

The late nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic increase in women's attendance at colleges and universities, with their enrollment tripling between 1890 and 1920. The majority attended co-educational institutions. Discrimination in admissions and course offerings and exclusion from the most elite schools, such as Harvard and Yale, led to the popularity of women's-only colleges, including Smith, Mt. Holyoke and Wellesley.

Even among women's colleges, Smith was unusual in the late nineteenth century for the attention it devoted to women's history, economics, and political issues. The school's founder, Sophia Smith conveyed her awareness of the needs and potential of young women. "In such other studies as coming times may develop or demand for the education of women and the progress of the race," Smith wrote, "I would have the education suited to the mental and physical wants of women. It is not my design to render my sex any the less feminine, but to develop as fully as may be the powers of womanhood, and furnish women with the means of usefulness, happiness and honor now withheld from them."

The questions on this portion of the Smith entrance examination attest to the rigorous standards the college established for admission.

For one woman's experience at Smith college at this time, go to JWA's *Women of Valor* exhibit at <http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/weil/>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did students need to know to pass this exam?
2. Does this exam ask students to analyze information or merely to provide factual answers to questions?
3. This was just one portion of the entrance exam. What conclusions can you draw about the range of knowledge incoming students were expected to have?
4. Compare this exam to college admissions requirements today. How do these different standards reflect their respective time periods?