



Sustaining Soul While Shifting Paradigm: Trinity's Journey Through Transformation

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I don't often get to lounge in the hot tub in Trinity's relatively new sports facility, the Trinity Center for Women and Girls in Sports. But late one Saturday afternoon my achy old bones craved the spa treatment, so after my usual swim I ventured into the whirlpool where several students were sitting on the ledges. As I settled comfortably into the deliciously warm water, I casually remarked to the students, "You are so lucky, we didn't have this when I was a student here; this whole building was just an empty field." The students, young enough to have been born well after I became Trinity's president, looked utterly amazed, and one said, "Really? I cannot imagine Trinity without the Trinity Center. It must have been so strange to live here back in the old days."

So strange, back in the old days. Back before iPhones, iPads, a vast array of entrees at every meal. Way back when we actually went to the library and did research in books, writing exams in blue books with black pens. Back when a modestly middle class Catholic girl like me could sit high up in a window of Trinity's Main Hall gazing out on this then-austere campus and think she'd arrived at heaven's gate, the sense of freedom being overwhelming for those of us raised in strict Catholic households. Back in those old days when there not only was no sports center, no pool, no hot tub, but also, almost no African American students from the city like these young women sitting on the ledge in total wonderment at the aged creature who actually survived those primitive days.

The change that came over Trinity from way back then in my days as a student was not so much the change we have experienced in amenities, buildings and technology, important though those may be, but more seriously, profound change --- a total paradigm shift --- in the population of students we choose to serve. Those young women sitting around the pool could not have conceived of a time when they would not have been here, in more ways than one. Most of our students today are still women, yes, in keeping with our century-long tradition as a women's college in our primary undergraduate program. But they are women whose life experiences, economic conditions, religious beliefs, racial and ethnic frameworks, preparatory

challenges and cultural perspectives are dramatically different from the nearly all-white largely middle class Catholic women of Trinity's past.

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[Slide 2]

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THAT CONTINUES TO THIS DAY.

The reviewer was quite right. By making a deliberate commitment to sustain Trinity's historic mission so that new populations of women could reap its considerable benefits, Trinity embraced the reality of a paradigm shift that changed almost everything while enlarging and strengthening the very soul of the institution.

1897: Radical Sparks of Life

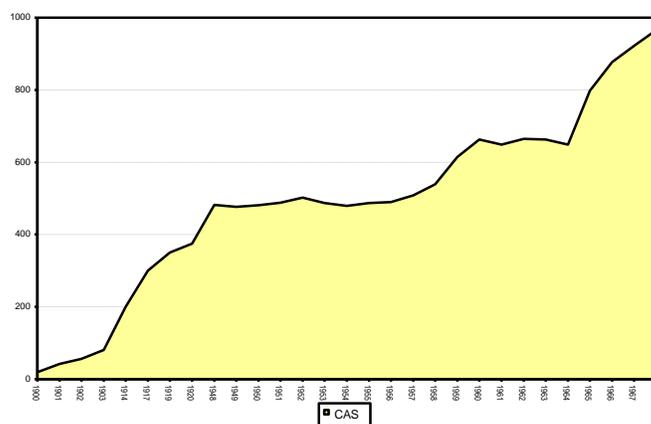
When the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur founded Trinity in 1897 as one of the nation's first Catholic colleges for women, they had a then-radical view that women had the same right as men to go to college. They founded Trinity in direct response to the fact that women were being barred from admission at the newly-established Catholic University of America. The leading bishop in Washington then was the progressive Cardinal Gibbons, who wrote to Trinity founder Sr. Julia McGroarty that it was "an embarrassment" that Catholic women were denied admission to the new university, so he supported the founding of Trinity. However, then as now, the extreme right-wing in the Church had a very dim view of women, and women's education, and raised quite a ruckus about Trinity's founding, going so far as to suggest it was a heresy called "Americanism." But the nuns prevailed, and from the fire of the founding struggles a college emerged whose soul was imbued with the passionate commitment of the SNDs to work in service to the world, to live by the social justice imperative of the Gospel.

Trinity drew its students over the first seventy years largely from Catholic girls' high schools in the major eastern cities --- Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore. Our alumnae over the years became famous for their broadly ecumenical devotion to service to our nation and world, exhibiting a fierce intellectual prowess that made our graduates able to blaze trails as "the first women" in many fields of endeavor. Trinity became the first college or university in America to have two female graduates serving in Congress at the same time when Nancy

Pelosi, Class of 1962, joined Barbara Kennelly, Class of 1958. Congresswoman Kennelly, first woman ever to serve on the House Intelligence Committee, blazed the trail for Pelosi's ascent into party leadership. When Kathleen Gilligan Sebelius, Class of 1970, the former governor of Kansas who became Secretary of Health and Human Services stood alongside Speaker Pelosi as President Obama signed the Affordable Healthcare Act into law, they became famous as the "Trinity Sisters" taking on some of the thorniest, most controversial political issues of our time. Beyond those famous faces are thousands of women across the generations since 1900 serving the greatest needs of their communities, teaching and healing and raising children and advocating for justice in myriad ways around the world.

