

The CE/DS Story

Historic Data



40 years of transformation
Continuing Education and Davis Scholars

June 2011

As the Continuing Education program celebrates its 40th anniversary and the Elisabeth Kaiser Davis Degree Program celebrates its 20th anniversary, CE/DS alumnae and current Davis scholars began to compile our class history. We researched highlights and milestones of the program during the past 40+ years, solicited classmates' memories and vignettes about our journeys toward a Wellesley degree, and asked members of the faculty, administration and staff to comment and share reminiscences of their experiences with CE/DS students.

The resulting history is posted on the CE/DS class web site and stored permanently in the college's archives. The CE/DS History Project is intended to be ongoing and class members are encouraged to keep their directory information current and to continue posting recollections and photographs on the class web site.

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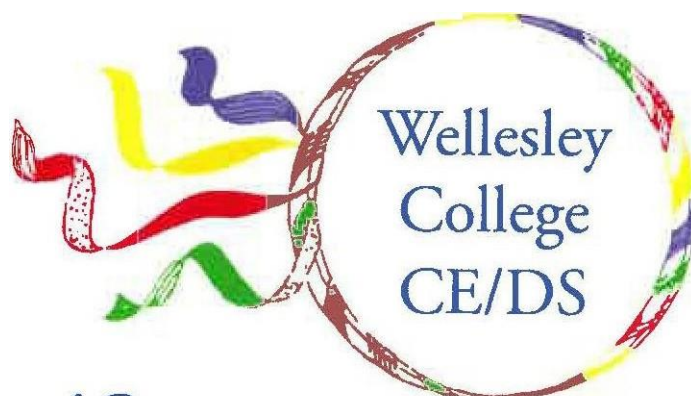
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40 years of transformation

Continuing Education and Davis Scholars

Continuing Education at Wellesley College: The First Forty Years

The 1960s: The origins of the Continuing Education Program

The notion that Wellesley should have a program of continuing education (CE) "sprang from the fertile brain of a faculty member," said former CE director Betty Lou Marple. She was referring to chemistry professor Eleanor Webster '44, who, in the mid-1960s, recognized that some



Eleanor Webster at CE 20th celebration in 1991

women scientists who had stopped working in order to raise families were having difficulty reentering the workforce, particularly academia, because their training was out of date. To address this, she started a successful master's degree program in her department.

With the founding of CE, Webster "risked adding another group of 'older women' to the college campus," Marple continued, speaking at CE's 15th birthday party in March 1986. "And Mary Lefkowitz was your midwife, for it was she who introduced the resolution that created you to academic council."

Classics professor Mary Lefkowitz '57, learned about the issue of women returning to college when she was a fellow of what was then called the Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study in 1966-1967 under its first dean, Constance Smith '42, a contemporary of Webster's. The



Mary Lefkowitz at CE 20th celebration in 1991

Institute had been founded in 1960 by Radcliffe president Mary Bunting, who had herself reentered academia after having a family. So, as Lefkowitz says today, "Smith knew as much as anyone did at the time about how hard it was for women to finish their education after it had been interrupted by an early marriage, or who sought to reembark on a career after a hiatus."

When Lefkowitz returned to Wellesley after her year at Radcliffe, two things fell into place: She was elected to the curriculum committee, and the college had a new dean, physics professor Phyllis Fleming, who "was open to new ideas," as Lefkowitz puts it. "I asked Phyllis if she would consider starting a program in continuing education. She told me to write a report about it.

I visited some of the other colleges that had CE programs, such as Sarah Lawrence and Wheelock, and came up with a proposal. My proposal was innovative in one respect-this was the late '60s, remember, and some people did not believe older women could manage to do



Phyllis Fleming at CE 20th celebration in 1991

ordinary university work. At Sarah Lawrence older women were taught in separate classes. I suggested instead that CE students would take the same classes and fulfill the same requirements as other Wellesley students."

On November 21, 1968, the curriculum committee sent academic council its proposal to start a CE program, and recommended hiring a director and administrative staff. The faculty approved, and a pilot program began the following fall, September 1969, with Webster at the helm, aided by three part-time staffers. They set up shop in Sage Hall.

