





*“We were not all made from the same mold, but we can learn to benefit from each other’s differences.”*

*—Arthur Bayer, Chair  
Babson Diversity Committee*

# The Quest for Diversity

Annual class photographs of Babson's graduates from 1919 to 1943 reveal some striking differences between yesterday's students and today's. Of the hundreds of seniors posing for the camera in the 24 class photos, all but two—Edith Babson '23 and Ching Hsi Li '34—were white males. Although no records of church affiliations have survived to verify the fact, almost all certainly were Protestant. On average, they were between twenty-two and twenty-three years of age, and, on paper, they were well-educated, most having attended college before coming to Babson.

Nevertheless, there was diversity. Among the marked differences between then and now—and the one that gave the early Institute its greatest claim to diversity—was the wide geographic distribution (within the United States) of its student body. Approximately three-quarters of Babson's pre-World War II students came from outside New England, a statistical marvel that the Institute was

quick to publicize. A student body drawn from all parts of the country, it noted, "makes for a wholesome exchange of ideas [and] . . . a breadth of view and receptiveness to new ideas which are invaluable to the young man who is studying for a business career."

Relatively few foreign students attended the Institute from 1919 to 1943, and most of them were Canadian. The paucity of numbers did not reflect a policy of exclusion. In fact, by its twentieth anniversary, the Institute boasted alumni living not only in Canada and virtually every state in the Union, but also in China, Latin America, and Europe.

There was a pronounced Protestant tone to religious activities on campus. The school chaplain was Protestant, as were the weekly chapel services held in Park Manor. But these features of campus life reflected the Protestant composition of the student body. Appearances notwithstanding, the Institute and its founders displayed a commendable ecumenical spirit. In 1927, for example, Rabbi Stephen S. Weiss of New York delivered the Commencement address to a capacity audience in Knight Auditorium.

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*Left: Students from many countries participated in the college's International Festival in 1990.*



*A 1950s view of the Babson Institute campus, with part of the Wellesley Country Club's golf course in the foreground.*

A sprinkling of Irish and Jewish surnames began to crop up on class rosters during the 1920s, and as the years passed, their numbers grew. At no time in the pre-World War II period did Catholic and Jewish students constitute more than a tiny minority, but their presence and their acceptance by their classmates signaled that there were no invisible walls at Babson barring entry of ethnic and religious minorities.

Not everyone attending Babson in the early years was wealthy. The Institute awarded two fellowships and two full tuition scholarships to qualified residents of Wellesley and Needham; the recipients had to demonstrate need. In addition, the school awarded partial scholarships, which were also based partly on need.

Student loans dated from 1923, when Roger Babson's friend Ernest T. Gundlach established a rotating loan fund, which deferred the tuition payments of "deserving young men of limited financial means, . . . sound character, and high scholastic standing." Over the next eighteen years, the fund dispensed \$127,684 in financial aid to a total of eighty-nine students, which averages out to loans of

\$1,434 each to approximately five students per year, or approximately half of their basic college costs during the 1920s and close to full coverage following the tuition reduction in 1933.

The rotating fund reflected Roger Babson's notion of student aid: grant tuition remittance to deserving students in the form of a loan that they were expected to pay back into a fund that was used to help other students. Essentially, recipients were told, "You're granted an advance on your tuition and we hope that you will pay it back when you're successful." Almost all of them did, and as a result the revolving fund—because of the interest it accrued—actually took in more than it loaned out.

Taken as a whole, loans and scholarships were few in number, but, in a school with relatively tiny enrollments, financial aid did inject an element of socioeconomic diversity into the affluent mainstream. As Henry Kriebel remarked, "You had the very wealthy, but you also had people that were scratching for it."

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distribution and a handful of international students, religious minorities, and recipients of financial aid, the only other elements of diversity in the student body were the half-dozen women who enrolled in the 1920s and a solitary Asian—the aforementioned Ching Hsi Li of China—in the 1930s. Demographically speaking, the Babson Institute, with these few exceptions, remained, at the end of its first twenty-five years, what it had been at the beginning—a rich man's school attended by white male Protestants.

The general absence of diversity notwithstanding, the Babson Institute did not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, or color. Economics, not race or religion, was the major barrier to admission. With the exception of recipients of financial aid, only the wealthy could afford Babson, and affordability was color-blind. Simply put, the cost of a Babson education was far beyond the means of average Americans, whatever their color or religious persuasion.

