

WPI Women Student's Experience

Maylee Gagnon, Grace Gately, Bryan Lima

Critical reflection on parts of WPI's history is needed.



Context

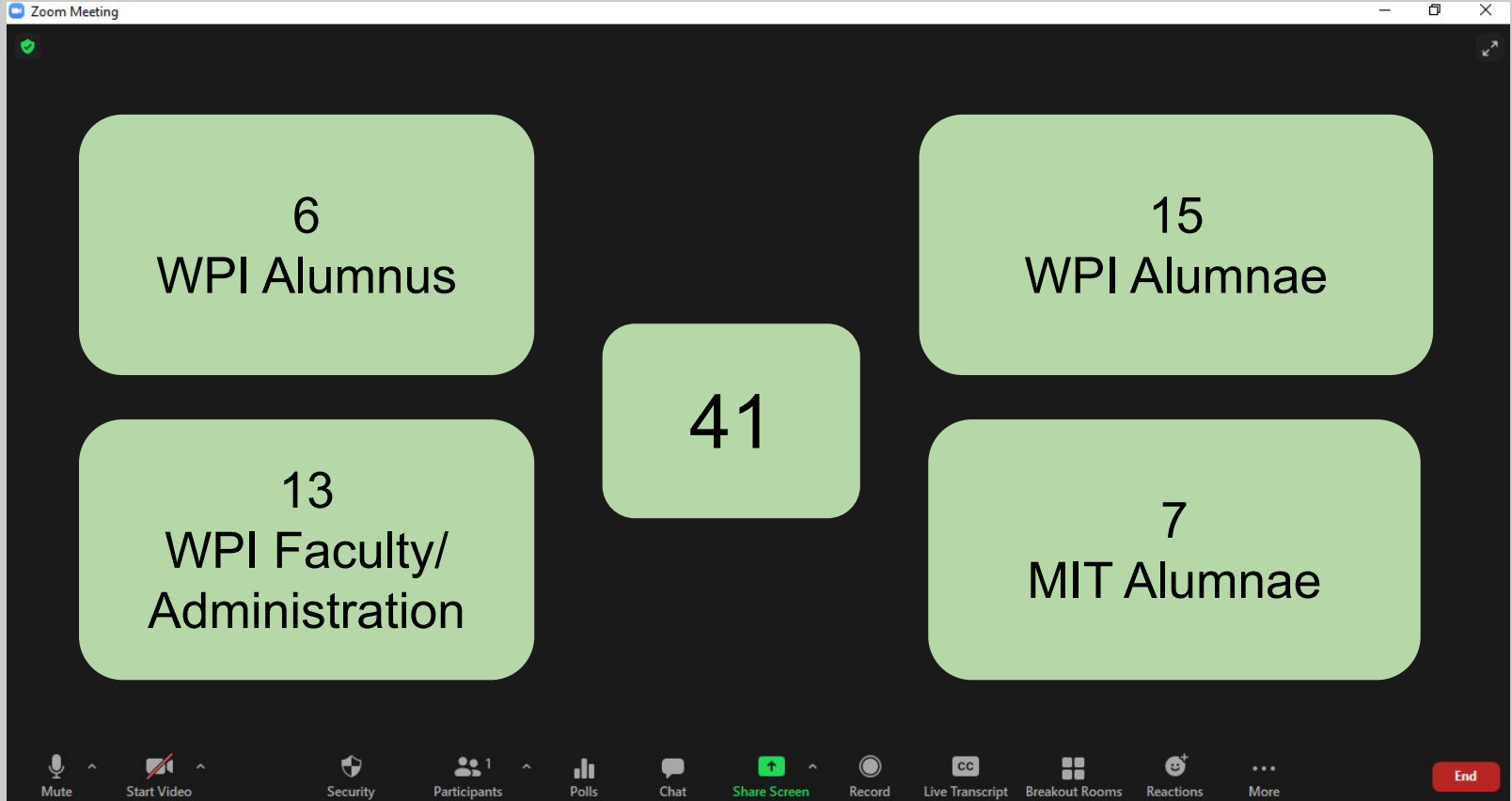


- Gender discrimination (Binary)
- 1965-1980 (Women were admitted in 1968)
- Attitudes and practices behind policies
- Experiences of women
- Better understanding