[Slide 3 – enrollment through 1968; CAS = College of Arts & Sciences (yellow)]

HEADCOUNT TO 1968



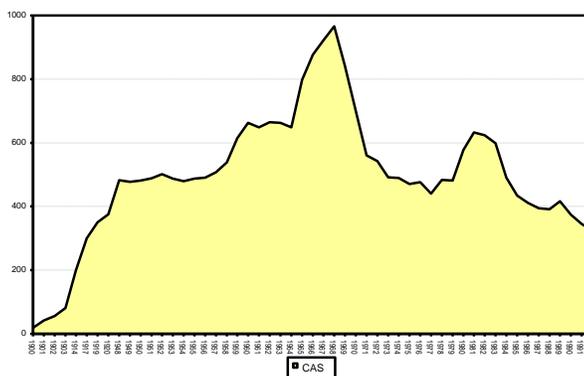
Trinity's proud, progressive soul soared through the 1960's with a view to the future as almost an unlimited horizon for a college devoted to women's leadership and advancement in society.

So high was Trinity's arc, so far was its vision, that it could not foresee the swift-rising threats that rose like dangerous wind shears to suck the institution back to earth with a long, thudding, thumping, crashing skid through the 1970's and 1980's.

Years of Challenge

[Slide 4 – enrollment to 1992]

HEADCOUNTS 1900 TO 1992

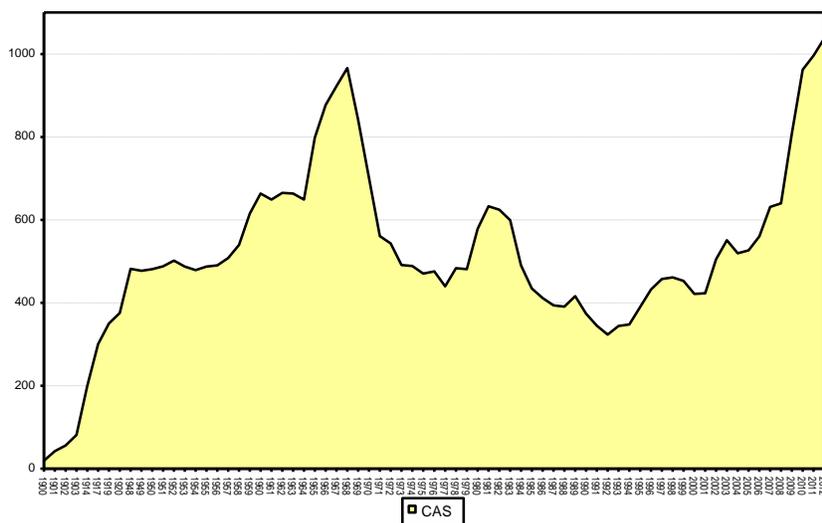


Vatican II led to the rapid evaporation of the free labor of the nuns who floated so much of Trinity's financial boat for the first eight decades. The cold war, the space race, the rise of the National Science Foundation built the men's university campuses and laboratories beyond any previous imagination, but largely skipped over the women's colleges. So when coeducation swept the land, and later the effects of Title IX and the NCAA, the women's colleges were left with outmoded facilities and seemingly suddenly irrelevant missions in a world that changed so very fast from 1965 to 1985. From a high of nearly 300 women's colleges in 1960, nearly 190 of whom were Catholic, today fewer than 50 institutions identify as women's colleges, and fewer than 15 of those as Catholic women's colleges. Some merged, some went coed, many simply closed.

Trinity remains --- not merely surviving, but flourishing, not merely a recovery operation, but a true triumph of institutional renaissance and transformation.

[Slide 5 – CAS to 2013]

HEADCOUNTS 1900 TO 2012



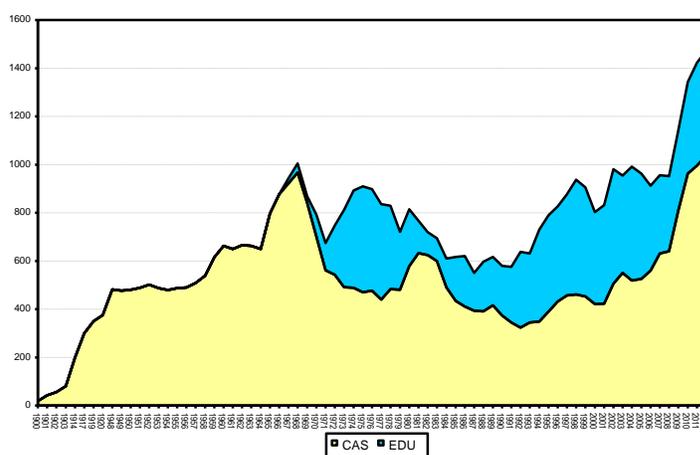
We didn't "go coed" but we do have men in many programs today since we have come to a view that a women's college is not about exclusion but inclusion, not about isolation from men but engagement with issues of equality that include gender, race, class and other characteristics. We stuck firmly with our traditional mission to women in the daytime undergraduate program, now called the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), because we realized that new populations of women needed precisely this kind of education focusing on their learning needs, but almost everything had to change to make this mission work in a new age. We breathed new life into the liberal arts by embracing professional studies. We learned that the true soul of a Catholic college is not in educating Catholics alone but in opening the power of our educational mission to the students of the world who need us the most, those who might not have had other opportunities but for our work.