The close of World War II brought throngs of former GIs—and working-class young men—to the Institute, altering in the process the socioeconomic

and ethnic and religious mix from one that was overwhelmingly affluent and Protestant to one somewhat more reflective of American society as a whole. Still, it was not truly representative. There were no women or people of color when Babson reopened in September 1945; and as late as mid-century, Roger Babson could write with conviction that “Babson Institute is essentially a Protestant Christian educational institution serving without distinction men of all creeds.”

The times were changing and so was the demographic composition of the student body. For one thing, there was a growing international presence on campus, thanks mainly to the flow of students from Latin America, who had replaced Canadians as the dominant international group. In September 1950, Babson Institute began its thirty-first year with an enrollment of twenty-six foreign students, fifteen of whom were Latin Americans.

On April 19, 1955 (Patriots' Day), Dr. Edward Hinckley, Babson's president, hosted a ceremony held in the rotunda of the Newton Library to honor the Institute's growing international community. Students representing six different countries presented their nations' flags as gifts to the Institute. Dr. Hinckley directed that the flags be hung in the foyer of the library, henceforth to be known as the Hall of Flags.

Since 1955, the number of flags has multiplied from six to eighty-eight, and the simple ceremony that marked the dedication of the Hall of Flags has evolved into a college-wide commitment to building a more diverse and international community at Babson.

President Sorenson's master plan set a goal of boosting the international student population to 10 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment. One way to increase the flow was to assure newcomers from other lands that they would receive a warm welcome and helping hand when they arrived on campus.

This was precisely what a small group of international students had in mind when they banded together in 1975 to form the Babson International Student Organization (BISO). According to

spokesman Ricardo Weisz of Venezuela, BISO was meeting a critical need—to help international students through culture shock. All newcomers face a period of adjustment when they arrive at Babson; for foreign students, the experience can be traumatic. “If I had somebody else to show me the way, it would have been much easier,” Weisz said.

BISO was not the first international student organization on campus—some five or six others had preceded it—but it succeeded in achieving permanence because its founders obtained a charter, gained the sponsorship of the student activities office, and secured funding from the student government budget.

The student founders took pains to make clear that they wanted to avoid turning BISO into a separatist organization. “We don’t want to separate international students from the rest of the Babson community,” Weisz said. “We want to bring them closer.” On the whole, BISO has succeeded in fulfilling its goals, but this is not to say there have not

*In 1975, the Babson International Students Organization was established by the students to help them integrate their cultural perspectives into campus life.*



been problems. Some American students complained that BISO violated its promise to bring its members closer to the rest of the Babson by forming instead a tight-knit separatist organization. On at least one occasion, members of BISO responded in kind. Asked their opinion of life on campus, some of them criticized their American classmates for their addiction to television and beer-drinking. Observations like these are common enough, even among the native-born, but, coming from foreign students, they stirred up some petty resentments and a few letters to the student newspaper of the “America, love her or leave her” variety.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. The *Babson Free Press*, in an editorial entitled “On importance of foreign presence on campus,” chided the few who attacked diversity. “We should not look at cultural differences as a way to separate us in our lifestyles,” it said. “We should welcome them as an opportunity to broaden our educational experiences.”

The black experience at Babson in some ways parallels that of international students. Some African-American students who have grown up in all-black communities and who have attended all-black or predominantly black schools also experience a culture shock upon their arrival at Babson. Being a few among the many, they, like foreign students, tend to cluster together on campus.

Surging enrollments at the end of World War II brought only a trickle of students of color to Babson. First to arrive was D.W.K. Chin, a Chinese-American from Hawaii. He graduated in 1951. The following year, Stanley L.C. Wu from Shanghai, China, became the second Chinese national to graduate from Babson. Several other students from Malaya, Thailand, and Japan followed. The first blacks to attend Babson were classmates John H. Dwight and Lafayette K. Morgan from Monrovia, Liberia. They graduated in 1957, one year ahead of Nathaniel Wright, Jr. of Los Angeles, California, Babson’s first African-American student.