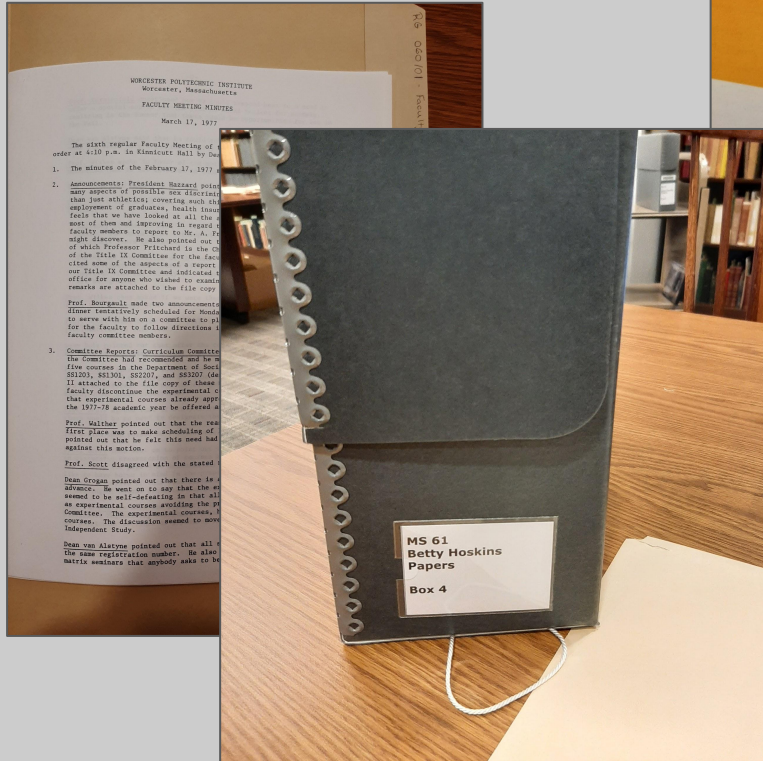
Interviews

Methods



Archival Research

Methods



Internal newsletter
Send contributions to
WPI News Bureau, room 202 Boynton Hall,
call 753-1411, ext. 305 or 306,
or mail to WPI Box 3000

January 30, 1978

announcement that Dr. Edmund ...
ected as the next ...
e be on year ...
he ...

Another item on the agenda will take us back just about a century in our deliberations. This concerns the proposal that we admit women in degree courses. In his original letter outlining the school he envisioned, John Boynton did not restrict the student body to males. He did state that if the trustees felt that restricting the enrollment to men only would be desirable, they might do so. The time now seems right for the Board to decide whether or not women are eligible for degree attainments here, under the same total admissions criteria as for men.

In recent years, the interest of women in engineering and science has been increasing. This year, we have had 11 women express a serious interest in applying and two have actually made application with full knowledge that acceptance (if they are otherwise qualified) will be contingent upon a change in our policy. There has been absolutely no proselyting of women applicants on our part. If we were to change our policy and actively seek women students, we would expect to receive additional applications from girls well qualified to benefit from the educational program at Tech. We would expect that the number of women would always be quite small, though significant, in the engineering and science programs. The obvious problems of housing, extra facilities, changes in the physical education and ROTC course requirements, etc., have been considered and do not represent major problems.

The Placement Office is humming with activity as seniors and graduate



WPI did not provide adequate facilities and accommodations for female students.

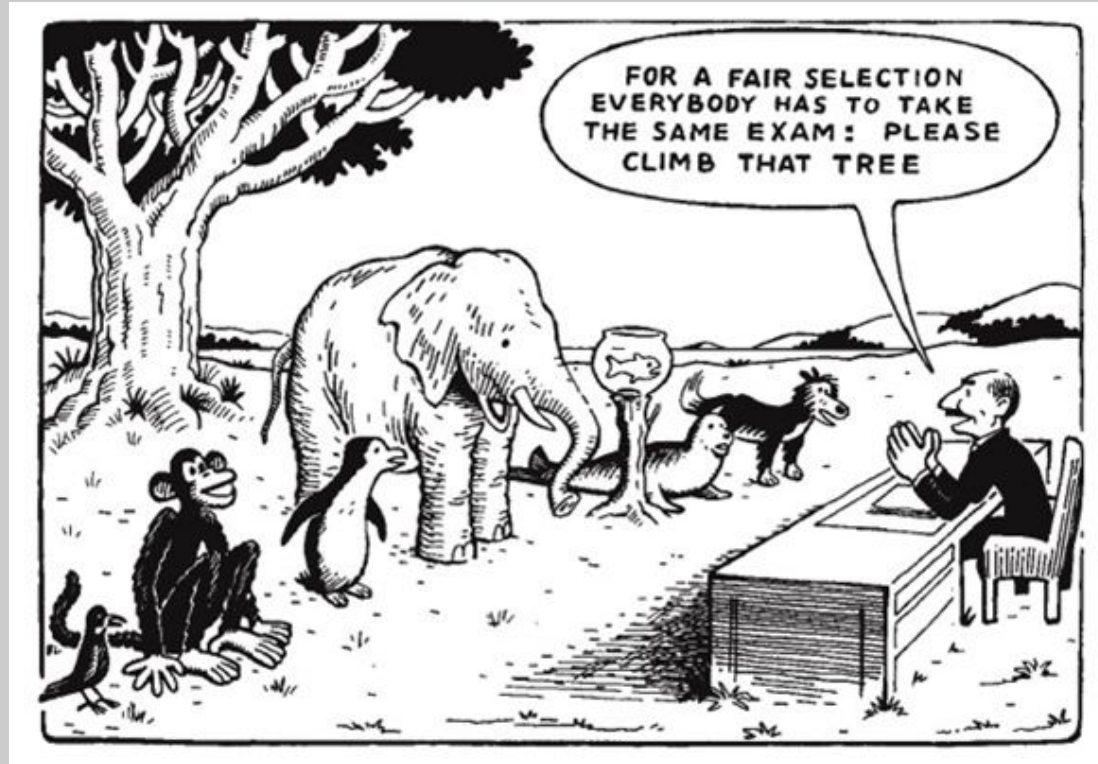
Findings



In the beginning, women had limited opportunities to participate in student activities.