"We were thinking of course what we could do for those women out there," says Lefkowitz. "We soon began to discover all the CE's were doing for us and for our students. We also imagined that the program would have a limited appeal to older women in the immediate area and draw 15 to 20 people at most. I'm delighted that we were wrong about that as well."

The 1970s: The program is established and questions remain

Continuing education at Wellesley moved out of the experimental stage in fall 1970, with Betty Lou Marple as the new director, and 26 students happily attending classes despite a lack of publicity, financial aid, or a formal name; that number doubled within two years. Any fears about the ability of older women to handle the coursework were immediately dispelled: At the program's 15th birthday party, Marple said, "When I looked at CE students' grades at the end of the first semester, I knew we had winners." Indeed, they maintained a median grade of B+ throughout the decade and beyond. Most were getting their BA's, but some, referred to as post-bacs, already had degrees and were taking classes required for graduate school, typically medical or dental school. In 1971 the program got a permanent home, when the Society of Phi Sigma gave up its house and CE moved in, initially sharing it with the counseling service.

The 1970s were challenging to the early CEs. Many juggled families and work along with their assignments. Some quit jobs or cut back hours in order to attend school; some got divorced.

Frequently, an already stressful situation was made more so because financial aid was iffy-grants and loans were available from various sources, but they were limited-and many students were forced to take classes part-time. Where to live could be challenging, and Marple tried to match students with empty-nesters with a spare room, or find rooms to rent. In some cases, these pressures interfered with a student's ability to do advanced academic work, such as an honors thesis; they just couldn't balance it all.

Whatever her background, every CE student was hungry for the intellectual rigor the college offered, and the professors responded with equal enthusiasm. Alumnae from the 1970s have spoken of particular academic and personal struggles, and have referred glowingly to the support they received from their professors, Marple, and in some cases, traditional-age students. They use words like "life-changing," "life-affirming, "glorious," and "wonderful" to describe their time at Wellesley, as do alumnae from the other decades.

Continuing education was new territory for Wellesley, as it was for most colleges at that time. While CE students had to fulfill the usual degree requirements, they could receive a Wellesley BA with just eight Wellesley credits (this changed in 1986). They did not have to take P.E. Many questions remained, however, and Marple worked tirelessly to field them: Were CE students eligible for academic honors? (Yes, and they began to earn them immediately.) Could they do research with a faculty member, the way traditional-age students did? (Yes.) Was the college starting a childcare program, and would CE students be allowed to send their children? (Yes and yes.) Could a full-time CE student be considered a transfer student, and thus become eligible for all the benefits of a traditional-age student? Could a CE use the infirmary? Could they have campus housing, at least in inclement weather? And the question that would not go away: Could the college give CE students the same financial aid as traditional-age students?

By 1976 enrollment of degree and post-bac students had risen to 130. Marple began to poll CE alumnae, and CE students began studying themselves: One, for instance, researched CE for her sociology class. These efforts gave Marple data she could bring to the administration in her struggle to find more institutional support.



Betty Lou Marple at CE 20th celebration in 1991

Spring 1976 was the first year CE alumnae paraded as a group at reunion. Calling themselves "the class of all colors" in recognition of Wellesley's tradition of identifying each matriculating class by a color, they marched behind a student-made banner of red, green, purple, and yellow.

Word was spreading about the CE program. A major publicity campaign about it in area newspapers finally kicked off in 1978, garnering a tremendous response. In May 1980, when Marple left her position after a decade leading CE, she reported that hundreds of students had been "beneficiaries of the program," which by now included 137 graduates. The pioneers had firmly established themselves on campus, in the classroom, and among the alumnae.

The 1980s: The struggle for equity-financial and beyond

At the beginning of the decade, many CE students were deeply involved with their community. They used the CE House to present an exhibit of a decade of their art and to host regular lunchtime discussions. One student performed a concert of her original music; others organized the first alumnae panel. The CE newsletter was redesigned and expanded, becoming an increasingly important communication tool in the era before email. A student orientation program was created. CE House Council was established. And for the first time, CE students lived on campus; initially, beds were found for seven.