As late as October 1964, a student newspaper editorial, “Opening Eyes to Reality,” praised the administration for its open-door policy of admitting students regardless of race, color, or creed, even



as it bemoaned “the lack of Negro students on the Babson campus.” But the 1960s were a period of social ferment and of growing demands for social change, especially on college campuses.

On May 9, 1968, came a defining moment with the publication in the student newspaper of an open letter, addressed to President Kriebel and signed by the president of the student government and the chairman of an ad hoc student committee on racial equality (who was from Eritrea). The authors of the letter demanded in the name of the student government that “the Babson Administration end its racial isolation in admission policy [and] actively . . . recruit and accept a minimum of ten (10) American Negro students for the 1968-1969 academic year.” The need for this quota was critical, the authors insisted, because “too much time has transpired wherein Babson’s Negro population has been incongruously slight.” The letter concluded on a note of optimism: “We feel that the advantages of such an enactment would provide a monumental beneficence to Babson Institute—both as an educational institution and as a conglomeration.”

Despite the overblown prose, the letter made sense and produced results. President Kriebel apologized to the student government for the failure of “our past efforts applied to this effort [that is, recruiting African-Americans], extensive as they have been.” He proposed that students, administrators, and faculty join forces in recruiting a quota of ten qualified African-American students, and pledged that the college would provide the necessary financial support. Meanwhile, pressure on the administration continued to mount. On May 14, Babson’s fourteen African-American students presented a set of “nonnegotiable” demands to the administration, which called for more scholarships for black students, a black student recruitment committee, a meeting room on campus for the black student body, a special orientation program for black freshmen, and an option for them to choose their own roommates.

Nonnegotiable demands were the rage on college campuses in the late 1960s; in this case, however, the demands were moderate and had merit. Generally speaking, the problems or obstacles that other freshmen encountered in adjusting to life at Babson



paled by comparison with what faced inner-city and rural blacks.

Everett Stephens spoke to this point in an article that he wrote for the *Babson Alumni Bulletin*:

*On campus the Babson blacks are a tightly knit subculture banded together for their own common good. And this is important to a black, for the gulf which exists between blacks and whites is not somehow magically eradicated just because blacks get a chance at a Babson education. While Babson had never discriminated on account of race, religion, or color, Babson has remained, like most American colleges, a predominantly white institution. . . .*

*The average Babson graduate expects that for him the American Dream will come true . . . but for the black the American Dream has been a nightmare of frustrations. His culture is radically different, and is looked upon as radically different. . . .*

*The point is that at this stage of our civil rights development, while whites may have understand-*

*ing and compassion, it is impossible for them to understand fully the black. And it is just as impossible for the black to comprehend the white. From the blacks' experience, our culture is not 'unracial'; it is bi-racial—one black, another white.*

Profound changes have taken place in American society since Everett Stephens penned those words a quarter of a century ago. Opportunities undreamed of just a generation ago have opened up to African-Americans. Millions have scaled the socioeconomic ladder, and in the process have vastly expanded the size of the black middle class. Nevertheless, the problems of the black ghetto remain. In fact, they may have grown worse.

Initially, the combination of financial assistance and stepped-up recruitment efforts produced positive results. Black enrollments at Babson climbed steadily in the early 1970s, reaching a high watermark of fifty-five in 1973-1974.

But at this point, black enrollments plunged. The 1978-1979 school year began with only twenty-six black undergraduates and five of these students dropped out during the year. In just six years, Babson's black student population suffered a 62 percent decline. And the downward trend was accelerating. In September 1969, seventeen blacks had entered the freshman class (nearly 8 percent of the class total). A decade later, black enrollments were down to six or seven a year. Put another way, more blacks were leaving through graduation and withdrawal than were entering.

For a school committed to diversity, the free-fall of black enrollments was an embarrassment. It was also perplexing, for it coincided with the commitment on the part of the college to increase the black presence on campus. The Sorenson master plan had taken note of the trend toward greater diversity in America by setting as one of its primary goals an increase in the proportion of minority students, with special emphasis on blacks. But instead of rising, their numbers sank.

The college realized it had a crisis on its hands, and in an effort to reverse the downward trend, the administration appointed a full-time minority recruiter and established the Office of Minority



Affairs (OMA), a resource center whose specific aim was to provide academic and social support for minority students.

