine prospects, no."

Said Carrie Kent, "Every year I was here in relation to the year before, it felt like there was a radical increase in the number of men on campus. I remember that whole crew of them

⁹² Charles Shain, "Alumnae Council: The State of the College," *Connecticut College Alumnae News*, Summer 1970, 2-4.

⁹³ Allen T. Carroll, "The odds were overwhelming," *Connecticut College Alumni Magazine*, Fall 1979, 3-6.

that lived down in Larrabee. They'd all come out of boys' boarding schools, so you could imagine. We used to go down to those floors and it was just out of control. They were with *women*, and you know, it was the early seventies, so people were for the first time experiencing what they thought was open sexuality. It was a little crazy at times. Not all the time, but sometimes.”⁹⁴

Students socialized in dorm rooms, common rooms, or an informal spot in the basement of Winthrop Hall called *The Coffee Shop*. Students were informal, in speech, in dress and in action, and most alumni told me that students in the early seventies weren't interested in the big formal events of the past. “There weren't proms,” said Kent. “I wouldn't have been caught dead at a prom when I was in college. That was just beyond the pale. People didn't really go in for organized social events, even parties. I went to a few, but more often someone would have some people over to their room, and you'd go to someone's room and you'd sit around and you'd talk, and in some rooms there might be dope smoked or in some rooms there was drinking, but it was not some sort of organized social. People still dated some.”

Photography professor Ted Hendrickson grew up in New London, and went to school with Carrie Kent and other children of Connecticut College professors. He attended the University of Connecticut in the early seventies, and would visit the College occasionally to see outdoor concerts or film screenings. On weekend nights he stayed on campus with friends.⁹⁵

“I would suppose there was an occasional party,” he said, “but I don't remember any big bashes, like massive amounts of people having a big party. I may not have been hanging around

⁹⁴ Carrie Kent '74, Connecticut College reference librarian, in discussion with the author, December 17, 2010.

⁹⁵ Ted Hendrickson, Professor of Photography and former Campus Photographer, in discussion with the author, October 26, 2011.

with the right crowd, maybe there were big raging parties I never knew about...” he stopped and laughed. “Yeah I think we would have heard about them, at least.”

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In October of 1971, Richard Nixon wrote a new draft bill for Vietnam that revoked the automatic deferment policy for men while they were in college.⁹⁶ A Draft Counseling Service was offered to Connecticut College men looking for support or information. They met in the Harkness Chapel Library, the same room Connecticut College women had used to prepare surgical dressings for WWII soldiers nearly thirty years before.

“The specter of the draft was very much a presence on the first floor of Larrabee House,” wrote Carroll. “A particularly poignant memory is that of the first draft lottery. Most of the dorm was gathered silently around the television that night, and by the time the telecast was over, emotions ranged from elation to despair. As far as I know, none of us ever went to Vietnam (our proxies were the less economically advantaged), but we were far from sure that we would never have to go.”

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Robley Evans and I met in the Palmer room of the Linda Lear Room for Special Collections and Archives on the second floor of Shain library, easily the most ornate public room on campus: old books line the walls, locked behind steel gates. A long wooden table runs down the center of the room, and decorations include a Chinese urn and two busts: one of Albert Einstein and one of Susan K. Langer, a philosophy professor at the College in the late fifties.

⁹⁶ “2-S Deferment Ended Under New Draft Bill,” *Pundit*, Connecticut College, October 5, 1971.

“I think, looking back, there was this political reality, but also an intellectual one,” Evans told me.⁹⁷ “We have to remember that through most of the College’s history, well into the 1960s, the requirements were very high, and there was a more rigid hold on what Susan and Johnny had to learn. And that came from a long tradition that to some extent is still with us. *It’s very good for young people to read Cicero*, for instance. *Yes, yes*. It’s kind of a mindless obedience to tradition.” He laughed and looked around at the caged books that surrounded us. “I hope they’re not listening!”

In the early years, the English Department was run by John Edwin Wells, who insisted the department teach primarily Shakespeare, Chaucer, and other pre-eighteenth century writers. Evans remembers Dean Noyes telling him she was amazed the day he asked her whether she would like to teach Victorian Literature.

“I’m bringing all that up because I think now we tend to think of the academy as being open and free, where we have debates and so forth.” He laughed. “But that wasn’t how a lot of the early twentieth century began.”

Evans says that lecture was the preferred mode of transferring experience. Although Connecticut College established itself as a school that would offer women a new kind of education, most of the faculty had been taught in old, male, Germanic, lecture-based Ivy League institutions. “There’s a whole backlog there that you probably won’t ever run into of traditions brought from some of the major graduate schools like Harvard and Yale,” he said.

“There were several former colleagues in my department who I can’t imagine talking to students today. I just can’t imagine it!” He laughed. “Lecturing to them? The distance between those old timers and the young students today must just be an immense, immeasurable gulf.”

⁹⁷ Robley Evans, emeritus Professor of English, in discussion with the author, February 7, 2011.

Through the sixties and seventies, courses began to shift and change shape. The English department began to offer courses studying more contemporary literature, and Evans began a small theater department. Interdisciplinary majors were offered, and students started writing Honors' Theses. Liberal Arts began to take on a new definition, one that was contextual and discussion-based. Evans said that the new intersection between men and women made his classroom more aggressive intellectually, which pushed forward these changes with vigor.

“The older people who were here as time went on just had to accept that these shifts were going to occur. And they survived. They made the jump. It sounds terribly silly, because of course you'd make the jump,” he said, grinning. “But, you know, there was a man who cried.”

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There are many reasons Connecticut College is said to have been successful in coeducation. Unlike Vassar, CC was young and had a small endowment, and in turn could let go of its past reputation and jump into the transition without hesitation. Unlike Goucher, CC chose coeducation at the cusp of a revolution in higher education. Admission was at its most competitive, and more men were looking for alternate college options. Unlike Skidmore, who changed campuses completely in 1969, CC did not make any large changes to its structural landscape, but stayed coherent with the women's understanding of their space. This stability doubtless allayed pressures of female students and alumnae. Finally, our name, Connecticut College for Women, unlike a college like Sarah Lawrence, was effectively nondescript: cut off “for Women” and the name recognition doesn't stick in the same way.

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2:30 marked the end of my interview with Peggy Sheridan. As we were putting on our coats, she stopped short. “You know,” she said, “the buildings were the same and the good

teaching was the same. It wasn't like the spirit of the place had gone. The philosophy of the place hadn't changed, but the whole way everything was being done changed dramatically."

She wished me luck as we left one of the oldest buildings on campus and split in opposite directions. Midway to the library, I turned around and spotted her, a bright pink College veteran of forty-eight years, striding in step with the line of students walking from dorm to class.

chapter four : equity

Frank Tuitt '87 came to Connecticut College to play basketball. He visited for Eclipse Weekend the May before attending, an annual celebration of race and ethnicity on campus, and remembers seeing students, faculty, and alumni of color everywhere.

“I looked around and thought, *this place really isn't that bad*,” he said. “And then I remember coming back in the fall, looking around, and thinking, *Hey. Where did everybody go?*”⁹⁸

Frank remembers the day he was sitting in a room with the ten students of color in his class – they were complaining about Connecticut College, deciding together to transfer. He also remembers the moment they changed their minds: “We thought, okay. We could transfer, but the problems are going to be the same, and Connecticut College is going to be the same. So why don't we try to do something about it?”

Frank Tuitt is Caribbean-American. He has dark, dark skin and a voice so low and level it vibrates. When I met him in the Charles Chu room of Shain Library, he kept his hands on the table, and tapped it for emphasis often. He was a leader of fifty-four students, black and white, who chained the doors of Fanning Hall shut on May 5, 1986. Like many of the black students with whom he sat, he felt victimized. He felt different, underappreciated, and that his concerns went consistently unheeded. Now, Frank is an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Denver College of Education, and teaches professors pedagogic methods of teaching that are respectful of racial diversity. He is also a Connecticut College Trustee.

⁹⁸ Frank Tuitt '87, in discussion with the author, February 11, 2011.

