

## **Research Shows: Graduates of Girls' Schools Have an Edge!**

**April 25, 2010**

For the first time ever, educators have solid evidence that all-girls schools are more effective than coeducational schools. This year, UCLA's Graduate School of Education completed a scientific, national study analyzing the experiences of female students in single-sex and coeducational high schools, and comparing their academic achievements after high school. The UCLA study revealed more than one hundred statistically important differences between women graduates of single-sex schools and grads of coed schools. Highlighted below are the study results that directly reflect the advantages conferred to students and families of St. Mary's Academy.

First and best, the UCLA study also included Catholic girls' high schools, which have usually been overlooked in past research. This is an important part of the UCLA study, because Catholic all-girls' schools were shown to have additional benefits for girls above all other schools. Specifically, attendance at Catholic girls' high schools:

- predicts higher SAT scores;
- enhances students' scientific orientation; and
- promotes an orientation towards college that is more ethically and spiritually grounded, more educationally motivated and less economically-motivated.

Secondly but also crucial for St. Mary's Academy students, the benefits provided by all-girls' schools remain the same even when accounting for the background differences between coed students and all-girls' school students. In other words, single-sex girls' schools are better for all girls, even when demographics and school characteristics are factored into the analysis. This means, regardless of students' race/ethnicity, family income, and parental education, and regardless of the location or wealth of the school, same-sex girls' high schools still out-perform coeducational schools in all the areas that matter for student achievement.

- - - - -

The study drew on the large database housed at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute. The statistical analyses compared the achievements, aspirations, and behaviors of 6,552 graduates of 225 independent girls' schools, and 14,684 of their peers from 1,169 coeducational high schools. The data indisputably shows that alumnae of single-sex girls' schools assess themselves stronger across all academic disciplines.

The study also reveals exactly how girls' high schools prepare young women for success in colleges and universities; and especially, how they do a better job of this than coeducational schools. According to the UCLA report, grads of girls' schools are consistently assessed above average and in the top ten percent in terms of their academic abilities, self-confidence, engagement, and ambition. Compared to graduates of coed schools, they have more confidence in their mathematics and computer abilities, and are able to study for many more hours, which is critical for success in higher education.

Graduates of girls schools are more likely to pursue careers in engineering, engage in political discussions, keep current with political affairs, and see college as a stepping stone to graduate school. This interest in political affairs is more important than one might think: across the board, previous studies have shown that familiarity with current political affairs is an indicator for future scholastic and professional success.

Ten percent more girls' school graduates rate their confidence in math and computer abilities high at the start of college compared to their peers from coed schools. That is, 47.7 percent of women entering college from single-sex schools are well prepared in math, as compared to 36.6 percent from coed schools. A similar gap appears in computer skills: 35.8 percent of girls' school graduates report self-confidence, versus 25.9 percent of their coed peers. Girls' school graduates are three times more likely than their coed peers to consider pursuing a career in engineering; or 4.4 percent compared to 1.4 percent.

Nearly half of all women graduating from single-sex schools (or 44.6 percent) rate their public speaking ability high, compared to 38.5 percent of women graduates of coed schools. A similar differential exists for writing abilities: 64.2 percent girls' school graduates assess their writing as high, compared to 58.8 percent women graduates of coed schools. These two areas cannot be overestimated, as there is a documented correlation between proficient speaking and writing skills and academic and professional success

Women graduates of single-sex independent schools spend more time studying or doing homework, talking with teachers outside of class, tutoring peers, and studying with others. Indeed, 53 percent of independent girls' school graduates study with other students, compared with 45 percent of their coed peers, and 63 percent spend 11 plus hours a week studying or doing homework compared with 42 percent of the coeds. And 37 percent of girls' school alumnae spend 3 or more hours a week talking with teachers, compared to 30 percent among women from coed schools.

More girls' school graduates consider college a stepping stone to graduate school (71 percent versus 66 percent from coed schools) and 45 percent of women from single-sex schools (compared to 41 percent of their coed peers) choose a college in part for its record of alumnae gaining admission to graduate school.

As the UCLA study points out, girls' schools graduates rate themselves more successful and engaged in precisely those areas in which male students have historically surpassed them - mathematics, computers, engineering, and politics. These findings may finally undermine opponents of girls' schools, who have traditionally argued that single-sex education accentuates sex-based stereotypes and widens the gender gap.

The UCLA study perhaps explains the recent, sudden growth in all-girls' schools in the US, as over 30 new girl's schools have been formed since 2006. Is it any wonder that the Director of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools states, "our nation's girls are a national resource and they deserve the best we can offer them?" It is no surprise to the founders, alumnae, teachers, and students of St. Mary's Academy—the oldest all-girls school in Southern California.