Strategic Change

How did Trinity do it?

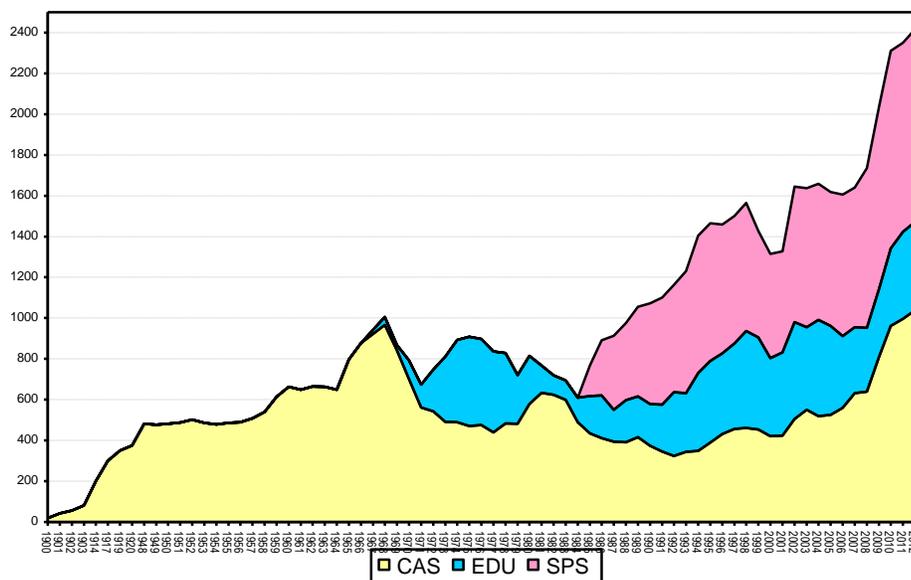
Trinity evolved from a single-college focus --- the historic women's college, now known as the College of Arts and Sciences [yellow on the charts], to a multi-unit university with multiple revenue streams. This complex development, guided by a series of strategic plans, made it possible for Trinity to design and deliver programs suited to many different populations --- the coeducational School of Education (EDU), begun in 1966 as an M.A.T. program, now offers a range of education-related master's degrees. [Slide 6 – School of Education in blue]

HEADCOUNTS 1900 TO 2012



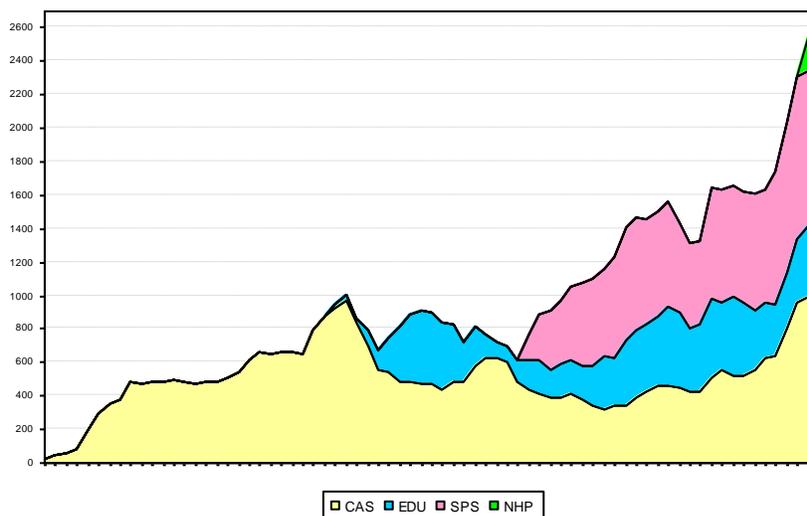
The School of Professional Studies (SPS), started in 1985 as a Weekend College for adult working women, now offers women and men a full range of degrees from associates through bachelors and masters. [Slide 7 – School of Professional Studies in Red]

HEADCOUNTS 1900 TO 2012



The new School of Nursing and Health Professions (NHP), also coeducational, fulfills a great workforce need in the Washington region. [Slide 8 – School of Nursing and Health Professions in Green]

HEADCOUNTS 1900 TO 2012



But all of that development only came after serious, strenuous and oft-conflictful planning and discernment of our true mission, our real spirit, our timeless soul as an institution.

In 1989 when I became Trinity's president, innovative programs for adult returning women and coed programs in graduate teacher education were sustaining the college financially, but in many quarters these programs were viewed as temporary, marginal endeavors to help the institution survive until the day of the Restoration of Trinity to its full mythological golden age. Of the 300 or so traditional-aged young women, the overwhelming majority --- more than 90% --- were white, Catholic, suburban young women from private high schools.