Undergraduate Admissions Director Joseph Carver applauded these actions, calling them “self-induced pressure” on the part of the college “to get its minority act together.”

Unfortunately, Babson’s reinvigorated recruitment efforts did not pay off, leading the school to try a variety of experiments aimed at encouraging prospective African-American students to choose Babson. It invited local black high schoolers to spend the weekend on campus so they could experience life at Babson firsthand and learn about opportunities for careers in business. And it followed up by bringing in guidance counselors from high schools with large black populations to tell them about the advantages of a Babson education for minority students. The OMA took the recruitment program one step further when it sponsored a week-long campus visit for fifty African-American high-school students from all over the United States. They were housed on campus, participated in special social and recreation activities, and attended lectures given by Babson professors and black business leaders. In sum, they enjoyed a firsthand encounter with life at Babson that was designed to quicken their interest in business as a career and in Babson as their school of choice. In addition to these special programs, the college today earmarks ten scholarships each year for qualified African-Americans.

Other than the scholarships, none of these outreach programs worked. According to a 1992 survey, Babson’s Diversity Study, blacks comprised only 1.6 percent of the student body, a proportion far below that of their 11 percent total of the U.S. population. By comparison, the same study showed that Asian-American students had increased their total to 3 percent of the student body, which corresponds exactly to their representation in the U.S. population.

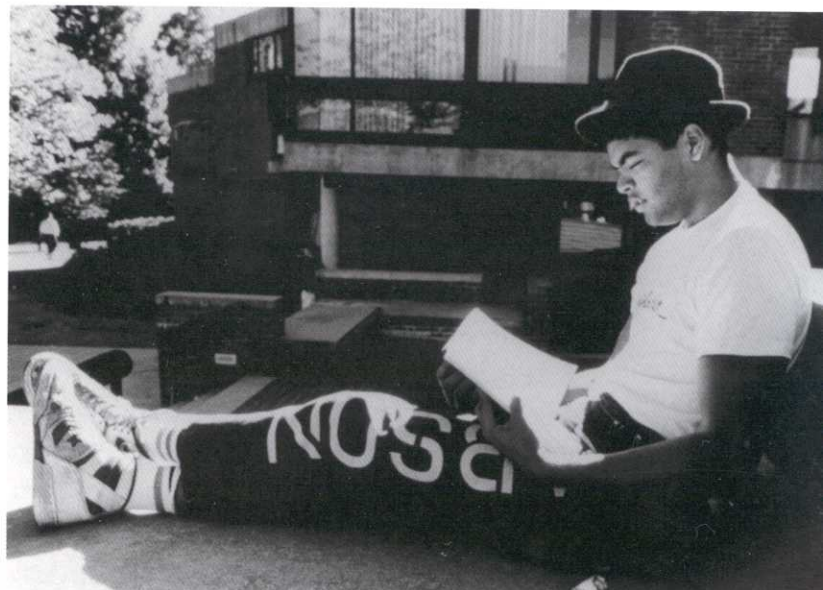
A number of black students spoke of their experiences at Babson in a series of interviews that appeared in the *Babson Bulletin* in the late 1970s.

These interviews shed considerable light on why college-bound African-Americans tended to shy away from Babson College.

The interviewees themselves were a study in diversity, coming as they did from different parts of the country and from different social, economic, and cultural groupings. Just as whites from disparate backgrounds need to adjust to each other, so do African-Americans. “You don’t know where you’ll fit,” one student commented. “I see brothers and sisters from New York, Chicago, Washington, and Baltimore and other places. They have different ideas. . . .”

One common problem that the interviewees encountered was the tendency on the part of their white classmates to think of them in monolithic terms. Some resented being stereotyped; others learned to roll with the punches. “I had some problems with other girls at first,” a coed recalled. “They had this idea that black people were all like the Jeffersons on TV. But I’ve learned to get along. I

*Babson College strives to provide a nurturing environment where students can achieve their highest potential.*



just take it in stride.” For an accounting major from Cape Cod, adjusting to her white classmates presented few problems. “In this school you’ll find most of the kids have hardly been around blacks at all. Now I’ve always gone to school with white kids, so it’s nothing new to me,” she said. But familiarity by no means bred content. A coed from New York, who also had gone through school with whites, found herself unprepared for the college scene that she encountered upon her arrival at Babson. “I was appalled that there weren’t more blacks here, and my freshman year, I tell you, I was miserable,” she said. “I was used to being around whites a lot, but they weren’t used to me. People here are prejudiced for ignorant reasons. They don’t understand that black people aren’t all the same.”