The history of Connecticut College for Women is astoundingly white. By 1967, after over fifty academic years, the College had graduated exactly eight minority students; the entire decade of the 1940s passed with only one black student entering its ranks. She withdrew her junior year.⁹⁹ Surprising as it is, this is also not uncommon in the history of our counterparts: like the seven sisters, CC was drawing from a Caucasian, northeastern demographic. Of the few black students who did apply, most needed financial aid, of which the College, young and tuition-based, could provide very little. Thus, in 1967, the first year that racial and socioeconomic diversity became a social issue for colleges, Connecticut struggled: most black students applying to college chose historically black colleges, or were swept up by more selective schools that could afford to give them financial aid. Additionally, few black students wanted to willingly place themselves in a school so homogenously Caucasian.

“Let’s face it,” Director of Admissions Jeannette B. Hearsey told *The New London Day* in 1968, “as a selective women’s college we are automatically, if erroneously, associated in the minds of many with the traditions of a white social elite. We must convince black students that we do want them, not to fulfill some kind of conscience quota, but because we welcome the intellectually excellent, regardless of race.”

Peggy Sheridan, who graduated in 1967, remembers very little diversity. “Very, very little,” she said. “Here and there I remember black students, but I can’t imagine what it felt like. My mother was a widow and we were middle class, and that was hard enough. It felt like you were very poor if you weren’t really upper middle class. So for an urban person of any color, who was

⁹⁹ “Admission of Minority Students at Connecticut College: A Report to the Commission to Investigate Racial Relations at Connecticut College” (Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives, Connecticut College (hereafter cited as College Archives), Fanning Takeover 1: Committee on Racial Relations File, 1971) 1-4.

not used to the accoutrements and not used to being remote from an urban area, it must have been incredibly tough.”¹⁰⁰

Frank helped initiate the second of two takeovers, part of a cycle that had been laid out for him by the generation before. In the fall of 1967, thirty-one students, or 2% of the student body, were black or Puerto Rican.¹⁰¹ By 1968, African American students were working with the administration toward a goal with a tagline: 71 by '71. “Spirit of '71” meant black students and the Admissions Office were actively recruiting together.

These efforts were spearheaded by the Afro-American Society on campus, whose efforts combined with chapters at other colleges. When Pembroke College made demands on their administrators in 1969, Conn students wrote them letters of support – Pembroke had demanded that their Admissions office recruit African American students more intensely than before, and suggested that their apathy was a form of racism in itself. “We support Pembroke Black women out of the necessity of unity,” CC’s chapter told the student body in the *Conn Census*, “and **you** support Pembroke Black women out of the necessity of tearing down a racist bureaucracy.”

In the spring of 1969 the Society hosted a conference called Black Womanhood. “We’re trying to reach two completely different groups,” Sue Johnson, chairman of the conference told the *Alumnae News*, “First, those white girls who tell us how much they like Blacks because their cook is black and wonderful. These kids have got to discover that we have many, many women who are outstanding by any criteria. Then there’s the black girl who *knows* we have loads of

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Sheridan '67, emeritus professor of Human Development, in discussion with the author, February 16, 2011.

¹⁰¹ “Admission of Minority Students at Connecticut College: A Report to the Commission to Investigate Racial Relations at Connecticut College” (College Archives, Fanning Takeover 1: Committee on Racial Relations File, 1971) 1-4.

famous women. But something's missing in her make-up, she doesn't *feel* any pride about it inside, you know? She lacks something – 'spiritual awareness,' I guess you could call it."¹⁰²

Two years later, on May 5, 1971, about twenty-five members of the Afro-American Society entered Fanning Hall at six a.m.; they chained its doors and refused to leave. They had three demands: one, that seventy-one black students enroll by the fall semester as previously decided. Two, that a full-time black admissions officer be hired by September 1. Three, that black students on campus have a housing option where they could live together.

It was a small disruption, with what reads like a congenial resolution; Shain issued a statement of agreement, and the students walked out at 9 a.m. "with thermoses, cracker boxes and blankets in hand."¹⁰³ As per the students' request, Shain made Blackstone the campus' predominantly black dormitory. He hired a black admissions officer, James Jones, to begin in the Admissions Office in the fall of 1971, with a full class of seventy-five minority students as promised. By 1972, the number of minority students jumped up to a hundred and three.¹⁰⁴

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Oakes Ames lives in an apartment building on Manhattan's Upper East Side, and when I walked into the elevator, a man in a suit shut its two iron gates. "Nice day," the man said, as he pressed a button. It was early February, and despite whipping winds, the day was sunny, almost warm.

The man who answered the door had almond-shaped eyes, an oval face. He smiled, bigger than I expected. Lines ran down the sides of his whole face, from the edges of his

¹⁰² "New Goals – Black Womanhood Conference, April 18-20," *Connecticut College Alumnae Magazine*, May 1969, 5.

¹⁰³ "Building Seizure Gains Student Goals", May 6, 1971, *New London Day*

¹⁰⁴ "Admission of Minority Students at Connecticut College: A Report to the Commission to Investigate Racial Relations at Connecticut College" (College Archives, Fanning Takeover I: Committee on Racial Relations File, 1971) 1-4.

almonds to below his mouth. “Welcome,” he said. “I hope you found your way easily. Now, first, would you like some tea?”¹⁰⁵

He wore frameless bifocals, a blue cashmere sweater, and khakis that rode halfway up his shins when he sat. He had tall, long legs. I stood with him in his galley kitchen while he let looseleaf tea soak in a mini wicker tea basket that sat on top of my mug. “I also have some cookies,” he said. “My wife would not endorse cookies in the middle of the afternoon, but company offers a good excuse.” We spoke and we didn’t; silences came and went smoothly.

The most common adjectives my interviewees used to describe Ames, the seventh president of Connecticut College, are “formal” and “gentle.” Through our email correspondence, I struggled with what to call him. I started with President Ames, and he signed his response “Oakes.” I tried Dr. Ames, and he responded with “Oakes.” Ames is a historic New Englander – his great grandfather established Ames & Sons shovel company right in time for the California Gold rush. His grandfather and namesake was a US representative from Massachusetts for ten years, and organized a contract for Ames & Sons to construct the Union Pacific portion of the transcontinental railway in the 1860s. His father was an investment banker who later became chairman of both the New York Philharmonic and Lincoln Center. His apartment is small, with low ceilings, furnished with decorative angels, pinecones and eggs. He drank from a mug with a blue and white bird on it. He was kind and spoke slowly. I wanted to call him Uncle Oakes, but I called him Dr. Ames.

He sat me on a couch and took the adjacent chair. A group of magazines lay out on the coffee table in front of me: The Atlantic, The Economist, The New Yorker, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, and Connecticut College Magazine.

¹⁰⁵ Oakes Ames, former president of Connecticut College, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2011.

Ames was president from 1974 through 1988. Up until Tuitt's takeover, the predominant campus debate revolved around apartheid in South Africa. Ames and his wife Louise had traveled to South Africa that November to meet apartheid and anti-apartheid leaders. "We met with church leaders, with labor leaders, with students, with people, we got this incredible mosaic of feelings and opinions, and we came back and we were very affected," he said. When he returned, campus concern about apartheid continued to grow. Many students believed that the College should divest from its endowment portfolio stock, bonds, any company that did business in South Africa.¹⁰⁶ To complicate things, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals had a huge fertilizer plant in the southeastern part of Africa.