Strategic planning became the backbone for managing the kind of change that Trinity had to embrace if we were to have a future. Like many institutions, however, thinking strategically was not in our culture. I told the faculty and board: why are we doing this? If we don't know why we are working so hard to open the front doors every day, then we should not persist. There are plenty of other universities in Washington who can educate our students. If we don't know why we are different, better, more effective, more essential for our students than any other school, then we cannot go on. What does mission really mean? What will it take to make this mission live well for new generations? *Toward Trinity 2000*, our first strategic plan of the modern era, pushed the community to address these issues.

As Trinity struggled with questions about its strategic future --- questions that successive Middle States teams had perceived and pushed Trinity to grapple with in prior decades --- the mainstream traditionalists truly believed that the restoration of Trinity was possible "if only" a

president would come along who knew what she was doing, “if only” we could get some competent personnel in admissions who knew how to recruit the same kind of students Trinity had in the past. Our discussions about our strategic future were a tug-of-war between the most radical traditionalists who preferred to die rather than consider any change, and those whose idea of change was to consider coeducation as a way to safeguard our Catholicism, a bulwark against a perceived rising tide of feminism, diversity, and, in their view, mediocrity.

Fortunately, the Sisters of Notre Dame, while increasingly few in number on the faculty and staff, still had moral authority and presence on our board. “Why are we trying so hard to reclaim the past,” declared one such nun at a board meeting, “when there are thousands of women at Trinity’s doorstep who could profit from this education? We founded Trinity to make higher education accessible to women, and countless women still find barriers to achievement. Trinity should be open to them.” [Slide 9: SND quote]

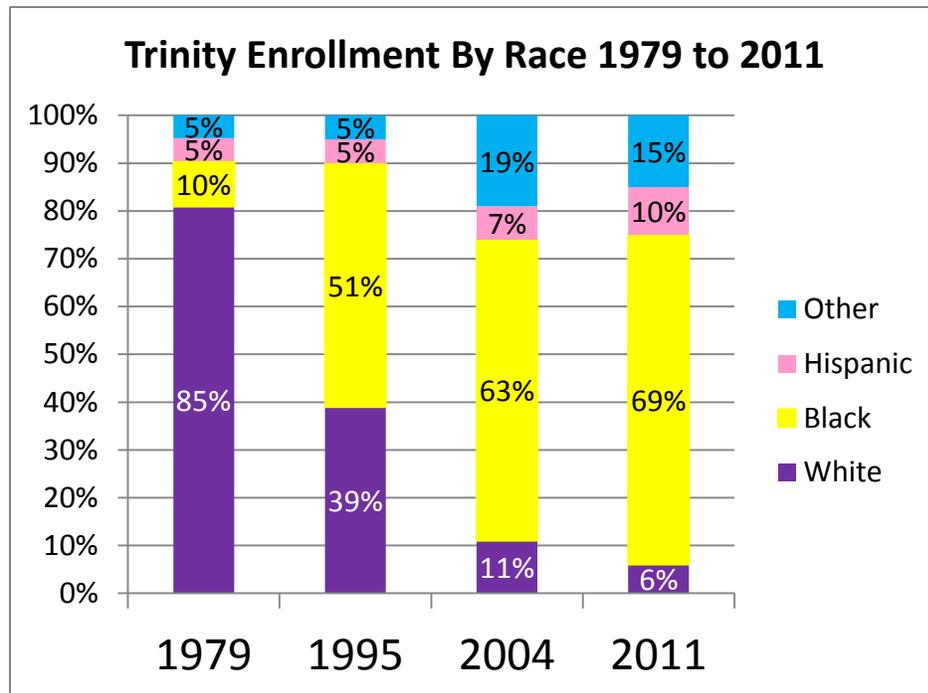
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**--- A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME
DURING STRATEGIC PLANNING DISCUSSIONS
CIRCA 1992**

