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### Innovations at Salve Regina September 29, 1972

Salve Regina College

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September 29, 1972 issue

Innovations on the Salve Regina campus in Newport, are a recognition of the changes which have taken place in contemporary life since the liberal arts, four year college for women, opened at Ochre Court 25 years ago.

What kind of innovations?

Superficially, there are the students in levis and mini-skirts (gloves and a hat were required for in-town excursions back in 1947-48); there are the 50 acres of land and 15 buildings (from a start on one major estate); there are the Nuns in civvies, smart hairdos and pretty pumps or sandals (a far cry from the bulky, stiff and repressive habits of a quarter century ago).

More importantly, an educational revolution is taking place at the institution of higher education --- an educational revolution which is a forecast of things to come on less progressive campuses, throughout the 1970's.

Originated and conceived by Dr. Beverly Miller, academic dean of Salve Regina College, a breath of mid-western fresh air in staid old New England, this new approach to higher education abolishes the traditional departmental structure and approaches learning from a more practical point of view.

Dr. Miller believes, after 18 years in both the classroom and as a part of collegiate administrative structure (she was the first lay vice president of Mary Manse College, in Toledo, Ohio, an Ursuline college with a student body of 600), that colleges generally haven't been preparing students for the kind of life they will lead in our world of the future.

She and Sister Mary Christopher, R.S.M., president of Salve Regina College, foresee a future of changing roles for most women.

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"Women today will be educated, work and get married, just as they have in the past," explains Dr. Miller, "but now they are much more likely to have five or six separate careers in a life-time."

"Technological changes are happening so fast, that even our vocabulary is altered in a major way, every three to five years. We have to prepare young people for these future changes and the old methods just won't do that."

As a result of this point of view, Salve Regina has abolished its 17 major departments and adopted a new structure, in which its curriculum is divided into three major areas, grouped according to the three major methods of inquiry used to uncover basic knowledge.

Incoming freshman, in the Fall of 1973, will study under the empiric, symbolic and reflective areas, taking four of their eight freshman and sophomore courses in a multi-discipline area, with the guidance of an advisor.

A master topic will be chosen --- "poverty and man" or "slavery through the ages" as examples --- and studied in a way which will encompass all previously separate courses. In other words, history, literature, science, math and the fine arts will all be incorporated into one master course dealing with a chosen topic.

"Thus, the empiric area will encompass all courses investigating man, his environment and his behavior," Dr. Miller explained. "The symbolic area will be devoted to symbols, concepts tied to symbols, and the knowledge one derives from manipulation of these symbols; with the reflective area including knowledge derived from man's reflection about his universe and his role in it."

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Traditional areas of study will be grouped under the new categories as follows:-

Empiric - natural, social, behavioral sciences, nursing, medical technology and education;

Symbolic - mathematics, logic, foreign languages and English;

Reflective - drama, music, fine arts, religious education and philosophy.

In addition, Freshman year will actually be an exploratory period --- when the student learns different problem solving techniques in a liberal arts context. In the Sophomore year problem-centered courses will be adopted, where students can apply the problem-solving methods they learned as Freshmen, in a specific area.

"There will be no right or wrong answers and students will be evaluated on the basis of how well they apply their accumulated knowledge to the problems of today's society," Sister Mary Christopher pointed out.

The former public assistance social worker, now Religious Sister of Mercy views the changes at Salve Regina as "the biggest challenge our faculty and administration could possibly face."

"It is an indication of the level of our community-at-large and the religious community in particular," Sister Mary Christopher continued, "that Dr. Miller's proposals were actually voted on by faculty and administration and the vast majority of our people voted in favor of adopting her new approach. We have a staff of individuals who are truly interested in the advancement of education."

Junior and Senior years will still be a time of in-depth study in each student's chosen major, under the revised system. The total curriculum, however, will be student centered, with students initiating and completing their own projects, in multi-disciplinary problem-centered courses.

Salve Regina is also adopting the "4 - 1 - 4" schedule, in which students attend two four month semesters and have the option of taking a month-long interim period as vacation, for independent study, or for foreign study.

"The '4 - 1 - 4' program, already adopted on better than 500 other campuses, means that a student can accelerate her college education and with a combination of interim and summer study, finish in three years or less." Sister Mary Christopher sees the economic as well as educational advantages of accelerated learning.

"Youth will be prepared for employment in their chosen fields earlier," she pointed out, "and more young people will be able to afford to attend the smaller college, where individualized courses and individualized instruction are the rule rather than the exception."

What Sister Mary Christopher is pointing out is that two-and-a-half years of concentrated study at Salve Regina will be financially competitive with four years at a more traditional institution of higher learning, where the four years on campus are still routine.

"All in all, we are adapting education to the times and to the real needs of the student. It is by so doing, we feel we can make our best contribution," she concluded.

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