The college has a historically close relationship to Pfizer, the pharmaceutical company that hosts its headquarters in Groton: at that time, an Executive Vice President of Research and Development named Barry Bloom was also a member of the Board of Trustees, and the College held Pfizer stock. To divest from Pfizer was to lose a valuable member of the Board. Ames explained that Pfizer was making every effort it could to hire black South Africans into the work force, but most students were still outraged. When the Board next visited, on February 25, 1986, students stood on either side of the walkway to Blaustein holding candles in a vigil pathway. Each member had to walk through a double line of students upon exiting. "The board had the experience of looking at these young faces in candlelight, and getting a sense of how they felt about it," said Ames, "And it became a big part of the deliberations of the trustees. So there was

¹⁰⁶ Meetings of the Board of Trustees (College Archives, Secretary's Record, Connecticut College, Volume 22: 1985-1987) 72-74, 134-35, 338.

an issue to discuss here, really to bite into.” That night, Ames lit a candle in support of the students.¹⁰⁷

One faculty member articulated that if a company is trying to do good in South Africa, divesting is actually contradictory and wrong. Meanwhile, the editorial section of the *Voice* published, week after week, their commitment to divestment. No decisions had yet been made when Tuitt and his friends formed a chapter of something called called SOAR: Society Organized Against Racism, a new multicultural group focused on racial injustices on college campuses. When Ames talked about the takeover of Fanning Hall on May 1, 1986, he called it just that: the takeover of Fanning Hall on May 1, 1986.

“It was a real upheaval on campus,” he said. “And boy, those students were impressive.”

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Seven people are sitting around a table in Abbey. It's 9:35, Wednesday night, April 31, Sheila Gallagher puffs on a Merit, smiling often as she shuffles through documents. Richard Greenwald, in a button down, blue oxford shirt, sits, rocking his chair on its hind legs, amazed and excited that it's going to happen. Frankie Tuitt, a silver anchor necklace hanging from his neck, says, "It's going to be a big fight for all of us." Trying to keep up with the conversation, his pen racing across a yellow legal-sized pad, Dan Besse writes down the statement, making light of the group's seriousness. Bass Ale in one hand, a pack of Marlboro 25's in the other, Jed Alfred, doesn't want to mince words, "Don't dilute it," he says. Christine Owens looks down and nods, 'we're running out of time, let's do it.' Sipping apple juice and making jokes, Reed Thompson worries, "Can we get another padlock? Do you have one?"¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *College Voice*, February 25, 1986.

¹⁰⁸ Fernando Espuelas-Asenjo and Cynthia Fazzari, “Fanning Takeover Forces Action,” *College Voice*, May 6, 1986.

So reads the reporter's notebook of Fernando Espuelas and Cynthia Fazzari, reprinted on the front page of the college newspaper, finally and permanently renamed *The College Voice*, on May 6, 1986. The leaders of SOAR, which had approximately fifty active members, had written a twenty-seven page document for administrators that they called their Statement of Expressions – it highlighted their concerns about diversity on campus. In short, the prominence of black students had regressed since 1971. Unity House was in Vinal Cottage across Route 32, isolated and underfunded. They perceived what Tuitt calls in retrospect “an isolated, some would argue hostile campus climate, and in particular, a sense that faculty had no clue how to interact with students of color.”¹⁰⁹ They sent the report to Ames, who wrote a three-page response acknowledging the problem, and, as an article in the *Voice* summarized, “sketching the steps already taken by the college to meet the needs of minority students.”

Both students and faculty remember unanimously that the students felt their options were exhausted. Administrators made acknowledgments but no changes. “Students have been patronized,” one student was quoted as saying. “The Administration has been saying things just to keep us content.”

Dean of Studies Theresa Ammirati was head of the Writing Center in 1986, and remembers a few students coming to her and asking for help. “They weren't being listened to,” she said. “They came to me, director of the Writing Center who had zero administrative power, which I took to mean that they were pretty desperate. Nobody was really aware of it, or really understood what they were going through. There were so few faculty of color.”¹¹⁰

John Gordon, an English professor, believes that the administration's passivity stemmed partly from the Dean of the College, whose badly kept secrets distracted him from the events at

¹⁰⁹ Frank Tuitt '87, in discussion with the author, February 11, 2011

¹¹⁰ Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Studies, in discussion with the author, March 1, 2011.

hand.¹¹¹ “I’m not going to name names here,” he said, “but his mind was not on the job. And the reason his mind was not on the job was that he was having an affair with the secretary of his boss. A very flamboyant and public one apparently...and so he was preoccupied. And he just dropped the ball.” Gordon was on the Student Life committee, and remembers African American students showing up to introduce their concerns. “He’d say, ‘Well, another time, another time.’ And they took that as a sign of insensitivity or racism or something like that. But I think it was really that he wanted to get to his mistress, is what it really was. That’s the real inside story there.” The dean resigned at the end of that May. In a subsequent *Voice* article, they cited “the Trustee’s alleged dissatisfaction with [his] tutelage over the Office of Minority Affairs as well as other undisclosed issues” as reasons for his resignation.¹¹²

To most others, the issue had nothing to do with faculty scandals. I was surprised by Ames’ honest, undefended response. “The minority students, and justifiably so, didn’t feel entirely comfortable on the campus,” he said, looking off in thought, as he often did before he spoke.¹¹³ “And we talked, but we didn’t act enough. That was what happened. We were aware. I had several black students come into my office and talk with me, and neither I nor other members of the administration realized the extent of their concern, and the feeling that they were being neglected. And it was that that triggered the takeover of Fanning Hall, on May 1, 1986.”

“We started to engage the trustees as well, and made a case to them about some of our concerns,” said Tuitt, “and we just felt generally that no one was taking us seriously. That led to some planning meetings.” They chose May 1, a week before the trustees would arrive for the

¹¹¹ John Gordon, Professor of Literatures in English, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2010.

¹¹² “Dean Resigns,” *College Voice*, August 25, 1986.

¹¹³ Oakes Ames, former president of Connecticut College, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2011

weekend, and four days from the first takeover's fifteenth anniversary. On Wednesday night, they broke into teams: some were responsible for contacting the media and the local NAACP, others were responsible for securing the building, others for writing the list of demands. The group of fifty-four worked through Thursday. The group met at Unity House and walked together up the hill, entered the building, chained the doors with bicycle locks, and then continued to refine their goals through the night. They settled on the following: "In 1971, a group of concerned minority students took over Fanning Hall to protest the minority situation on campus. Fifteen years later the situation has clearly deteriorated. Every effort to bring about concrete change has been met only with token verbal responses. Because of the deterioration below the 1971 level, we, as concerned students, feel that the only possible recourse is to take over Fanning Hall once again."¹¹⁴

The students had a plan: they would do a press conference at ten o'clock, and would not speak to anyone outside of the building until then. Tuitt remembers a range of emotions, tangled somewhere between fear and excitement. In a speech he gave with Tuitt twenty-four years later, Richard Greenwald '87, another student leader of the initiative, said the following:

"Concurrently while some of us were reviewing our plans in the stillness of Fanning Hall that night, some people were figuring out their contingencies – because it might have been our last night at Connecticut College. After all it was an illegal act, and if not illegal, then certainly it was going to be within the rights of the school to expel us all."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ College Archives, Fanning Takeover II, May 1, 1986.

¹¹⁵ Frank Tuitt '87 and Richard Greenwald '87, "Connecticut College: Finding and Feeding Your Passion," Baccalaureate Address, May 22, 2010.

“I mean we were in bed,” said Ames, “and the sun was just rising, and I got a call from Campus Safety that the building was locked in.” He laughed. “Surprise!” and laughed again.¹¹⁶

When the students looked outside, they saw the New London police, Ames, and all of Fanning’s administrators huddled in the cold. As the day developed, as many as six hundred students and faculty members were outside in support.

“We camped out pretty much on the second floor,” said Tuitt, “and if you look at pictures there are people hanging out windows, looking down.” At different points in the day, the students sat with their legs over the windowsill, calling down their concerns.

The Administration and a number of faculty members relocated to Blaustein Humanities Center to begin negotiations. Two faculty members, Professor Emeritus of History Edward Brodtkin and former Dean of the College Robert Hampton, were student-approved allies, and moved between Fanning and Blaustein repeatedly to communicate. Three revisions, a few student concessions, and a handful of hours later, the groups had agreed on a statement. “So we were admitted into the administration building,” said Ames, laughing with what I can only describe as affection, “and we went up to a big classroom that had been set up with a table in the middle. A lot of the students were around it, and we talked, and there was very little wrangling. We were really in agreement.”