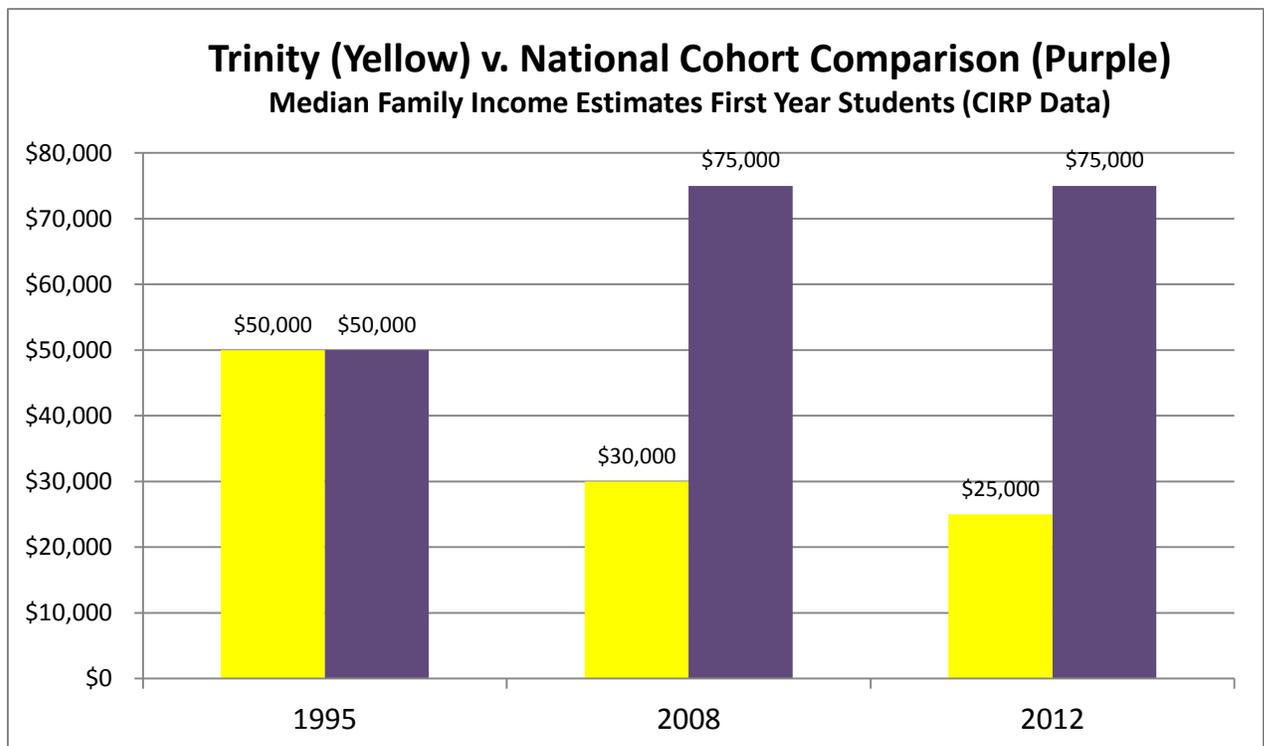
Even as the nuns urged us to open wide the doors of opportunity in our full-time undergraduate college, the adult women who were coming in larger numbers to our Weekend College began to see Trinity as a great option for their daughters. Predominantly African American, many single mothers, working full-time while studying Shakespeare on weekends, these were the women who run Washington, the mid-level federal workers managing the administrative affairs of the big agencies, the secretaries and office managers of the law firms and private businesses managing government contracts. They came to Trinity to complete baccalaureate degrees so that they could get promoted at work, improve their economic security for their families --- and they discovered the real power of liberal learning as personally, intellectually and spiritually fulfilling beyond the mere economic incentive. They realized the powerful results of an education focused on making women successful. They brought their daughters, first a trickle and then a great wave, a tsunami of change cresting over the once-impermeable granite walls of Main Hall.

The Paradigm Shift Begins

[Slide 10 – change in racial composition]

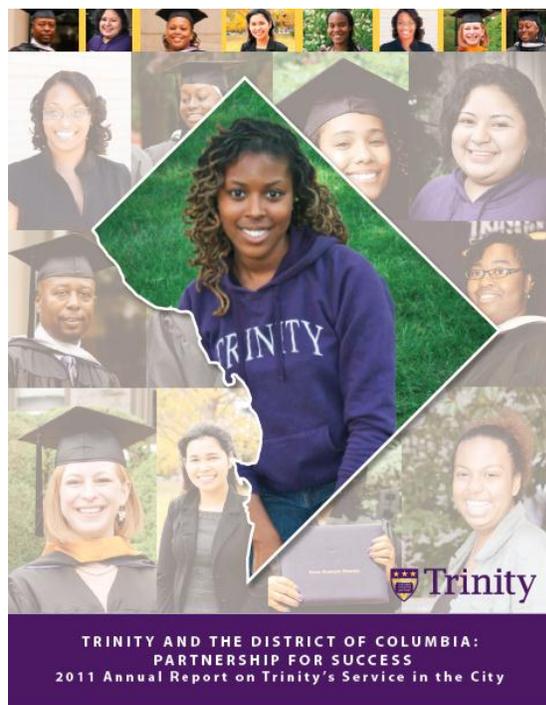


From 1989 to the Year 2000, Trinity's student body demographics changed from more than 85% White to more than 60% Black, from predominantly Catholic to predominantly Baptist and other Christian denominations, from middle class to low income. [Slide 11 – median family income change]