But a feeling of being invisible to the greater community remained. In May 1981, students wrote articles for the college student newspaper, saying that CE students have "a pervasive sense of isolation" and "feel outside of the mainstream. "While an academic advisor answered questions on coursework and possible majors, there was still no director. The college finally hired Joan Esch in fall 1981, more than a year after Marple had left, but the wait was worth the new title: Dean of Continuing Education. Under Esch's direction, students began participating in the college's week-long resident-advisor training in order to become big sisters to incoming CEs.

Bonnie Leonard '59 replaced Esch as CE dean in September 1983, by which time the program had grown to 130 degree students and 30 post-bacs. Its members continued to be disproportionately high achievers. Of the 23 CEs who were graduated the previous spring, for instance, seven were Wellesley Scholars and four were Durant Scholars.

Leonard sized up the situation and jumped in. First on her agenda was refurbishing the CE House, and for that she turned to both students and the CE alumnae association, which had 256 loyal members. The alumnae had been raising funds for scholarships; they now oversaw the



Bonnie Leonard at CE 20th celebration in 1991

collection of nearly \$7,000 for paint, furniture, and other improvements for the house. Leonard also established a steering committee made up of students, faculty, and administration, which urged the CE community to be "more forthcoming and impose itself, when necessary, on the college machinery."

Financial aid was available to those who qualified, but it was not guaranteed, as it was for traditional-age students.

Room by room, Leonard found campus housing for CEs, although living expenses were not included in their financial aid packages, unlike their younger counterparts. More

colleges were developing programs for returning students, and Leonard met with the administrators of many of those programs to compare notes on recruitment, funding, financial aid, degree requirements, and housing. At her 25th reunion, Leonard's class at Wellesley recognized her new position-and enthusiasm and established the Class of 1959 Memorial Fund for CE Scholarship, raising nearly \$49,000.

In November 1984, the growing call for financial equity was met by the college registrar with a recommendation that the minimum number of Wellesley credits CEs had to earn be raised from eight to 16, to be in line with the rest of the student body. Leonard responded by expressing her concern for the areas where CE students were not given equal treatment: They had only limited access at the Stone Center and were excluded entirely from the golf course, which even MIT students were allowed to use. There was no CE student representation on college committees. "I support the essential idea of the recommendation (for changing degree requirement)," Leonard wrote in a memo to the dean of the college, philosophy professor Maud Chaplin, who was becoming a strong advocate for CE, "but only if College policy with regard to financial aid for CE students is changed, and if conscious efforts are made to address the inequities that exist in other realms of CE student life at Wellesley."

In the early 1980s, Smith College received glowing attention from the national media for its program for returning women, the Ada Comstock Scholars, and the point was not lost on President Nannerl Keohane that the "Ada's" were fully funded and housing was available. She pledged her strong support to Leonard and promised to clarify CE's place at Wellesley.

Eager to be considered Wellesley students in every sense of the word, the CE community responded to Leonard's efforts in ways both symbolic and practical. A student sewed a second banner with the four colors, and CEs proudly waved it at step-singing and other all-school events. A small group of CE students met daily during winter session in January 1986 to write a position paper that addressed the community's concerns in terms of college governance, financial inequities, and support services. In addition to the same financial aid guarantees as traditional-age students, the paper called for the lifting of the requirement of the signature of a parent or husband on an applicant's financial aid form, 12-month housing that included children, childcare, and raising the number of minimum credits from eight to 16. The entire CE community voted in favor of the recommendations.

The position paper was delivered to the administration, which in turn presented it to the trustees in late March, a couple of weeks after CE had celebrated its 15th anniversary with a lunch, speeches, and a play written, directed, and performed by students. Later that year, Wellesley committed to meeting 100 percent of demonstrated financial need for CE students, the hated signature requirement was dropped from the application paperwork, CE was given a spot on student council, and the number of Wellesley credits required for a Wellesley College degree was bumped up to 16.

