

Part Three: 1980 – 1998

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Enrollment in higher education continued to grow through the 1980's and 1990's. Enrollment growth was fed by increasing numbers of high school graduates (the first wave of children of the baby boomers), by state and district efforts to have more high school graduates move on to college, and by the ever-increasing number of adult learners enrolling in both traditional and non-traditional institutions of higher education in response to the declining number of middle class jobs that didn't require some college education.

A number of trends converged and are reflected in the three essays of this section. First, the 1980's brought out the first of IBM's personal computers and the first Apple Macintosh computer with a mouse. The digital age was about to become accessible to those who didn't have access to mainframe computers. While the first personal computers were stand-alone machines able to manipulate numbers and letters, there was a growing sense that these machines could transform teaching and learning. This form of digital technology, pre-Internet, just thirty years ago, required extensive investment in computer labs, hardware, software, and staffing. Lesley's Technology in Education Program, described here by Blakeslee, Carter, Gannon, Robert, Thormann, and Yoder, became one of the "national" programs at Lesley serving K-12 teachers across the country. Ironically, it was not just the personal computer that allowed this to happen, but (as the authors point out) the Reagan administration's de-regulation of the airlines industry. Faculty could now afford to fly to all parts of the country to teach teachers.

A second trend had to do with children who were disabled. The implementation of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act), adopted by Congress in 1975, took years to implement and in some ways is still being modified to find best practices to serve students with various, particular disabilities. This limited success may be due as much to funding and to the ever-evolving research around particular disabilities as it is the political will to serve these students. In just six years following passage of PL94-142, Lesley University initiated the Threshold Program, under the leadership of faculty member Arlyn Roffman, to serve young adults with disabilities who had the potential to live independently but for whom there were few postsecondary programs to assist them.

Third, adults were returning to college in unprecedented numbers well before policymakers became aware of the trend. As the economy shifted from manufacturing and agriculture to services, the income gap began to widen. The de-regulatory emphasis of the Reagan Administration (1980-88) also contributed to this gap as the rich got richer, the poor got poorer and the middle class began to evaporate. Adults returned to college to earn degrees in hopes that they could gain employment in the moderate or high-income side of the service sector (finance, technology, education) as opposed to the explosive growth of jobs in the low-income side of that sector (home health aides, retail, fast food production, security services). The current focus on education as a pure economic investment with standardized tests to measure the ROI

(return on investment) gained its momentum during this period, especially with the 1984 report, *A Nation at Risk*. Deregulation helped some industries produce short-term gains for their investors, but this period also marked the beginning of a new era of regulation for the nation's schools.

Again, as McKenna describes it, Lesley played a key role in designing educational opportunities for an underserved population, adult learners. The first wave of adult learners were pioneers who enrolled in colleges and universities that most often did not customize programs and services for adults who were working, raising families, and were active in their communities. By the early 1980's, there were many reports and studies about how to build such programs to serve adults. If the GI Bill opened college and university doors for veterans; if desegregation legislation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and affirmative action opened those doors to persons of color; and if PL94-142 opened K-12 doors to children with disabilities, then it was the adults themselves who forced open higher education doors to respond to their educational needs and aspirations. To this day, the federal government, and the organized lobby of higher education, will not modify financial aid policies to better serve adult learners out of fear that this will reduce funding for traditional age students.

Edith Lesley was a business woman. She understood the dynamics of the public marketplace: increasing demand for kindergarten with district school boards deciding to add kindergarten, and a paucity of programs preparing kindergarten teachers. She built her school as a proprietary institution before handing it over to a board and having it officially registered with the state in 1941 as an educational, non-profit institution.

This capacity to look objectively at society, to understand historical shifts taking place, and to identify needs or gaps in the marketplace is, in many ways, a testimony to the commitment and creativity of Lesley University faculty and administrators throughout Lesley's first century.