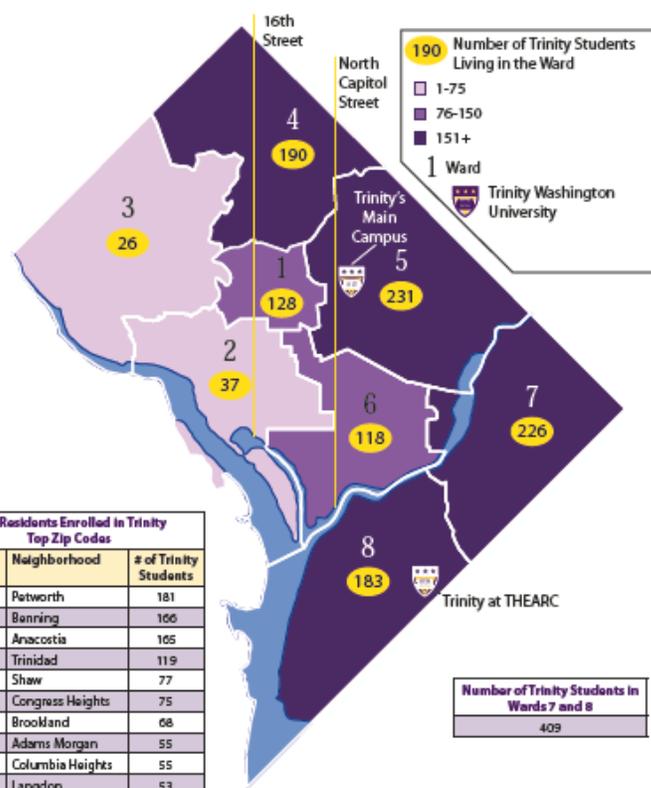


The changes in race and social class also illustrated the fact that Trinity was fast becoming a preferred institution for students from the District of Columbia and nearby Prince Georges County.

[Slide 12-13: [DC Report](#)] (See the full report on Trinity's impact on DC by clicking [here](#).)



D.C. Residents Enrolled in Trinity Washington University, by Ward

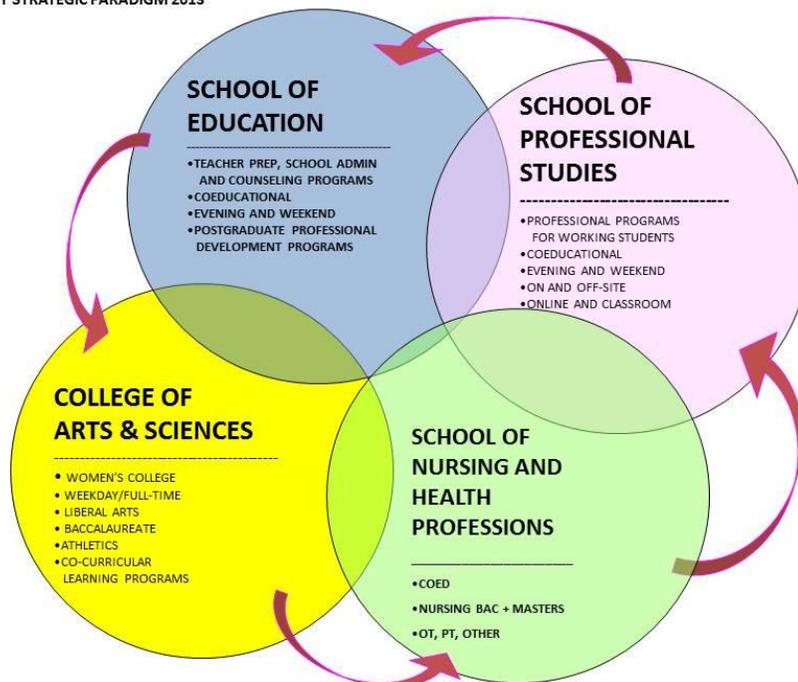


More than half of Trinity's full-time undergraduates today are from D.C., and about 45% of our total student body are D.C. residents. About one-third of these students are from the "east of the river" neighborhoods that are among the lowest income places in the city. D.C. has one of the highest poverty rates among major metropolitan areas along with one of the highest median family incomes. D.C. also has a staggering adult illiteracy rate, about 35%, even though it also boasts the highest percentage of earned degrees in the country. D.C. is a city divided, and that divide runs down the center of the map --- and Trinity serves most of the city on the eastern side of the map.

All of this data framed the real work: Trinity had to undergo profound change --- a true paradigm shift --- in curricula and programs, services and support systems, policies and practices, and in the size and capacity of faculty and staff to work successfully with a new student population. We had to move our perception from focusing on our students as unprepared for us, to an understanding that we had to be better prepared for them. Many colleagues, particularly older faculty, could not accept the change; early retirement helped

them to make the right choice and helped Trinity to recruit a new generation of faculty who proved to be eager to embrace the kind of curricular and pedagogical change we had to have to be successful. A new strategic plan, *Beyond Trinity 2000*, laid the foundation for serious programmatic reorganization, growth into the university structure, programs and services emphasizing quality and innovation for new populations. [Slide 14, Strategic Paradigm]

TRINITY STRATEGIC PARADIGM 2013



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We reaffirmed our essential mission while embracing even more creative ways to deliver this mission to new populations who could profit from Trinity's historic emphasis on academic quality for the purpose of educating students who would be of great service to our world. [Slide 15: Mission Statement]

Trinity Mission Statement

Trinity is a comprehensive university offering a broad range of educational programs that prepare students across the lifespan for the intellectual, ethical and spiritual dimensions of contemporary work, civic and family life.

