A Brief History of Meredith College

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Meredith College’s beginning follow the trends seen in both the Period of Industrializing Society: Civil War to World War II (1860-1945) which saw the development of HIED for women - co-education exists to educate women alongside men, and trends in the Pre-Industrial Era: Pre-Civil war (1640-1860) where denominational colleges open in the south and recruit a middle class cohort.

Meredith College was founded following the establishment of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by the state, Greensboro College in 1838 by the Methodist Church, and St. Augustine's College in 1867 by the Episcopal church. At this time, North Carolina realized that the higher education options for the women were lacking. "In 1835 the North Carolina Baptist State Convention met and debated the possibility of forming a 'female seminary of higher order'…however, the Baptist Convention did not commission a female school until 1889" (Martin, 2016, para. 2).

Meredith College, then known as the Baptist Female University, had their first student enrollment in 1899 and their first graduating class of just ten students in 1902. Later in 1909, the name was changed for the second time to Meredith College. "The name's lack of pretentiousness its brevity, and it beauty of sound were welcome," the vice-president of the college, Johnson said (Maxwell, 2016, para 11).

Tuition when the school was opened was $36 for room and board, and $17.50 for tuition per term. Soon after opening, Meredith College established an athletic association which offered basketball tennis and volleyball. Within the first ten years of operation, many of the traditions that still are followed today were established including hiding a crook and forming a daisy chain which are both traditions used to honor the students who are graduating.

In 1921, Meredith was admitted to the Southern Associations of Colleges and Schools, and in 1928, Meredith College was the first women's college in North Carolina to receive the distinction of "approved colleges" by The Association of American Universities. It was the fourth school in North Carolina to receive this distinction.

Meredith also has a history of supporting underrepresented students. Gwendolyn Matthews Hilliard, the school's first African American student graduated in 1971. In 1974 Dr. Sandra Thomas became the college's first female vice president, and under her leadership the school took up the cause of women's rights. In fact, in 1997, "Meredith College broke its close ties with the Baptist State Convention to give the school autonomy amid concerns about the convention's views on women" (Maxwell, 2016 para. 50). In 1999 Dr. Mareen A. Hartford was Meredith's first female president, and upon her retirement in 2011 a Meredith graduate, Dr. Jo Allen took her place.

Currently Meredith is focusing on personal and professional development programs for students and graduates, adult education programs, international education at their campus in Sansepolcro, Italy, and various other endeavors. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Average annual cost including tuition, living costs, books, and fees for a student from a family income of $48,001-$75,000 is $21,159. They have a graduation rate of 56% with an average salary after completing their degree of $26,700-$38,400 per year (Meredith College, n.d.).

Some of the information I learned about Meredith's history was surprising. For example, I did not know that the school needed to cut ties with the Baptist State convention in order to keep striving for female equity within the organization. Although not mentioned in my summary, each of the now eight presidents of Meredith College strove to accomplish huge goals of growth, equality, and increasing the endowment of the College. Each president met and often exceeded their original goals for Meredith, and I feel a sense of pride about the leadership of the college. I am looking forward to learning more about the institution's motives for the incorporation of sports, clubs, on campus activities, and graduate programs.

References

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