None of those interviewed spoke of overt racism, but, like the New York coed, most complained of racial prejudice born of ignorance. “A lot of [white] kids have preconceived notions, stereotypes about black people,” commented a black senior. “I’ve had to tell them ‘it’s just not like that.’”

One common theme threaded through the interviews was that, in choosing Babson, African-Americans tended to weigh the prospects of racial isolation at an overwhelmingly white college against the prospects of a bright future in business. “A lot of businesses are looking for minorities. Babson’s got a good name and being a minority and graduating from here, they’ve got to think you’re worth looking at,” commented a black sophomore whose part-time job in the Office of Career Counseling afforded him an insider’s view. “From what I’ve seen, every black who has graduated since I’ve been here has landed a good-paying job.”

Adjusting to life at college is seldom problem-free, but for many of Babson’s blacks, being part of a tiny minority at a white college located in an affluent white suburb presents a unique problem—social isolation. It is a problem that lies at the heart of Babson’s failure to recruit appreciable numbers of African-Americans. A number of Babson’s black alumni have complained of feeling ignored during their college years. Aaron Walton, an African-American whose fellow students elected him presi-

dent of the student government, was not one of them; but he could identify with those experiencing a sense of isolation. “I think a lot of black kids feel left out because all the campus social events are white-oriented,” he said. “There just aren’t many activities [for black students] on campus.”

Babson’s first coordinator of minority affairs, Kaidi Bowden, brought to that position a perspective born of experience. A native of Roxbury, she had attended a predominantly white college. “I know it’s tough having no social life, or not being able to find a suitable girl or boy friend,” she said. “Believe me, I know. I had the same kind of problems when I was in school. So I try to keep the kids from focusing on their social problems and concentrate on their academics and the value of what they are getting here.”

According to Bowden, whether or not the student stuck it out to graduation hinged on which one of two considerations—social isolation or the value of a Babson education—predominated. “I don’t

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*The Babson Dance Ensemble rehearses for a performance.*

think any of our black students would deny they are getting a good education," she said. "But on the other hand, living through the college years takes a toll. You have to decide if your education is worth the problems. . . . I think many of the black alumni would say it is."

Babson is not alone in its quest for greater diversity. Competition among colleges and universities to recruit minorities is intense. Wealthier colleges with large endowments have an advantage, because they can earmark larger sums for financial aid. Babson's difficulties selling itself to prospective African-American enrollees are compounded by the fact that it must convince them to choose a suburban white college when they could just as easily enroll in an urban one with a large black student body.

A former minority student recruiter at Babson summed up Babson's failure to attract African-Americans in catch-22 terms: "Here at Babson we are starting with a small group with an aim to enlarge it but cannot because the group is small."

While the failure to attract and retain African-Americans remains the college's most intractable problem in its quest for diversity, the transforma-

tion of Babson into a coed college marks its greatest success.

Sigmund Freud may have thought that he had the last word on the subject of women when he said: "For women, biology is destiny." Roger Babson would have none of that. Though reared at a time when a woman's place was in the home, he was an early and enthusiastic advocate of equal educational and employment opportunities for women. Too often, he asserted, gender was raised as an artificial barrier to stymie the ambitious and intelligent woman. The trend set during World War I of growing numbers of women entering the workplace drew from him this warm endorsement: "Certainly the men of the world were successful for many thousands of years in hoodwinking the women [and] we certainly cannot blame the women for at last asserting their economic independence."

Babson summoned up statistical evidence to support the case for women taking a more active role in the realm of business management and in the management of their own financial affairs. Women, he noted, were the beneficiaries of 80 percent of all life insurance policies and two-thirds of



probated estates. They comprised a majority of bank depositors. In all, they owned more than 40 percent of the nation's wealth. Yet they did not control it. Trust companies and trustees handled most of their money, a fact that, for Roger Babson, argued the case for offering women the same kind of training in the fundamentals of business management and conservation of wealth as the Babson Institute made available to men.