Female students were subject to unfair methods of assessment.



Many women experienced sexist comments.

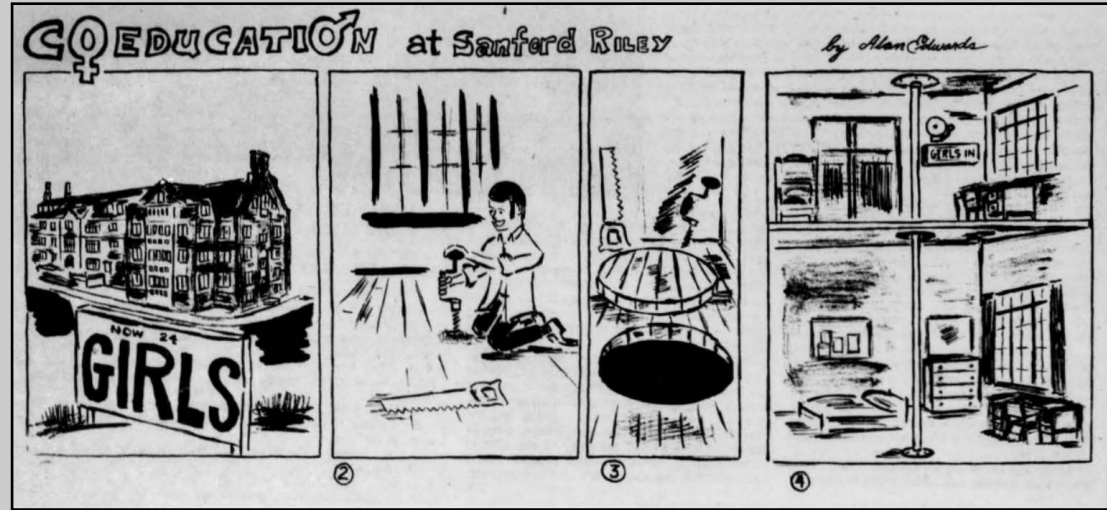


Some women experienced various forms of harassment.



Many female students struggled with a sense of belonging and lacked female mentorship.

Findings



Many female students felt heightened pressure to do well.

“We had to work twice as hard to be accepted”

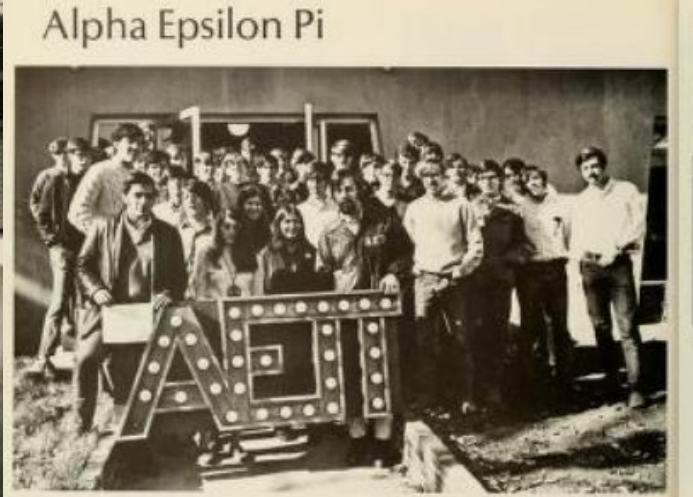
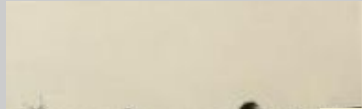
“show you I can be here and that I deserve to be here”



Women found various outlets of support in administrators and each other.



Over time women found various supportive networks with student organizations.



- [A webpage on the Global Labs website](#)



Sexist Views



“Maybe this will show you that women do not belong at engineering school. You just go home and find a nice husband and raise a family”

Sexist beliefs and attitudes of faculty, peers and family contributed to the exclusion of female students at WPI. During their time on campus, many female students faced discrimination from WPI faculty and peers. Some professors would clearly state



The project was challenging but worthwhile.



Thank you all that helped us bring this project to life!

- Sponsor: Professor Stephan Sturm
- Advisors: Professor Foo & Professor Hersh
- Global Labs: Professor Leslie Dodson & Paloma Gonzalez Galvez
- WPI Archives: Arthur Carlson & Amy Smid
- Lifetime Engagement Office: Monica Ellis & Maureen Maynard
- The 21 WPI alumni that were interviewed
- The 23 former and current WPI faculty and staff that were interviewed
- The 7 MIT alumni that were interviewed



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