Fifty-two names are scrawled around the shaky signature of Oakes Ames in the final document that ratified the policy changes.¹¹⁷ Its predominant promises included a series of sensitivity workshops for faculty and students, a minor in Afro-American and Black History studies, renovations to Unity House and an a 5% budget increase, an increase in minority

¹¹⁶ Oakes Ames, former president of Connecticut College, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2011.

¹¹⁷ “Statement by Concerned Students and Senior Staff” (College Archives, Fanning Takeover II File, May 1, 1986).

enrollment by 2% every two years until it “appropriately reflects the composition of our society.” Immunity against disciplinary action for the students occupying the building was also secured.

“This past Thursday, May 1, two Connecticut College clichés were exposed as being unfounded,” read the next week’s *College Voice* editorial. “The first cliché dealt with student apathy. The second with the administration’s supposed lack of concern with the students’ wishes. We are happy to report that the take over of Fanning Hall [by] 54 *concerned* students proved these allegations to be a myth.”¹¹⁸

I looked up at Ames as he collected his thoughts, my feet squished between the couch and the coffee table. He had a hearing aid, and his hands shook lightly.

“One of the lessons that came out of this,” he said, “is that you’ve got to go out of your way to be alert to how people feel. And we weren’t reading the signals quite right. The students who were most involved were not Student Government, by and large. It was a new group, and they were idealistic...” he paused. “And they were...” he paused again. “They were *terrific*. I mean, they were really impressive. It was very moving.”

He looked down at the table, his hands “The leadership that was exhibited was awesome. I get so immersed in that now.”

I asked what specifically moved him.

“In that particular situation, it was the enormous sincerity of the students, the depth of their feelings,” he said. “I was suddenly seeing them as I hadn’t seen them before. I think they recognized that the campus was learning from it. In other words, they were not frustrated. They saw various things happening that signaled that there had been a change, there was being a change, right then and there. I just remember feeling very close to them.”

¹¹⁸ “Successful Takeover,” editorial, *College Voice*, May 6, 1986.

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Before Frank Tuitt left the Chu room for his Trustee dinner, I asked him why he thinks the numbers of minority students on campus so consistently rises and dips in waves. “Ok,” he said, “I think students hold institutions accountable in ways institutions can’t hold themselves accountable. So every so often, you get groups of students who come through who raise these important questions and remind the institution of its commitment. And then the institution says *yeah!* And they do something about it.” He tapped the table, never breaking eye contact. “And then complacency sets in again. The other thing that happens is that the institution becomes more accessible, and is not prepared to manage its increased diversity. Instead of trying to work through that, it says *oh no, we can’t do this*. And retreats. I think it’s a combination of both of those.”

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In the Spring of 1988, the trustees voted to divest completely from South Africa and Ames retired from the presidency. “Feelings were running high, and everybody was talking to everybody else,” he said. “And the leadership on the part of these young people, they were so impressive.”

chapter five : shared governance

Claire Gaudiani opened the door to her penthouse apartment in Manhattan's Lower East Side wearing a black leotard, tights, bright red running sneakers and a bejeweled cashmere cardigan. "Welcome," she said, and beckoned me inside. "It's nice to meet you. I just came in from exercising. Would you like some tea? We're big tea drinkers in this house."¹¹⁹

She brought me into the entryway, where her husband sat typing at a desk. "David Burnett," he said, shaking my hand, and as he turned back to his computer off I was brought down the hallway to their kitchen, where Claire got to work microwaving two mugs of hot water. Claire's kitchen and attached living room looked north toward the rest of Manhattan. She walked slowly, limping from a medical issue she mentioned was spinal related, and pulled our mugs carefully from high shelves. When I asked whether she minded if I tape recorded, she looked at me, and then at my recorder, with hesitation.

"I've had bad experiences with recordings," she said. "You never know whose hands they'll land in," and then reluctantly agreed.

Claire was a student at Connecticut College from 1962-1966. Her mentor was Nelly Murstein, French professor emerita married to Bernard Murstein, a psychology professor. Connecticut College was the only institution that the couple could find in the early sixties that would accept a working woman with children and a Jewish man. Nelly took a liking to Claire. She saw her as eager and full of potential. "I remember walking to Crozier Williams with Claire, where I was taking a dance class," Nelly had told me a week before, wide-eyed, articulating every word.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Claire Gaudiani, former president of Connecticut College, in discussion with the author, November 29, 2010.

¹²⁰ Nellie Murstein, professor emeritus of French, in discussion with the author, November 2, 2010.

“She was asking me, ‘How do you manage to combine students and family?’ I was a woman, married, with children, and these were girls. I wanted Claire – and others, she was not the only one – to have as much approval as possible to counteract the social negativity towards a career woman with children.”

Claire handed me my tea. “The faculty took their work seriously, and they took us seriously, and education seriously,” she said. “Nelly was like the answer to a prayer! Here was a totally beautiful woman with two daughters, and with a husband who loved her, was very smart, and thought she hung the moon. He wasn’t threatened by her or afraid of her, he wasn’t embarrassed, he just thought it was so great that he had this brilliant woman. Into my life walks this person on day one! And I thought, *I want to be Nelly Murstein when I grow up. I want a PhD.* Nelly hosted seminars in her home, and of course I even do that here. The seminar I teach is in this room. Those are my favorite spoons.” She passed me one, leaning informally against the marble counter.

“Some faculty aren’t comfortable with that, but most of the faculty knew that they were role models. A lot of us knew men who were our faculty members, who really appreciated smart women. You know, Bill Neiring, who died in my arms...” she looked down and sighed audibly. “Such an amazing man. I didn’t see men who didn’t respect the minds of women when I was in college.”

Claire brought me into her office and gestured to a rocking chair by the window. She sat in the adjacent leather chair and placed her tea on the coffee table between us, next to a copy of Brave New World and her new book, Generosity Unbound: How American Philanthropy Can Strengthen the Economy and Expand the Middle Class. The book was published by the Institute for American Values, a morality-based think tank of which she is a senior fellow. Her bookshelf held, among many others, the Holy Bible, Ayn Rand, and a history of the *New London Day*, in which she is

featured prominently. Missing is another book that spotlights her, one called Little Pink House, which describes the Supreme Court's case of Kelo vs. New London. In 2000, Claire was President of both Connecticut College and of the New London Development Corporation, an organization attempting vigorously to revitalize New London's economy. The research headquarters of Pfizer Pharmaceuticals is housed in Groton, and at the time, her husband David was the director of its research university. Over the course of several meetings, Claire encouraged George Milne Jr., a then-College trustee and the Pfizer Senior Vice President, to create a research facility across the river in New London. He agreed. The NLDC continued with their project by working to develop the surrounding area: a neighborhood of houses and a sewage facility. They did this by exercising the legal rules of eminent domain over its residents, summarily displacing them from their homes.¹²¹ The plot of land still remains empty. The Pfizer site has since closed.

Claire's chair, which appeared to be stationary, actually contained a sliding mechanism. She began to slide back and forth as she sat reclined, one sneakered foot on the ottoman. Each time she slid back the chair hit the radiator and squeaked.

"I was invited back to the College to speak a couple of times," she said, "because I had a very active career as a professor. I was writing books and I was going all over the world, doing lectures."

She returned to speak at the dedication of Blaustein Humanities Center in 1988, right around the time Oakes Ames was stepping down from his presidency. Claire received a positive response, and she told me that three faculty members wrote her asking if they could nominate her as a presidential candidate. "I thought, *That's crazy. I'm 41, and I've never been an administrator of any*

¹²¹ Timothy P. Carney, "Pfizer deserts its monument to corporate welfare," *Washington Examiner*, November 11, 2009. <http://washingtonexaminer.com/politics/pfizer-deserts-its-monument-corporate-welfare>

sort, so no one is going to give me a college to manage. But I said, ‘Sure.’ I didn’t want to tell them it was a dumb idea.”