Grace Babson shared her husband's opinions on these matters. She, like him, envisioned that women in the not-too-distant future would establish their presence in the command posts of the business world. Thus, it is not surprising that the Babsons entertained the idea of making the Babson Institute coeducational.

The question took a personal turn in 1922. Their daughter, Edith, was attending Boston University at the time, where she was majoring in geology. Both parents were satisfied that Edith was receiving a fine cultural education, but they were uneasy about its practical applications. Roger Babson described the situation in his autobiography:

*Our daughter was receiving little training [at B.U.] . . . which would fit her for financial responsibilities. Furthermore, we wanted her to be in a position of independence to the extent of being able to care for herself should her husband die prematurely or should anything happen to Mrs. Babson and me. We therefore asked our daughter to study a year at Babson Institute in order that she might learn the difference between working and loafing, and between deeds and mortgages. She at least would then be capable of talking intelligently in years to come with the executors of our estate or with her own attorney. . . . My daughter fell in with the suggestion and consented to spend a year at the Institute.*

While this little family drama was unfolding, the coeducation issue was heating up within the inner councils of the Institute. Other parents were just as anxious as the Babsons to have their daughters enrolled in the Institute's unique program, and they were making their wishes known to the trustees. Now they had precedent on their side. Edith Babson had started classes, thus achieving instant fame as the Institute's first coed. Actually, she was not alone. Another young woman, Dorothy Boal, had enrolled at the same time. Unlike Edith Babson, however, Boal was not listed on the official class roster. Neither was Selma Eversole, who became the third coed, when she enrolled in the three-month finance course later in the year.

Roger Babson seems to have been of two minds on the subject. He clearly favored opening up to women the kind of unique training that the Institute specialized in, which was why he urged his daughter to transfer from Boston University. And years earlier, he had opened up the Institute's extension courses to women. On the other hand, going coed would present certain logistical problems. Roger Babson's plans for the Institute included a new residence hall to house students on campus. A coeducational Babson Institute would eventually necessitate separate dormitories, and at \$200,000 a building, that spelled a lot of money out of pocket. A more immediate concern, it seems, was that, in Roger Babson's mind, commingling the sexes in the

Opposite page: Bich-Ngan Nguyen '90 from Vietnam was a student advisor during orientation week for new students.

Right: Elizabeth McCarthy '78 was the first woman editor-in-chief of the Babson Free Press. She is the daughter of Charles McCarthy '50.



tight quarters of the “business office” in the school building on Washington Street might lend itself more to office romance than to education.

Babson had sounded out the opinions of the trustees on the subject and found them all enthusiastic supporters of coeducation. Roger Babson, however, had reservations. He called a meeting of the board on September 27, 1922, at which he suggested that women students be admitted to the school for instruction only, that they not be assigned office desks, and that they leave the building at the end of the class period. As usual, the trustees endorsed their chairman’s suggestions.

These restrictions applied to the Institute’s two full-time coeds—Edith Babson and Dorothy Boal. Both women fitted in well. They were popular with their classmates, and they proved adept students, finishing their course work in June. However, only Edith Babson was allowed to graduate, thus becoming the Institute’s first alumna. Dorothy Boal, on the other hand, achieved a distinction of a different sort. She was the first and only student in the history of Babson Institute to have completed the one year program without receiving a diploma or graduating.

In 1984, Edith Babson, now Mrs. Mustard, confided to a Founder’s Day audience the reason why she transferred from Boston University to the Babson Institute: “My father wanted me to know the difference between a stock and a bond and to be able to read a balance sheet.” Was it good advice? According to the woman that the *Natick Suburban Press* called “the spicy Mrs. Mustard,” she learned enough about personal finance in her year at the Institute to guarantee that “nobody could put anything over on me.”

Dorothy Boal (later Brierly) also shared her experiences in a 1984 interview with the *Babson Bulletin*. She had been informed at the time of her admission that she would not receive a diploma upon completion of the course. That presented no problem. She held a degree from the Florida State College for Women and was not particularly interested in a diploma. Her reason for coming to Babson was to sharpen her business skills.