Trinity's core mission values and characteristics emphasize:

➤ **Commitment to the Education of Women** in a particular way through the design and pedagogy of the historic undergraduate women's college, and by advancing principles of equity, justice and honor in the education of women and men in all other programs;

➤ **Foundation for Learning in the Liberal Arts** through the curriculum design in all undergraduate degree programs and through emphasis on the knowledge, skills and values of liberal learning in all graduate and professional programs;

➤ **Integration of Liberal Learning with Professional Preparation** through applied and experiential learning opportunities in all programs;

➤ **Grounding in the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the Catholic tradition**, welcoming persons of all faiths, in order to achieve the larger purposes of learning in the human search for meaning and fulfillment.

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By 2006, our Middle States visiting team was able to tell us: [Slide 16 text]

“The team has experienced in Trinity, at every turn, a mission-driven institution....The team recognizes the impressive congruence of Trinity in 2006 with the original vision of Trinity’s founders in 1897. The team admires and commends the University’s rejection of the notion that paradigm shift means abandonment of historic mission. Rather, we discover in the work and vitality of Trinity of 2006, a most obvious continuity with Trinity’s 110 year old mission expressed with a renewed relevance and vigor.... (p. 5)

“There is breath-taking achievement chronicled in the self-study: ...Above all, perhaps, is the success of Trinity faculty in curricular and pedagogical change serving the students of the ‘paradigm shift.’” (p. 31)

Trinity has realized even greater success since this 2006 report, guided by the next strategic plan *Achieving Trinity 2010*, and in 2011 Middle States reviewers of our Periodic Review Report commended Trinity, in particular, for the excellence of our work in assessment of student learning. Our new strategic plan, in progress, is *Trinity 2020* and it will extend Trinity’s success in educating new generations of diverse students in new disciplines and delivery formats well into the next decade.

Trinity in the 21st Century

In the last decade, Trinity’s faculty and staff have gone from getting comfortable with our students to becoming proficient in the forms of pedagogy and academic services necessary to ensure success for a population of students who many would describe “at risk.”

Some of the obvious characteristics of our student body today, revealed in our financial aid and CIRP data and student essays at entrance and later discoveries by advisors and counselors and service specialists and faculty include:

[Slide 17 – Realities First Year Trinity Students Fall 2012]

- 75% of entering first year students in Fall 2012 are Pell eligible
- \$25,000 is the approximate median family income of the first years
- 25% of first years estimate their family income at \$10,000 or less
- More than 75% identify as African American, close to 20% as Hispanic
- Majority are self-supporting
- Most work more than 20 hours per week, many work 40+ hours
- About 15% of first year young women have children already
- About 40% of first years have health issues that can impede academic progress
- Many of the health issues are previously undiagnosed or untreated
- Majority of entering students require some level of developmental math
- Critical reading and writing skills are deficient
- Knowledge of “the academic vocabulary” and culture is limited
- Few if any adults in their lives who can be good supports for academic success

Many of our students come to Trinity with astonishing stories of their lives. Each year I read the admissions essays of the students who enroll, and I find myself stunned, appalled, amazed and humbled by their words. These are women who, at very young ages, have had to figure out how to prevail over circumstances that would make most of us tremble and collapse. Mothers shot. Fathers incarcerated. Siblings abused. Death, sickness, violence, hunger, homelessness, refugee status, genocidal war, oppressive regimes, flights across the border seeking safety and security in a new land ---- my students have known all of this before age 18.

Knowing as much as we do about our students, what is Trinity doing to ensure student success? And how do we measure “success” in a world where some very smart people are being amazingly ignorant about boiling it all down to one or two standardized numbers applied equally to everyone. My students are the ultimate proof that “one size does not fit all” and the measure of success often depends on where she starts and how far she has to travel simply to find the center of that mythical playing field.

Here is where we have truly saved the “soul” of Trinity for our current and future generations, taking the historic driver of the women’s college --- the idea of access as a fundamental part of social justice --- and applying that to curriculum, pedagogy and support services to make sure that our students are not simply “allowed in” but actually well educated as a result of being at Trinity.

The key elements of our curriculum, pedagogy and support services for students today include:

[Slide 18 – Strategies for Student Success: Academic]

Curriculum and Pedagogy

1. Assessment: Every student is assessed at entrance for Math, Writing and Critical Reading skills and her first year schedule is tailored to her needs.
2. Engagement: Every first year student has a learning community with no more than 18 other students, led by a senior member of the faculty. All faculty have participated in professional development programs designed to improve their effectiveness with pedagogies designed to help at-risk students achieve at higher levels.
3. Specialists: Specialists in the gateway Math, Critical Reading and Writing courses teach the gateway courses and also work with the rest of the faculty to develop the expertise of the discipline-based faculty in the ongoing work of student development.
4. Technology: Technology tools provide considerable assistance at the right places for all students. In the first year program, the use of Pearson’s MyMathLab and similar packages, as part of the larger pedagogy, has proven effective. All courses at Trinity have websites on Moodle and many faculty have developed considerable expertise in combining classroom and online pedagogies to keep students engaged (even in snowstorms!).

5. Assessment Again: The specialists pay careful attention to assessment in every semester, and we have a body of data collected and analyzed over the last five years that demonstrates increasing progress for students in these foundation skills areas.