Oakes Ames, President from 1974-1988, is often described as a perfect gentleman: kind, stately, formal. John Gordon, Professor of English, called him “an old-school, old money noblesse oblige. A sweet, gentle man. I think when we went from him to Claire Gaudiani, it was the idea that maybe he was too polite. Maybe we needed something to shake us up. He did not like controversy.”¹²²

As 125 candidates narrowed to eighty, and then to twenty, Claire assumed she was still in the running for any reason but her qualifications. Perhaps they wanted an alumna in the running. Perhaps they needed a woman. What they really needed, more than a statistic, and what we must assume that deep down she knew, was energy. Claire had been a consultant for the National Endowment of the Humanities, advising higher education institutions on approaches to curricular development. At the time, she was teaching French at the University of Pennsylvania, and was assistant director of their Management and International Studies Institute.

“I never thought I was a serious candidate in a million years, so I always told them what I thought should happen at the college,” she said as she slid. “I’d been overseas so much that I could see that there were tremendous changes coming, and that a liberal arts college in a tucked away place would have to transform itself. A school like Connecticut would have to have a much stronger science program in order to have a balance, and we’d need to go strongly into an imaginative international program, because that’s where the world was going.”

So she went through what she calls her “little doo-dah” at each interview, until she got a call from the trustees of the College, offering her the job.

Claire was looking intently at me at this point. She snorted.

¹²² John Gordon, Professor of Literatures in English, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2010.

“I thought, ‘Not really. You’re only kidding,’” she said. “But they weren’t kidding.”

She told the trustees she couldn’t accept the job without securing the faculty’s support. Next she told the faculty, in her words, “I’m going to make a lot of mistakes, and you need to help me, and you’ll need to head me off when I make mistakes, and you’ll need to help make people forgive me.” Claire says the faculty members told her they were encouraged: “They said, ‘We think the faculty is ready for some real energy, and we think that we have a great campus and a great future and we need a great change.’” So she accepted the job to them instead of to the trustees as was convention, a move made to show respect to the faculty as the College’s intellectual leaders. She wanted them to know that she didn’t want to force changes in an institution.

“I wanted to lead an institution – insofar as I really *didn’t* want to lead the institution, any institution – but I would scramble my family to lead an institution that wanted to become a model of what liberal arts colleges ought to be.” And as she repeated through the afternoon, the prestige meant nothing to her. “I’m just not a big deal person. I mean, I still have my graduate student diamond, which is not,” she leaned forward and offered out her left hand, “not a quarter of a carat. So I just don’t care about that stuff.”

Claire looked around and stood. “You poor thing,” she said as the sun set over the City. “I have you in the dark here.” She turned on a lamp and moved to her desk chair. As she repositioned, I noticed a photograph of her children in the late eighties on her wall, young adults with floppy hair, lying on each other’s legs and gazing through the camera like unencumbered models. Her daughter Maria is a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, currently covering Uganda and side-blogging for the Huffington Post. Her son Graham is a tenured professor of history at Princeton, which they both attended as undergraduates. He studies, among other things, the relationship between power and knowledge.

“Every now and then I met with those same four faculty,” Claire said of the faculty on the hiring committee, “and it was extremely difficult. And that I can’t go into. But it was extremely difficult, because I think we were all more optimistic about how change would happen, and even how a young female would meet a faculty that had then become 70% male.”

I gaped, transfixed by her. “That’s right,” she said, “It didn’t become fifty-fifty. Before the transition to coeducation, it was 70% female faculty, tenured and tenure tracked, and 30% male. Within ten years, it had flipped completely.”

I asked her the difference she saw upon returning to her alma mater nearly thirty years later.

“That’s very delicate. I’m not sure I’d like to put that down on tape.”

And the recorder was turned off.

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“It had nothing to do with the fact that she was a woman.” Stephen Loomis was sitting at a table in 108 New London Hall, surrounded by humming machines and tubs labeled *Seagate*, *Neslab*, *Drierite*, *Fisher Scientific* in boxy fonts.¹²³ “She may have,” he paused, “sometimes she made comments that men faculty don’t like responding to woman presidents. I don’t think that was an issue at all. It also had nothing to do with her ideas. She had really good ideas. It all had to do with her leadership style. There are books out there about what’s called charismatic leaders, and it can be a very caustic leadership style.”

Loomis is a professor of Biology at Connecticut College who specializes in cryobiology. When he was a child, his father put his goldfish in the refrigerator while they vacationed for three weeks. When they returned, the fish was frozen in ice. “I put George out on the counter to thaw and went to prepare the commode for the [funeral] ceremonies,” he wrote in a publication for the Society of Cryobiology. “About an hour later I returned to get George and to my amazement,

¹²³ Stephen Loomis, Professor of Biology, in discussion with the author, February 8, 2011.

George was swimming around in the bowl."¹²⁴ His research is focused on biochemical mechanisms that allow invertebrates to survive at cold temperatures. The Carnegie Foundation voted him one of the “U.S. Professors of the Year” in 2000. He spoke with authority about Claire because under her presidency, from January 1993 through June 1995, he served as Provost and Dean of the Faculty. Loomis was asked to fill the Deanship as a replacement, and though he accepted, he didn’t like his role. “I felt like I was being drawn and quartered every day when I came in to work, with the faculty on one side of me and Claire on the other,” he said. “I spent a lot of my time putting out fires.”

Loomis was also the professor to hand Claire the petition that demanded her resignation in the spring of 2001. It was signed by seventy-eight out of 105 tenured faculty.

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Throughout my interviews, Claire has been explained as flamboyant, energetic, immediate, impatient, visionary, high handed, and untrustworthy. Professor John Gordon found her flamboyancerefreshing. “She’d dress in shocking pink mini dresses and high heels. The senior women once had a party with a ‘Dare to be Claire’ theme, which meant putting on red, red lipstick, shoulder pads – she always wore shoulder pads – very spiky heels, and so forth.”¹²⁵ Gordon, one of the last in the English department to maintain support for her, eventually gave up himself. “Frankly, she wasn’t that trustworthy,” he said. Said photography professor Ted Hendrickson, “She came on like gangbusters: high energy, immediate, impatient, certainly a figure that roused a lot of feathers. Her ideas were good, but she made decisions without input.”¹²⁶ Bernard Murstein summed up the faculty opinion by joking, “Claire’s idea of shared governance was govern, and then share it with everyone else.”

¹²⁴ Stephen Loomis Faculty Profile, Connecticut College website (http://www.conncoll.edu/academics/web_profiles/loomis).

¹²⁵ John Gordon, Professor of Literatures in English, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2010.

¹²⁶ Ted Hendrickson, Professor of Photography and former Campus Photographer, in discussion with the author, October 26, 2011.

“She definitely had a vision, especially having been an alumna,” said Rob Knake ’01, the Editor-in-Chief of the *College Voice* during Claire’s resignation. “There was a tremendous amount of change on campus, and there was a lot vested in Claire. She was a very charismatic speaker, and was inspiring to a group of Connecticut College students who were picking up what she was setting down.”¹²⁷

He remembered, “We were obsessed with the US News and World Report ratings when I was at Conn.” The fixation was for good reason: in the course of her presidency, Claire brought the College’s rankings for top liberal arts college from number 41 to, at peak, 24.

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The notion of charismatic leadership originates from sociologist Max Weber’s term Charismatic Authority, one of three classifications of authority described in his 1922 book Theory of Social and Economic Organization. This term describes high-energy leaders who challenge traditional boundaries and communicate clear, enticing visions of the future. They have an innate understanding of their current social environment. They outwardly display relentless heroic self-sacrifice to reach their goals. Their pitfalls can include traits of narcissism, lack of accountability, one-way communication, and insensitivity.¹²⁸

“She micromanaged,” Loomis went on. “She didn’t trust anybody. She didn’t think anybody could do the job that she could do, and would disrupt the jobs she gave out to tinker with them.”

He continued, “I’m glad I was Dean of the Faculty for the period of time that I was. I would never do it again, but in a way, it was one of the most satisfying things I’ve done, because it felt like I had made a difference at the time. It felt like I was able to hold the college together.”

¹²⁷ Rob Knake ’01, in discussion with the author, April 18, 2011.

