WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

An Encyclopedia

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Southern Baptist Colleges

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) began opening higher education to women in the mid–nineteenth century. By creating separate schools for women, Southern Baptists avoided coeducation and prepared women for vocations considered appropriate for their gender. Although a few Southern Baptist colleges experimented with coeducation in the nineteenth century, most colleges were single-sex. Some women's colleges coordinated with nearby Southern Baptist colleges for men, often sharing faculty or operating coeducational classes in particular subjects. Southern Baptist colleges excluded African Americans until the mid–twentieth century. Women pursuing careers in Christian service attended single-sex training schools for missionaries and social workers until the 1950s, when the all-male seminaries opened their doors to women. Coeducation became the most popular option for young Southern Baptist men and women in the mid–twentieth century as men's colleges began enrolling women, and many coordinating men's and women's colleges merged. In the late twentieth century, as fundamentalists took control of the SBC, opportunities for Southern Baptist women to train as ministers were eliminated, and alternative Baptist seminaries from outside the SBC emerged to educate women ministers.

Baptists emerged in seventeenth-century England. They migrated to New England seeking religious freedom and eventually migrated to the southern colonies. In 1845, after controversy between Baptist abolitionists and southern Baptist slaveholders, Baptists in the South broke away to form their own Southern Baptist Convention. Women played a very active role in early Baptist churches in England, serving as deacons and sometimes preachers. However, the public role of Baptist women declined over the years. Women of the mid–nineteenth and twentieth centuries found churches questioning their right to serve as church leaders. The Trienniel convention and the early SBC were for men only, and therefore women's mission societies sent male representatives.

Some early Baptists supported higher education to train missionaries, pastors, and laymen to improve church leadership. However, other Baptists were strongly

opposed to education, especially theological education. Many associated education with their persecutors in England, and others on the frontier feared that education would lead to spiritual pride or undermine faith. However, antieducation sentiment began to moderate during the nineteenth century, and enthusiasm for missions spurred the creation of Southern Baptist colleges to train male ministers and missionaries. The earliest of these, Georgetown College in Kentucky (1829), Richmond College in Virginia (1832), Mercer University in Georgia (1833), and Wake Forest in North Carolina (1834) would not open their doors to women students for about 100 years. The majority of Southern Baptists were opposed to coeducation. Even those who supported women's education expected that women would be educated for "women's work" and did not see the need for offering women the same curriculum as men. This opposition to coeducation led Southern Baptists to create colleges for women, which sometimes coordinated their programs with colleges for men.

Judson Female Institute, created in 1838, was the first Southern Baptist College for women and set the pattern for others such as the Johnson Female Seminary in South Carolina (1847), Forsyth College in Georgia (1847), and Meredith College in North Carolina (1899). Meredith's curriculum was typical for Southern Baptist women's schools at the turn of the twentieth century: a student who earned a B.A. degree from Meredith College in 1904 studied Latin, English, mathematics, history, and physiology; she may have elected to study other courses in the sciences, languages, logic, ethics, art, music, or pedagogy. She had an opportunity to study Greek or perhaps take the Bible course introduced in 1902.

Historians of women's higher education observe that coordinate colleges provided a means for institutions to avoid coeducation while still sharing resources. The story of Greenville Baptist Female College, established in 1855 in South Carolina, illustrates a typical coordinate arrangement used by Southern Baptists. In 1853, the Baptist State Convention of South Carolina established a committee to explore the need for a college to educate young women. The convention voted to establish the liberal arts school but noted that it must be controlled by the board of trustees of all-male Furman University. In 1908, the Female College established a separate board of trustees and was chartered as Greenville Woman's College, remaining a single-sex college until 1933, when it merged with Furman University.

Although the majority of Southern Baptist colleges were sex-segregated well into the twentieth century, a few institutions, like Baylor University in Waco, Texas, began placing men and women in the same classrooms by the late nineteenth century. First located in Independence, Texas, Baylor experimented with a coordinate arrangement, leading to the establishment of a separate women's school in Belton in 1866 called Baylor Female College. Twenty years later, when the all-male Baylor moved from Independence to Waco, coeducation was resumed but with strict rules limiting interaction between the sexes. At first, women and men followed different curricula, but by 1891, all courses of study, including biblical studies and business courses, were open to women.

The conditions of the Civil War led to temporary closings of almost all institutions of higher education in the South. The all-male institutions sent students

and faculty to the front lines, and economics and additional responsibilities prevented women from attending colleges. Charles Johnson (1955) noted that for a period of twenty years, even schools with strong prewar financial support were barely able to reestablish programs when endowments were lost.

Southern women's schools of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used the term "college" to designate schools with very different academic standards. Some Southern Baptist women's schools were similar to academies or finishing schools, offering training in subjects such as music, elocution, domestic skills, and etiquette. Others, like Judson College in Marion, Alabama, featured a preparatory division for young girls as well as a postsecondary department. Therefore, when student records of this period show college attendance, it is unclear whether the student was engaged in secondary or postsecondary learning.

For women pursuing careers in Christian service, Southern Baptists created single-sex training schools for missionaries and social workers. Training schools for Southern Baptist women were modeled after those established by Northern Baptist women, particularly the Baptist Missionary Training School of Chicago, founded in 1881. The Woman's Missionary Union Training School for Southern Baptists opened in 1907 in Louisville, Kentucky, and coordinated with the nearby Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which trained male ministers. The Training School's curriculum included some theological courses at the seminary and a women's curriculum, including social work, domestic science, music, elocution, and nursing. Another school that offered missionary training for women was Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Originating as a theological department of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, Southwestern moved to Fort Worth in 1910 and was considered coeducational since it enrolled women as seminary students. However, Southwestern had many features of a coordinate arrangement; with women living in a separate building where they studied a women's curriculum. A nursery and kindergarten were provided so that married women could study with their husbands. Until the late twentieth century, Southwestern Seminary observed the Southern Baptist sanction against women entering professions reserved for males, including preaching.

