Commentary

Drexel University and Drexel University College of Medicine: An Overview of Their Commitment to Women Through Education

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ABSTRACT

The Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania was a groundbreaking institution and an ancestor to the Drexel University College of Medicine. The tradition of the Woman’s Medical College lives on in the form of education and leadership programs dedicated to medical training for women. (Gend Med. 2012;9: S83–S85) © 2012 Elsevier HS Journals, Inc. All rights reserved.

Key words: medical education, women’s education, women in medicine, women’s health and leadership.

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INTRODUCTION
In 1850, the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania was founded to embark on a new mission—educating women physicians. Previously, women were not allowed to study medicine formally, so the creation of a place where women could study was a historic event. The name of the school changed in 1857 to Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania and again in 1970 to the Medical College of Pennsylvania. The Medical College of Pennsylvania merged with Hahnemann Medical College in 1987, and in 2002, Drexel University solidified its affiliation with MCP Hahnemann to create the largest private medical school in the country.1

WOMEN’S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
From the university’s birth in 1892, Anthony Drexel’s vision included women. As a coeducational institution, courses have always been open and available to women.2 As years have passed, Drexel University and the Drexel University College of Medicine have become institutions that champion women’s issues. The Institute for Women’s Health and Leadership (IWHL) was established in 1993, and in 1996, the Institute was named by the Department of Health and Human Services as a National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health.3 The nation’s first women’s health curriculum at a medical school was created at Drexel,4 and the university also offers an undergraduate degree in the area of women’s studies. These programs all serve to echo the commitment to all students, including women, that was inherently expressed by Anthony Drexel at the time of the University’s founding. The education of women has been and continues to be a part of the Drexel mission.

Within the College of Medicine specifically, there are several programs that focus on the issues that women face in medicine, leadership, and health education. Gender-specific programs within the medical school, such as the Women’s Health Education Program (WHEP) and the IWHL, were created to provide medical students, as well as community members, with a resource for education on women’s issues. In WHEP, courses such as Women’s Health Primary Care, Women’s Health Education, and Women’s Health in the Community are offered to increase third- and fourth-year medical students’ knowledge and understanding of topics that relate to women, outside of the traditional topics surrounding women’s reproductive health. Both male and female medical students are encouraged to take part in seminars, formal courses, and conversations to broaden their knowledge as they train to become physicians. Under the IWHL umbrella, several programs are offered: Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine, the WHEP, the Center for Women’s Health Research, and others. All share the advancement of women as part of the mission. In the Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine program, the mission is to increase the number of women in positions of leadership at academic institutions.5

Nursing students at Drexel have a variety of courses available to them as they seek to broaden their knowledge base in the area of women’s health care. Courses such as Women’s Health I and II introduce nursing students to caring for women throughout the life cycle. Management/Care of Women’s Gynecological Needs is a course in the college of nursing that focuses on the skills needed to treat women effectively with regard to gynecologic needs.6

In the Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel, future attorneys have the opportunity to participate in courses that address gender-sensitive issues, such as reproductive rights law and employment discrimination.

Undergraduate students at Drexel University have a broad range of topics to select under the Women’s Issues umbrella as they seek to become well-rounded scholars. To begin, history courses approach the study of women from several vantage points. Offerings such as Women, Crime and History, Women and Work in America, Women in American History, Exploration in Technology, and Gender and the American Woman give students a wide range of options when it comes to the study of women in history. Another course, African American Herstories, is an opportunity for students to gain historical insight into the lives of African American authors who have made contributions to society throughout history.6
Other female-specific courses available to undergraduates include Women’s Health Psychology, Women in the Health Professions, and Ethical Issues in Reproduction. Ethical Issues in Reproduction is a course that addresses controversial topics such as abortion and assisted reproductive technologies.

Drexel also offers a program of study that leads to an earned minor in Women’s Studies. To earn a minor in this area, students must complete 24 hours of course work. The course selection includes topics such as Intro to Women’s Studies, Women in the Global Context, and Women’s Health and Human Rights, as well as other seminars and independent study opportunities.

CONCLUSION
The diverse initiatives briefly described here are emblematic of Drexel’s long history of including women. Anthony Drexel included women as part of the educational mission from the birth of the University. The progress of the College of Medicine and expansion to include the WHEP and the IWHL continue this legacy. Women’s issues are not just the concern of women, and Drexel University is committed to offering opportunities for all students to improve their knowledge surrounding the concerns of, contributions of, and issues that affect the women in our society.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
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REFERENCES

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