¹²⁸ Jane M. Howell and Bruce J. Avolio, “The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership: Submission or Liberation?” *The Executive*, May 1992, 43-54 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4165064>).

Many professors I interviewed had a hard time summoning individual examples of how Claire meddled, and felt uncomfortable going on the record with the examples they had – they feared that individual instances sounded petty or insignificant out of context. Some examples I’ve collected include Claire’s interference in faculty tenure decisions – she was known for vetoing widely-supported candidates in favor of her own choices – and students and faculty alike remember receiving disgruntled nighttime phone calls from her at home. Most notable, and perhaps the tipping point, was financial: Claire invested the College’s endowment funds - \$2.8 million of it, to be exact – into real estate downtown.¹²⁹ She also put money into apartment and classroom space for the College community in Downtown New London without consulting the faculty.¹³⁰ This included a \$250,000-a-year fifteen-year lease on a building downtown called Mariner Square.¹³¹ The college is still paying off this lease today.

“Claire was really getting into redeveloping New London,” said Knake. “She began to get more interested in local politics than in the school, and it was clouding what she was doing here.” As she started hiring administrators with stronger backgrounds in politics than in academia, the editors of the *Voice* started asking questions. Knake continued: “Claire had an agenda that had something to do with government, something with the state of Connecticut. She was investing in New London. She had a bigger agenda that had nothing to do with the College.”¹³²

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¹²⁹ Rob Knake, “Open Forum Brings Answers on Finance, but Student Angst Still High” *College Voice*, September 22, 2000.

¹³⁰ Jeanine Millard and Trang Nguyen, “Faculty and Students Concerned About Shared Governance,” *College Voice*, April 21, 2000.

¹³¹ Paul P. Marthers, *Eighth Sister No More: The Origins and Evolution of Connecticut College* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2011), 181-199.

¹³² “New London Redevelopment Not Here Yet” by Bret Cohen, *College Voice*, November 12, 1999.

Claire describes her first years as “very difficult, because there were maybe 20% of the faculty who had been asleep at the wheel.” She was insistent on the college’s efficiency, and often spoke using corporate terminology: she explained that every productive line the College pays needs to yield top value. “It doesn’t mean you start chopping off people’s heads, but it does mean that you make a plan for some to re-find the starter button,” she said. “That is fiendishly difficult, and in most cases most departments don’t have the courage, frankly, to do it to their colleagues. Not even sit down and talk with them. Some do, but generally speaking it’s easier to let the provost or the president do it.” So Claire decided to meet personally with individual faculty members who she thought needed a boost and ask them, “How can I help you be in dramatically more positive shape?” Some said they really hated teaching – she helped them find new jobs and replaced them with more energetic professors, to increase productive lines (“One of the guys who did this transition named his next child after me in gratitude, which is really quite touching, he wrote me a beautiful note.”). She initiated Study Away, Travel Away programs and began sending groups of professors and students around the world, she offered them extra sabbaticals or money to attend conferences, anything to retrieve their spark, and in turn to publish.

“Sometimes a leader needs to drop back and sit with those who are struggling to sort of re-find themselves. And that was a tremendous privilege, because there was joy in seeing so many people turn out happier. You know, this is part of the work of leadership, and a small college can do this. I’m sure there’s faculty who would have preferred that I not.” She laughed through her words. “But because you just don’t have the same resources, every faculty line really needs to yield maximum opportunity for students and for the field. And that responsibility falls to the provost and the president.”

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Loomis listened to this story patiently, and then shook his head.

“No?” I asked.

“Colleges and universities are essentially run through shared governance,” he said methodically. “There are things that the faculty, the president, and the trustees are responsible for, and they’re usually fairly clearly delineated. It means you don’t have a dictator. When shared governance breaks down it’s usually when one group oversteps those boundaries and starts getting into the responsibilities of another group. Claire would go in and out of those when she wanted things to move faster. It’s almost like ambush. You’re always looking over your shoulder, wondering when the hammer’s going to come down. It creates an anxiety, an institutional anxiety that I think this institution was in for a very long time.”

Around campus today, students generally know Gaudiani for her involvement with the Kelo vs. New London case, and/or as the president who put the College into significant debt. Interestingly, it wasn’t until Claire left that the community realized exactly how financially indebted the College was.¹³³ In 2000, the year before Claire’s removal, current Vice President for Finance Paul Maroni took over for Lynn Brooks. As soon as this happened, students and faculty began to see budget cuts across the board. As the faculty and the student editors of the *College Voice* pressed the administration, and the administration pressed Claire, tension between Claire and the entire community ran higher.

“I took a lot of flack for people who thought we were participating in yellow journalism,” Knake said in our phone interview, “because we started asking questions about finances. That bothered a lot of people. During all of it we suspected there were issues, but it was very hard to figure out the Mariner Square lease. Members of the Board had vast amounts of paper money, so the school really thought it was flying high with its investments, with money it didn’t have. We did a lot of reporting on that.”

¹³³ Stephen Loomis, Professor of Biology, in discussion with the author, February 8, 2011.

The faculty began to distract themselves with long conversations about the process of shared governance. They attempted to make changes in the faculty, trustee and administrative handbook to protect their prerogative at the time, with little success.¹³⁴ They had secret faculty meetings. In the spring of 2000, toward the end of Gaudiani's twelfth year they began a series of surreptitious late-night calls and quick stops into offices to compile the petition, with which Loomis and two other faculty members approached her.

The following is how Loomis recalls the conversation: the three walked into the room with the petition in their hands, hoping to give Claire the chance to step down gracefully.

"Claire," Loomis remembers saying, "I think it's time for you to leave. The College is in a bad situation right now, we're not moving ahead, and it's starting to damage the institution."

"Uh huh," she responded, and asked for clarification.

After Loomis elaborated on the faculty's concerns, she looked at the professors before her, professors that had stood beside her a decade before, and offered up two sentences:

"The faculty at this college have no power. I am not going anywhere."

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"So we got up, we walked out, and we released the petition to the press," said Loomis.

Despite obvious problems, the trustees remained publicly on Gaudiani's side through September. The front page of the September 8, 2000 issue of the *College Voice* reported the following articles: one on mixed results that summer to her New London revitalization efforts by the NLDC; one on budget cuts that would hit Health Services that year (hours would be cut and students would be charged a \$450 health care fee); one on Conn sliding down two spots in the U.S. News and World Report rankings ("Gaudiani to Announce New Programs in Mid-October to Enhance Academic Reputation"); and one called "SGA: Students Left in Dark on College

¹³⁴ Stephen Loomis, Professor of Biology, in discussion with the author, February 8, 2011.

Finances,” informing students that the budget cuts also led to the closing of Smith and Burdick dining halls. Said one student, “The administration has to know that with every excuse they make they are losing our faith.”¹³⁵ But on page three, a public letter from the chair of the Board of Trustees lists bullet pointed achievements from the ’99-’00 year, and pours positivity thickly with words like “pleased,” “succeed,” “excellent,” “innovative,” “proud” and “superb.” “The College has never been stronger and has solidified its position as on[e] of the nation’s outstanding liberal arts colleges,” wrote Duncan Dayton ’81. “As the board has examined statistics and trends showing our growth over the last decade, it is clear that we are stronger by ever[y] measure. To ensure that we maintain this moment[um], the Board has asked for and received from President Gaudiani her renewed commitment to the College.” The letter was chastised by the student body, and deemed “infamous” in an editorial two weeks later.

The next week, about 200 students at the College marched prior to an open forum, yelling “Hey, ho, we wanna know, where did our money go?”¹³⁶ Approximately eleven hundred students attended that forum, pressuring administrators for answers.¹³⁷ The faculty wouldn’t talk.

What the students didn’t know is that the faculty were in close contact with the trustees, pleading their case, and winning.

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In May of 2000, after reading of their own college’s faculty petitioning against their president in the Chronicle of Higher Education, the trustees had contacted Loomis, chiding him for working behind their backs. They told Loomis the faculty was to form an official Committee in

¹³⁵ *College Voice*, September 8, 2000

¹³⁶ Rob Knake, “Open Forum Brings Answers on Finance, but Student Angst Still High” *College Voice*, September 22, 2000.

