

The Claremont Colleges: Women benefit from open door opportunities at The Colleges

The appointment of Deborah Freund as Claremont Graduate University president last fall confirmed a growing trend of women in the highest office in The Claremont Colleges.

Women currently hold 5 of the 7 presidential offices of The Claremont Colleges with Ms. Freund at CGU, Lori Bettison-Varga at Scripps College, Pamela Gann at Claremont McKenna College, Maria Klawe at Harvey Mudd College and Laura Trombley at Pitzer College. Pomona College President David

Oxtoby and Keck Graduate Institute President Sheldon Schuster are the only 2 male presidents among the 7-school consortium.

Ms. Freund believes more opportunities have been given to women to achieve such positions within the past 2 decades.

“As their numbers grew, new opportunities opened for professional development. That, in turn, has propelled more women to ascend to the highest levels of academic leadership,” said Ms. Freund, who is CGU’s first female president in its 86-year history. “Women also tend to have very collaborative leadership styles, which is particularly useful in the model we have here at the Claremont Colleges.”

Nancy Bekavac became the first female president in the Claremont University Consortium 21 years ago when she was appointed to the position at Scripps College. The 6 presidents preceding Ms. Bekavac were all male.

Fritz Weis succeeded Ms. Bekavac in 2007 before the college elected Ms. Bettison-Varga in 2009. The current Scripps president noted the growth the school has enjoyed under female leadership.

“I am honored to be the 2nd woman president in Scripps’ history, following Nancy Bekavac’s leadership from 1990 to 2007,” Ms. Bettison-Varga said. “Actually, I’m the 3rd woman president, if you count Mary Kimberly Shirk, who served as acting president in 1942-43. So having a woman president at Scripps isn’t at all unusual. Also, 4 out of 5 vice presidents and deans at Scripps are women, including the dean of faculty. Scripps College has undergone tremendous growth—in student body population, campus



COURIER photos/Steven Felschundneff
Scripps College President Lori Bettison-Varga met with reporters in January as the college reacted to the shooting of alumna Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.


improvements, endowment, and national reputation—during the past 20 years, 18 under a woman president.”

Ms. Gann became the 3rd female president in the consortium when she took office at Claremont McKenna College in 1999. Former Pitzer College President Marilyn Massey was the 2nd female president, serving from 1992-2002. Ms. Gann is the 4th president in Claremont McKenna history with Jack Stark (1970-1999), Howard Neville (1969-1970) and George C.S. Benson (1946-1969) being her predecessors.




Pitzer College President Laura Trombley after publishing her fifth book on Mark Twain last year.



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COURIER photos/Steven Felschundneff
 Claremont McKenna College President Pamela Gann congratulates a graduate last May during commencement at CMC.

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Ms. Trombley became president of Pitzer College 3 years after Ms. Gann was appointed (2002), but is the school's 2nd female president. Under her leadership, Pitzer has increased its endowment by 136 percent, received the highest number of national awards in its 48-year history, achieved the highest per capita number of Fulbright awards for any college or university nationally and added 4 new Gold LEED certified mixed use residence halls.

"My time spent at Pitzer College has been the most rewarding that I ever could have enjoyed both personally and professionally," Ms. Trombley said. "The faculty is deeply talented and utterly committed to offering the best educational experience for our students. Our staff is professional and committed to service and our students represent the best of their generation. It has been both a pleasure and a privilege

to be president at Pitzer College."

Ms. Klawe was appointed the first female president of Harvey Mudd College in 2006, following in the footsteps of former presidents Joseph Platt (1957-1976), Kenneth Baker (1976-1988), Henry Riggs (1988-1997) and Jon Strauss (1997-2006). Harvey Mudd is currently enjoying its first female majority incoming class in school history.

"My colleagues on the Council of Presidents of The Claremont Colleges are fabulous to work with, including the two male presidents and the male CEO of the consortium," Ms. Klawe said. "Being the first female president can sometimes be tricky to navigate, so it helps to have a group of presidents who can offer sympathy and good advice. Increased diversity improves the quality of solutions, provides a better learning environment, broadens the range of perspectives and helps us all to work effectively in our diverse world."



Renowned health economist and educator Deborah Freund began her position as president of Claremont Graduate University in November 2010.

Both Pomona College and Keck Graduate Institute have yet to appoint a female president. Pomona has a 121-year history with several presidential tenures while KGI is the newest member of the consortium with 14 years in existence and 2 presidents.

Mr. Schuster views the rising trend of women in leadership as indicative of the Claremont Colleges moving in the right direction.

"The presidents of The Claremont Colleges strive to represent the best qualities of our academic institutions," the 2nd KGI president said. "Breaking down barriers and forging new paths are two of the missions of the colleges, and the growing number of women presidents demonstrates at the leadership level that we are making great progress in those regards."

—Landus Rigsby



COURIER file photo
 In 2006, Maria Klawe was appointed Harvey Mudd College's first female president.

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