The other pressing need was a name for the program. An equally dedicated group of students, including some of the same people who had worked on the position paper, spent weeks researching illustrious Wellesley professors and alumnae in order to find suitable names, and presented their findings to the CE community. At the same time, Leonard and Keohane were searching for a major donor who might want to have her name attached to the program.

The CE community continued to step up its presence on campus, getting involved in clubs, sports, and other activities. "Tea with Maud" became a popular tradition. A CE was the student speaker at commencement in 1988, where another tradition was born: Graduating CEs wore ribbons of all four colors presented to them by the alumnae association. The alumnae also continued to distinguish themselves. That fall, a 1975 graduate who had become an archeologist was awarded a MacArthur fellowship.

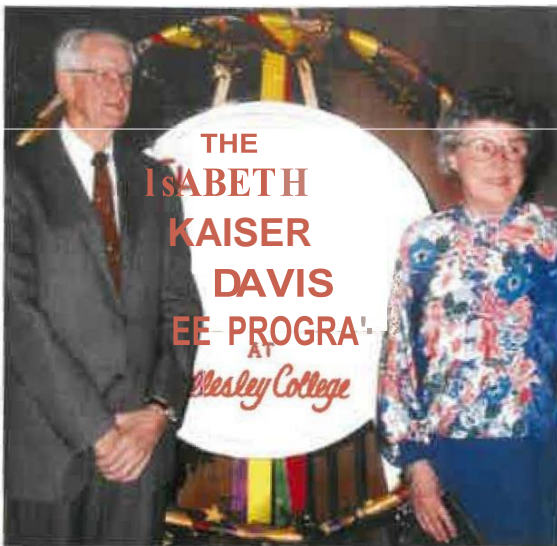
Financial equity achieved, CE students continued to press for the tools to meet the particular needs of their community. A second position paper, written in the fall 1988, addressed issues of housing, parking, and again financial aid; this time for women with dependents. In March 1989, Simpson West, with nine beds, was designated as the new CE dorm. Responding to a college task force on racism, Leonard stepped up her efforts to attract applicants of color, including placing regular ads in the *Bay State Banner* and other appropriate newspapers.



The Continuing Education House at Wellesley College

The 1990s: Welcome, Davis Scholars!

With the advent of financial aid, an increase in the availability of housing, and a push in marketing, the word on the street and in the classrooms of community colleges was that Wellesley offered a supportive program for qualified older women who wanted to continue their education-and it gave financial aid. In 1990, CE saw its largest pool of degree applicants ever, many from out of state or from other countries. Two dozen CE students lived on campus, and CEs continued to excel academically: Of the 32 students receiving diplomas in 1990, 31 were eligible for Latin honors.



Elisabeth Kaiser Davis and her husband Stanton Davis at the naming ceremony, March 1991

In 1991, the program was at last given a name. CE's 20th birthday party that spring was splashier than ever, with a day of panels, speeches-Mary Lefkowitz was the keynote--lunch, and a musical performance. But the big news was the announcement that the Davis Foundation, headed by Elisabeth Kaiser (Lib) Davis '32 and her husband, had donated \$2.5 million to CE, which would now be called the "Elisabeth Kaiser Davis Degree Program at Wellesley College," and its students known as Davis Scholars, or DS.

An article in the April 1992 issue of *Life* magazine about a mother of two on welfare in her first semester at Wellesley, along with subsequent national and local media coverage of the program, boosted applications further, as did an increase in housing. Simpson West was renovated, Homestead was turned into another DS dorm, and Cedar Lodge, offering a 12-month housing, opened on the edge of campus. A number of alumnae have mentioned the expanded housing options as the reason they were able to attend Wellesley.

The student body continued to diversify economically, and again, students came together to support their own. In 1992 a Davis Scholar founded Lifeline, a student-run organization that still today offers food, emergency funds, and services to fellow DS students. A campaign timed to the 25th anniversary was launched to raise money to endow Lifeline, as well as financial aid for Davis Scholars.