6. Career Pathways: With the addition of Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Criminal Justice and other new majors with more specific career pathways, students have additional incentive for higher achievement in general education and all pre-requisite courses. The attention to math and science, in particular, to support the growing health professions programs is forcing students to stick with the gateway courses in greater number.

7. Internships: Internships and experiential learning are essential methodologies for most majors at Trinity. Because of the strong tradition of internships in Washington, many students are employed in their first professional jobs even before graduation, and post-graduate career pathways are strong.

[Slide 19 – Strategies for Student Success: Support]

Academic Support

Because the work of the faculty in the regular curriculum is obviously not enough, we have developed a robust Academic Services Center and group of advising professionals who are able to work with the faculty on a broad range of student issues, including:

1. Tutors and workshops: math, writing, critical reading. “Monday Mathematics” has proven to be an immensely popular method to engage reluctant students in additional informal instruction with faculty members. Additionally, tutors --- upper division students who have excelled --- provide important additional support for math, writing and reading. The Writing Center provides significant support for information literacy, avoiding plagiarism, writing skills.
2. Learning skills support: through the Academic Services Center students can access staff and programs that assist them with a wide variety of academic issues from time management and study habits to locating tutors and specialized assistance.
3. Disabilities Support: Trinity’s support for students with disabilities keeps expanding, with about 125 students registered for support in Spring 2013.
4. First Year Advising and Services: Success in the first year is crucial to the ultimate goal of timely completion. In addition to all of the other supports, Trinity’s first year experience program includes entrance assessment, learning communities, professional academic advising, health assessment, “intrusive advising” when a student starts to slide, triage for the most at-risk students, taking attendance and other activities designed to intervene when students exhibit signs of failing.

[Slide 20: Strategies for Student Success: Co-Curricular]

Co-Curricular Support and Services

Health Services
 Residence Life
 Athletics
 Campus Ministry
 Traditions: Signs and Symbols of Belonging

Partnerships

1. College Success Foundation
2. College Access Program
3. KIPP, other charter schools, public schools, Catholic schools
4. Cristo Rey Network
5. Girl Scouts
6. Jumpstart

[Slide 21: Successful Outcomes]

A recent survey of Trinity graduates from 2002 to 2012 (survey still in process) points to these results: of those who have answered...

95% are currently employed with a median salary range of \$60,000-\$69,000

70% have pursued some graduate studies since graduation; 60% have completed graduate degrees and 36% are still enrolled for a total persistence/completion rate of 96% for graduate degrees; the graduate schools they have attended include universities such as Georgetown, the London School of Economics, American University, Howard University, the University of Pennsylvania, UMUC, Bowie, Towson, Phoenix and Trinity

Within one year of graduation, 78% reported that they were immediately employed and 32% were in graduate school

85% of respondents say that they are employed in the same or related field as their major, or in a different field by choice;

The most important knowledge and skills the respondents said they received from their Trinity education include excellence in written and oral communication, critical thinking and a deep sense of ethics.

CONCLUSION

What does all of this mean for you, my colleagues and co-adventurers in the vitally important endeavors of Minority Serving Institutions? I hope this brief presentation on how one university, Trinity, was able to sustain its soul while experiencing a dramatic paradigm shift can encourage you to persist in mission and purpose in a world where too much of education is homogenized and flattened.

Final thoughts to encourage you:

1. Be bold in articulating mission as a truly generative force for good for your students and your institutions. Mission is the place where we offer our students the true difference, not trying to be just like everyone else, but rather, distinguishing our educational programs and pedagogies in ways that can best meet the needs of our unique learners. Collaborate as much as you can with other colleagues and institutions who share this mission so ardently.
2. Be exemplars of the ways in which academic quality and intellectual rigor need not be virtues in competition with access and diversity. Instead, establish the right kind of academic standards ---- outcomes instead of inputs, real intellectual achievements instead of mere time-in-place measurements. Challenge your faculty to exercise what I call “compassionate rigor” which means being tough on student learning but providing opportunities for second chances where students show the aptitude to improve with repetition.
3. Establish high expectations for the commitment of your faculty and staff to their chosen life’s work. Embracing this mission, this population of students makes this job quite different from a similar position at another place, at their last institution. Exhort them to spend less time bemoaning how underprepared our students may be, and instead, spend more time preparing to teach them well.
4. Do not let others characterize your work unfairly, demeaning your mission and your students. It’s ok to step off the rankings mania circus, to “just say no” to U.S. News, to present alternative ways to understanding student achievement. You have to tell your story as well as possible --- don’t expect others to do it for you.
5. Remember, always, that the only thing that really matters is student growth and transformation, and that, quite often, a successful student will dazzle you far beyond your initial expectations. Be open to the ways in which your students manifest their success with learning, with intellectual advancement, personal and spiritual fulfillment through their college years. Celebrate their success at each benchmark along the way --- you are not only changing their lives, but opening new horizons for their children and families.

What better work can there be in all of human life than the sacred work of changing lives through education?

Thanks for listening.