¹³⁷ The issue of the *Voice* from that week is missing from public records, as is the issue from three weeks later, when Gaudiani finally resigned. **article**

Being to examine the issues and discuss the appropriate action. They then invited the faculty to meet at the law firm of trustee Dale Turza '71 in New York, housed in the MetLife building.

Many of the trustees had been selected by Claire, and Loomis said the faculty didn't know which ones they could trust. He said Claire had prepared the trustees ahead of time to have low expectations. "She kind of infantilized us," described Loomis, and his voice began to accelerate. "So we got together, knowing this meeting was coming up and that we had to be totally, totally prepared for it. We had it pretty much scripted, and we practiced it on the way down a couple of times. We walked into this amazing conference room – they thought that the site was going to intimidate us – but we had this professional presentation: a PowerPoint, and a notebook that was well-organized with excerpts from a book written about the characteristics of charismatic leaders and examples of colleges that had charismatic leaders and their effects on the college. And I did a systems thinking chart that showed the inevitable end to that kind of leadership. It just described her to a T, and I think they could see that.

"And so we went in," he continued, "and we just *nailed* the presentation."

Loomis paused. In the silence, whirring machines came into high relief. I finished a line in my notebook and glanced up. He was almost two feet away, but I could see that his eyes were red, and there were tears in them. He was looking straight at me.

We sat in white noise.

"We must have met," he said finally, "I'd say probably six times, maybe, during the summer. And by the end, the trustees were on our side. And they told her she had to leave."

"Did it bring the faculty together?" I asked.

"It did, in a funny way," he said. "Everybody had kind of a common experience and pulled together. But immediately after it happened it was shellshock." He paused. "Dale Turza, right after Claire was fired, had decided that it was not a good idea, and she was very angry with the faculty.

But once all of the financial issues really started coming out, they realized...” Loomis stopped, trying, impossibly, to separate from that quiet pride that made him cry, “that we'd done a good thing for the college.”

Only three weeks after the student forum, Knake was contacted with pressing news. “I got a call from someone who said, ‘Look, Claire wants to meet with you in person.’” A dean drove him out to her house in Groton Long Point late that night. “She sat me down and said, ‘The scoop is, I'm resigning.’”¹³⁸

“When an institution moves as fast as we've moved over twelve years, there are natural stresses that build,” the subsequent article quotes her as saying. “And when we are working as hard as all of us have been working through a campaign, with extensive travel and high demands on time and energy, communications can weaken and erode the kind of relationships that ought to be part of our academic community. I think what we saw in May was the evidence of that pace.”¹³⁹

Months earlier, I had asked John Gordon if Claire had resigned after the petition. He corrected me immediately. “Oh, she was fired,” he said, reclining into the leather armchair in his office, legs crossed at the ankle, one foot resting against the ottoman with confidence. I told him about the statement in Knake's article in 2000, which reads, “Dayton and Gaudiani were adamant that her decision to stop down was not prompted by the faculty petition that called for her resignation last May.”

“I don't remember what the cover story was,” he said candidly. “Something like ‘I want to spend more time with my family’ or ‘other interests elsewhere.’ But the fact is, she was fired by the faculty.”

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¹³⁸Rob Knake '01, in discussion with the author, April 18, 2011.

¹³⁹ Rob Knake, “Claire Gaudiani Steps Down as College President,” *College Voice*, October 13, 2000.

In September of 2001, faced with the institutional anxiety of a new campus and the recent national anxiety of September 11, Norman Fainstein came from Vassar College to replace Gaudiani. Fainstein is a sociologist who was Dean of the Faculty at Vassar; like Rosemary Park, he was brought up from the deanship to take over after a tumultuous presidency. He self-identifies as a professor, and in his inauguration speech he cited Max Weber's view of a good leader: one that has equal measures of passion, proportion, and a sense of responsibility.¹⁴⁰ He said, "The objectives of this kind of Weberian president – if you will – is not to convert faculty and students and staff to his or her causes and point of view, but rather to help frame issues and questions, to encourage widespread and reasoned discussion of those questions, and to then work to implement the answers developed by the entire community. This is, of course, the dream of liberal democracy, and it is my vision of how a liberal arts college can actually function."

Faculty members often remember Fainstein as comforting. "He was a calming influence," said Loomis. "His role was to be an open book. Everybody knew where he stood and what he wanted."

"As a friend of mine said, he was our Gerry Ford," said John Gordon. "Norman was there to smooth things out and get back, so to speak, to normal."

"Fainstein was unthreatening," said Writer-in-Residence Blanche Boyd. "He believed in faculty governance. He restored trust. He's the one who told me to stop operating like an NGO. He told me, 'If you have opinions, get on a committee.'"¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ "Remarks by Norman Fainstein on the Occasion of his Inauguration as the Ninth President of Connecticut College," College Website (<http://www.conncoll.edu/news/archives/647.cfm>), May 4, 2002.

¹⁴¹ Blanche M. Boyd, Professor of Literatures in English and Writer-in-Residence, in discussion with the author, April 5, 2011.

In the spring of my sophomore year, Fainstein was my professor for Urban Sociology. I didn't know for another year that he had been president of the College, and in a phone interview, I told him so.

He laughed. "Well that's a positive! Thank you. You know, when you're in the classroom, and you're judged on what you have to say about the reading and responding to students. You don't want to bring in the other baggage. That's not how you should be judged as a teacher."¹⁴²

Fainstein never had an ambition to be an administrator. He wanted to be a professor. He also knows well that this was an important prerequisite for his role at Connecticut College.

"This was a period in which the faculty sought much more empowerment for itself," he said. "I think I was chosen to be President at that time because I had come from a place that was very faculty centered, and that my administrative style was very much to be involved with the faculty. It was clear that there had been a crisis at Connecticut College, so I didn't enter with any kind of naïveté. I also understood before I took the job that the College was in significant financial difficulty. It was at a place where, in some ways, if it didn't come down gently from its precarious position, it could have gone into a spiral of collapse. I think in many ways that my presidency was one of reestablishing, in my mind, the proper role for the faculty and the governance of the college, and especially reestablishing the financial solidity of the college."

The faculty worked together immediately to brainstorm and apply ways to reestablish the budget, which included a temporary salary freeze and other concessions.

"There could have been a perception that this was a place where the faculty was at war with the administration," Fainstein continued. "That means you don't get the best students, and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. So that was challenge, and in some ways it was an easy one to meet, because the faculty was very, very ready to be involved in responsible governance of the

¹⁴² Norman Fainstein, former President of the College, in discussion with the author, April 25, 2011.

College. It was really through the faculty decision making that we made some very tough budget decisions the first few years, that proved to be very sound and turned the College around.”

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“The faculty used to meet over at Cro to have lunch,” said Loomis, “and for a long time we were just complaining about one thing or another. We didn't talk about our research, we didn't talk about our teaching. That's totally turned around now. Now we're not talking about issues of shared governance. We're not upset about things that someone did or didn't do. We're more focused on our jobs. It's a very, very different atmosphere with the current president and the current Dean of the Faculty. I think that the college is in a much better place now.”

I thanked him for his time and forthrightness.

“You know,” he said, “It's amazing, the memories you push back.”

/// CONCLUSION ///

From Elizabeth Wright to Julie Comstock '19 to Allen Carroll '72, characters from throughout Connecticut College's history have defined themselves as pioneers for over a hundred years. I have based each of my stories on periods of change in the College's history. In its first decades, the College attempted to define its role as a women's college just as the American woman's role was subtly shifting. In those years, between wars and weddings, we moved from a vocational-liberal arts hybrid to a strictly liberal arts college. In the 1960s, the College entered coeducation with vigor, and spent the next decades adapting to changing social conceptions of education, diversity, and student rights. Through the 1990s and 2000s, the College set the foundation for the buzzwords we still use today: Global citizenship. Environmental stewardship. Research, travel, internship, and leadership opportunities abound. My adviser, Dean Theresa Ammirati, and I have sat in her office in Fanning Hall for many hours over the course of the year, surrounded by old senior theses and framed class photos, sharing stories of tension, exuberance, and tremendous change on our campus. I came in one day disappointed that I could find no giant, campus-altering stories to tell from my four years here. She told me that these are smooth years, and that is a good thing – the money is carefully managed, the faculty has a voice, the students are academically nourished, and the College is healthily, stably chugging along. In my mind, the most defining issue as of late is financial: the College's most pressing job has been to defend the liberal arts in a difficult economic time.