Although the Chicago, Louisville, and Fort Worth missionary training schools were reserved for Caucasian women, African American women also received training for the mission field. The Baptist Missionary Training School of Chicago served as a model for missionary training programs established in schools for African American women. Northern Baptist women assisted in the establishment of several programs in southern schools, including those at Spelman Seminary, Shaw University, and Bishop College in the early 1890s. Spelman Seminary, a school for black women located in Atlanta, Georgia, founded a missionary training department in 1891 featuring a two-year course with five months of field experience.

In 1909, the National Training School for Women and Girls was launched under the leadership of Nannie Burroughs. She inspired members of the Woman's Convention, an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, to provide training for African American women in domestic

service, teaching, and missionary work. In its first year, the school enrolled thirty-one students, ranging in age from twelve to forty-three. Unlike the training schools at Louisville and Fort Worth, the National Training School in Washington, D.C., offered training in vocations that were secular as well as religious.

African American studies scholar Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham notes that the philosophy under which the school operated was influenced by Burroughs's notion of self-help for African Americans. An admirer of Booker T. Washington, Burroughs rejected the notions of northern white Baptists and black intellectuals like W. E. B. DuBois, who believed African Americans should focus on the development of a "talented tenth" to serve as African American leaders. Burroughs believed in the dignity of labor and the duty of African American Baptist women to provide training, not only for an elite group with special talent but also for those engaged in domestic service. Both Washington and Burroughs focused on the advancement of the majority of African Americans rather than the cultivation of a professional elite.

Like other schools for women of this era, the National Training School focused on developing moral character through strict behavioral codes. It was called the "School of the 3 Bs," emphasizing the Bible, bath, and broom as tools to advance the African American race. At 6:00 each morning, the neatness and personal cleanliness of each student were inspected. Those who had been untidy or careless in attire did not receive diplomas. Students provided hard labor to help control the school's expenses. Although women at other schools were involved in extracurricular recreation, the women of the National Training School cleared weeds, planted trees, and built concrete walkways. They did gardening, raised pigs, milked cows, and churned butter.

Due to the emphasis on racial self-help, no contributions from white donors were accepted until after the school was operating. However, in 1912, northern white women of the Woman's American Baptist Mission Society supplied a model home in which domestic science lessons could be taught. Higgenbotham noted an important difference between domestic science courses in the National Training School and in schools for white students. Courses in domestic science in schools for white students were designed to train women to become better wives and mothers. However, domestic science courses in schools for African American women trained women for paid domestic service.

By the mid–twentieth century, the majority of the Southern Baptist colleges originally designated as men's colleges were enrolling women students. In addition, many schools began admitting African American students. Men's and women's colleges previously having a coordinating arrangement typically merged into one coeducational college. Some women's colleges, like Meredith, continued as women's colleges until the latter twentieth century, when men were admitted as students. The 1980s and 1990s brought many political changes to the SBC, causing some colleges and universities, such as Wake Forest and Baylor, to break or modify their connections with the SBC while maintaining strong affiliations with their state conventions.

In the early twentieth century, Southern Baptists opened theological education to women but insisted that women

were preparing for different vocations than male ministers. In the 1950s, half a century after women had been invited to listen quietly to lectures, the Southern Baptist seminaries began enrolling women students. Women typically pursued seminary degrees in the areas of music and religious education. By the 1960s, women were not an unusual sight in seminary classrooms. In 1964, Addie Davis became the first woman to be ordained by Southern Baptists after she completed theological training at the nearby Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina. A great deal of protest was raised, but it soon subsided when Davis accepted a pastorate outside the Southern Baptist denomination. Baptist historian Leon McBeth estimates that fifty or more women were ordained between 1964 and 1977, although many were employed by non–Southern Baptist churches or served in nonpreaching roles such as a hospital chaplaincy.

The decade of the 1980s brought about a deep schism among Southern Baptists that drew a great amount of attention to the matter of women in seminaries. Throughout the 1970s, a group of Southern Baptist conservatives organized a plan to gain control of the more moderate SBC in order to make the belief in biblical inerrancy normative among Southern Baptists. Southern Baptist historian Bill Leonard points out that although fundamentalists insisted that clarification of biblical authority was the primary goal, fundamentalists were promoting doctrines that they viewed as inseparable from the inerrancy issue. These doctrines were concerned with controversial issues such as the role of women and the nature of ministry. As the SBC moved in a more conservative direction, in 1984, Southern Baptists made a public statement of protest against ordination of women, basing the resolution on selective references to Scripture, particularly the Pauline letters. In spite of this statement of opposition, 232 women were ordained to the Southern Baptist ministry by 1986.

Although Baptist women continue working to develop networks of support, opposition to women in the preaching ministry permeated the SBC at the beginning of the twenty-first century. SBC seminaries have been enjoined by the denomination to discourage women from entering the preaching ministry. Although women continue to enroll in Southern Baptist seminaries, they cluster in the areas of music, missions, and religious education and no longer study for the preaching ministry. Baptist women continue the struggle to define their places of service, with many leaving the SBC to find employment by other denominations. Others have found acceptance among alternative Baptist groups such as Alliance of Baptists or the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, formed in the 1980s in response to changes in the SBC leadership. These organizations, composed of former and current members of the SBC, support women in all forms of church leadership, including the preaching ministry. They support seminaries such as George W. Truett Seminary in Texas, Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, McAfee School of Theology in Georgia, and others educating both men and women for ministry, including preaching.

T. Laine Scales

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