Like its predecessors, the DS community left its mark on the college. Among other contributions, Davis Scholars founded a campus Toastmaster's Club, hosted a conference on continuing education, and, after years of fielding a team, won dorm crew. By the end of the decade, 612 students had graduated from Wellesley under what was now short-handed as CE/DS. Among them was a 1994 graduate who was to become commencement speaker in 2006.

The 2000s: The community contracts but continues to thrive

For many reasons, the population of the Davis Scholar program dropped in the first decade of the 2000s. After three heady decades, enrollment in 2002 sank below 100 for the first time since 1974. For the past five years it has hovered between a low of 46 and the current high of 57. Price is a big factor, of course: The cost of higher education has soared, and there are new expenses. Leonard unsuccessfully lobbied the college to include the cost of a computer in the financial aid packages of Davis Scholars, and to give those denied housing aid for their room and board.

But while cost is important, the times have changed, as well. "Current students tend to come with more of their degrees already completed and to move faster through the college once they get here," says Susan Cohen, the director and dean of the Davis Degree Program. "There are many more alternatives, virtual as well as campus-based, for nontraditional students; many of these competing programs are more convenient, more practical and less expensive."

Cohen, an English professor who had worked as a class dean for six years, took over after Leonard retired in 2002, but as director at first, not dean, "Bonnie's enthusiasm about the program and the Davis Scholars was infectious and inspiring," Cohen says. "The collaborative work of the class deans familiarized the rest of us with the particular challenges and connected with nontraditional students. The decision was made to have the three upper-class deans take on the role of advising Davis Scholars." Eventually, this practice was dropped and Cohen was made dean, which she sees as an improvement: "Returning to the model of a single dean and director has been one factor in maintaining the coherence of the program and reinforcing the Davis Scholars' sense of identity and connection."



Susan Cohen, current Director and Dean of Davis Degree Program

Don't be fooled by the numbers, says Maki Kato, one of the current Davis Scholars who helped organize and synthesize the archival records that inform this history. Today, the DS program is less about "continuing education, which suggests a part-time effort with a few courses over time," she says, and feels more like a transfer program. "Many DS students live on campus with traditional-age students and it is important to illustrate the diverse contributions that

Davis Scholar students bring to the college," Kato says. "Their achievements reflect their hard work and dedication in reaching personal educational goals."

Like the women before them, today's Davis Scholars reflect a variety of past experiences. They've come to Wellesley from across the country and across the world, including Brazil, China, Columbia, Japan, Lithuania, Mongolia, and Romania. Their ages range from 21 – traditional-age students with children may now become Davis Scholars – to 57. As always, their educations were interrupted for many reasons, some positive, some negative, and they've earned their livings in many ways, including in the military, running small businesses (such as scuba-diving store, apple orchard, movie theater, bridal boutique), as professional singers and dancers (both ballroom and ballet), and as nannies and in preschools.

The CE House continues to serve as the center of the community; the old traditions carry on. Davis Scholars still attend a separate orientation at the start of their college experience, which gives cohesion to the community, and they celebrate commencement with their own reception and lunch. Weekly brown-bag lunches, the traditional holiday party in December (still known as the best party in town), the annual lunch with the college president, the hoop-rolling breakfast, panel discussions, exhibits, the dean greeting each new graduate as she walks off the stage after receiving her diploma – all continue. Davis Scholars are adding new traditions, of course, including family cookouts on the new gas grill on the deck, and most recently a talent show, the Davis Scholar Encore. A third banner, first used at the November 2010 party that launched the program's latest birthday festivities, cites "40 years of transformation." By all accounts, the DS community continues to be strong, healthy, and a powerful presence on campus.

This brief history and the accompanying archival materials from which it is drawn attempt to tell the story of the first four decades of this program, with the hope that this information will continue to be updated by future writers and researchers. The opportunity to attend Wellesley as a CE/DS student changes lives in rich and unexpected ways. As a survey respondent from the class of 2002 put it, "My experience at Wellesley College opened up a world for me. I have tried to embrace that world, to throw myself into all the new experiences and opportunities I've been afforded. This is what I had hoped for when I decided to return to college, and I haven't been disappointed for even a second. The world is a wonderful, rich, amazing place."