I asked her, as I have asked most people I've interviewed, what she would say characterizes the college.

“You know,” she said, “The anti-war protests became violent in the early seventies. There was vandalism on campuses across the country. That didn’t happen here. Students were respectful – when they took over Fanning Hall, there wasn’t a paper out of place – and the administration listened.”¹⁴³

She thought for a second, and spoke again. “It may not be the amount of power they want, but students have always been an important part of decision making here. They assert power. And the administration cedes some of the power they have, because the cost of exerting that power would change this institution. It’s one of the founding ideals of this school that students are agents.”

Secretary of the College emeritus Jane Bredeson defined the community’s character. “What I have always liked about the College,” she said, “is that I think it’s unpretentious, I think it’s informal, and I think it’s very friendly.”¹⁴⁴

“The college has maintained its character,” said photography professor Ted Hendrickson. “The faculty really cares about their students. It’s a small school mentality that’s stayed undiluted throughout the years. That is admirable, that professors aren’t so involved in their own research that students are actually the priority. The faculty is highly committed and serious.”¹⁴⁵

“There was something about being there that was inspiring,” said Oakes Ames. “I think the setting. The beauty of the campus and the atmosphere that created certainly had something to do with it.”

¹⁴³ Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Studies, in discussion with the author, April 19, 2011.

¹⁴⁴ Jane Bredeson, Assistant Director of Admissions 1963-1977 and Secretary of the College 1977-1991, in discussion with the author, January 17, 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Ted Hendrickson, Professor of Photography and former Campus Photographer, in discussion with the author, October 26, 2011.

I recently had my last meeting with Leo Higdon, who took over as President of the College from Norman Fainstein in 2006. We meet a few times per semester regarding the *College Voice*, and generally the meetings are frank and off-the-record. For this last one, I turned the recorder on, and watched as in ten minutes, he hit most of the points that have taken me nine months of research to conclude.

“You can talk about the programs that we have here. And there’s no question the campus is not just beautiful, I mean the location of the campus, it is unique. But I really think it’s a combination of the people that are attracted to this institution, and their embrace of the original values of the institution.” He took a sip from a translucent green water bottle – *CONNECTICUT COLLEGE* was printed along the side block text – and spoke again. “Our founders were very right to conceive of a college that was born of Wesleyan denying access to women,” he said. “And I think that left an indelible mark on this institution around equity and equality, and things that are embedded at its core. This combined with the faculty and the staff, who genuinely, genuinely care about students and care about the student experience.”¹⁴⁶

During coeducation, to be young in relation to the schools we compete with was an advantage. It works for us, I told him. It’s part of our personality.

“It works for us, because I think we work harder,” he said. “We don’t take things for granted. And I like that about our character. And I think that you can point, you and your classmates can point to tangible improvements here that have manifested themselves. Take a look at the markers. I mean the faculty we’re hiring, the quality of students we’re getting. The money we’re raising. I mean, those are outside validation.

¹⁴⁶ Leo I. Higdon, President of Connecticut College, in discussion with the author, April 18, 2011.

Outside validation that Connecticut College is on an upward trajectory. Okay, kiddo?” He was late for another meeting, and so shook my hand as I walked out the door. “Your degree is worth more.”

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In my mind, the spirit of the college is made up of five distinguishing traits.

First is that our college is aesthetically majestic. It is situated on an arboretum, looks out on (but doesn't touch) the open sea, and sits beside the Groton Submarine base and the Coast Guard Academy, reminding us daily that there is a world outside of our own.

Second, the college is small and insular. Our campus is shaped like an oval, the buildings a sisterhood of white, stone, scholarly structures that sit on its periphery facing inwards. The center hosts our three most preferred points of watching and being watched: the student center, the library, and an enormous clear, rolling green. This oft self-defined “bubble” is a long walk from a fickle city, surrounded by gates that close come nightfall. And despite attempts to hide within defined spheres, as is possible in a university, students at our college cannot simply confine themselves to their group of choice. Stranded in paradise, we are overwhelmingly forced to interact. This asks students to redefine their relationship with their community on a regular basis. Research has told me that this aspect of the College has morphed to conform to new buildings, new people and new social mores, but its immersive aspect has not changed.

Third, faculty and administrators have always responded, academically and socially, to the College's evolving understanding of what is fair. We were vocational to prepare women for entering the work of society. We became strictly liberal arts when

“typewriting” and “home economics” felt subjugating. At the students’ request, we created African American Studies and dropped parietals. We hired married couples with children. We implemented gender-neutral housing.

This and yet we still hold close our old ways. We were formed under the name Connecticut College for Women – and despite the reality that our transition to coeducation has disturbed many female traditions, vestiges of our foundation live on: we are one of few colleges that host Dances, not Parties. Our dorms provide common rooms close to entranceways, an architectural style characteristic of female colleges, designed to protect women from intruders. The College has continued to reserve a few fourth floors for all-women housing, and basements for men. Although mostly chipped and out of tune, grand pianos furnish many social spaces. We are still remembered by older generations as a women’s school: that identity is not lost.

Lastly, and most importantly, the college maintains an intangible sense of *potential* that has been running through its veins since its inception as a homegrown college with the vision to progress women’s education through progressive means. We are young and have a graspable understanding of our history, and therefore a clearer sense of where we can go. We are still, as many attested to, not as widely known or appreciated as we feel we deserve to be. Sometimes this materializes in self-deprecation, hints of an inferiority complex. But ultimately, on a good day, when the sun is shining and students are lazing on the green, it means that students, faculty, staff and alumni feel like pioneers working toward a goal, cheering together for the College and her success.

/// IMAGES ///

Idealism

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2. **New London Hall and Plant House, circa 1915.** Campus and Buildings Photos. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College.
3. **Elizabeth Wright:** (left) *Chapters in the History of Connecticut College in Its First Three Administrations, 1911-1942*. New London, CT: J.J. Lytle & Ives, 1943. 11.
 - a. Elizabeth Wright: (right) Photographs: Founders, Donors, Trustees, Presidents (Box 1). New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College.
4. **Morton F. Plant:** (top left) College Relations, Connecticut College.
 - a. Morton F. Plant: (right) Postcard author's own (date unknown).
 - b. Morton F. Plant and his second wife: (bottom right) History of Avery Point, University of Connecticut. <http://www.averypoint.uconn.edu/history.php>.
5. **Frederick Sykes:** Formal Portrait, New London: Ernst Common Room in Blaustein Humanities Center, Connecticut College.
6. **Plant House circa 1919.** Campus and Buildings Photos. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College. Photo taken by Mildred White.
7. **Connecticut College Herald**, December 10, 1915. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College.
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2. **“The Perfect Human Being”**: Presidents of the College box 1, Benjamin Marshall file. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College.
3. **Katharine Blunt**: Presidents Photographs box, President Katharine Blunt, 1929-1943 file. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College, 1965.
4. **Girls on the roof of Branford**: Dorm Life box, Branford file. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College, 1926.
5. **“Wardens’ Jobs Mix Comedy With Duty On Bill Hall Roof”**: *Connecticut College News*. December 10, 1941.
6. **Air Raid Precautions**: World War II: Plans for Emergency Evacuation of the College, 1942 file. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College, March 24, 1942.
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14. **Eleanor Roosevelt**: Eleanor Roosevelt Visits CC vertical file. New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College, 1942.

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14. **Three men dining in Harris:** Dorm Life box, North Complex file, New London: Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives at Connecticut College. Photo by John Robbins.
15. **Coffee House ad:** *Satyagraha* (Connecticut College). October 5, 1971.
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