After leaving Babson, Mrs. Brierly managed her family’s hotel business, operating a hotel in Chautauqua, New York, during the summer months and another hotel in Winter Haven, Florida, during the



*To educate women in business and financial affairs, Roger and Grace Babson established Webber College in Florida in 1928, naming it in honor of their granddaughter, Camilla Webber. Top: the Grace Knight Babson dormitory. Left: Edith Babson Webber (later Mrs. Mustard) with her son Roger. Right: the entrance to Webber College.*

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It was here, in Florida, that the Babsons built their second college—a women's college modeled after the Babson Institute, named Webber College.

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winter season. On occasion, she would bump into Roger Babson, who wintered in nearby Lake Wales. "I liked to razz him that I wasn't smart enough to get a Babson diploma," Mrs. Brierly recalled.

Evidently the razzing made an impression. In 1931, the Board of Trustees voted to grant a diploma to "Dorothy Boal Brierly as of the date she finished her course at the Institute." She received the diploma in the mail. No letter of explanation accompanied it. It can safely be assumed, however, that Roger Babson had a hand in righting the wrong.

In addition to Babson, Boal, and Eversole, three other women attended the Institute during the 1920s. Mary Ives and Charlotte Reed arrived in 1924. Like Selma Eversole, they took the three-month finance course. The sixth and last woman to enroll in the 1920s was Harriet Ellison, whose father was a friend and business associate of Roger Babson's. Both men convinced Harriet to enroll for a single term in 1926 to acquaint herself with business fundamentals.

But despite the admission of several women on a part-time basis after 1922, coeducation had become a dead letter. An article appearing in the January

1923 issue of the *Babson Institute Alumni Bulletin* tipped the administration's hand. A number of women had expressed interest in attending the Institute, the article reported, "but we cannot give them any encouragement." According to Roger Babson, it was the students who decided the fate of coeducation at the Institute. The decision, he said, was taken only after he and Mrs. Babson had talked the matter over with some of the students "who, strange to say, . . . did not feel at all enthusiastic over the idea."

Out of this setback was born Webber College. The decision having been made by the Institute to bury the issue of coeducation, Mr. and Mrs. Babson fell back on a contingency plan—the creation of a women's college "in which young women could be prepared to properly handle and conserve the responsibilities they will handle."

Roger Babson had bought a large parcel of land consisting of hundreds of acres located in central Florida near Lake Wales, and developed a new community on it, which he christened Babson Park, Florida. It was here, in the heart of Florida's citrus country, that the Babsons built their second college—a women's college modeled after the Babson Institute. Named Webber College in honor of their first grandchild, Camilla Webber (Edith Babson had married Winslow Webber '22 shortly after graduating from the Institute), the college opened on January 9, 1928.

At the time of its creation, Webber College shared with the State College in Tallahassee the honor of being one of the only two women's colleges in the state of Florida. Its curriculum, similar to that of the Babson Institute, provided training in the fundamentals of business and the management and conservation of property. Mrs. Babson, in particular, felt strongly that the practice of wealthy parents bequeathing property to their daughters without having provided them with the know-how for taking care of it was "nothing short of a crime."

The Babsons spoke with pride of their handiwork: "Webber is unique, as it is the only [women's] college in the country where training of such nature can be secured." Another unique feature was its

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The recently drafted [1968]  
master plan called for the  
admission of women to the  
undergraduate program.

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dual residency. Students divided their time between Boston and Florida, spending the fall term attending classes in business management in the Back Bay's Hotel Lenox near Copley Square. They spent their winter and spring terms on campus in Florida, wrestling with the complexities of investments, property management, and secretarial studies (the better, the school said, to get a foot in the door of a company that otherwise might be closed to women seeking a management position).

However intent the founders were in creating a women's college in the image of the Babson Institute, there were marked differences. At Babson, the men went to work promptly after punching the time clock at 8:30 a.m.; at Webber, there was no time clock and the school day began with a morning prayer. At Babson, the conference method of instruction and case studies were favored; at Webber, lectures were standard. At Babson, the men learned how to give dictation; at Webber, the women learned how to take dictation. Finally, Babson men returned to "the office" after lunch; not so the Webber women. In what might be called a concession to climate, Webber students spent their

afternoons outdoors exercising. Lest prospective students be misled into thinking this meant humdrum calisthenics, the school assured applicants that there was "no extra charge for the use of riding horses, the golf course or tennis courts." The *Babson Institute Alumni Bulletin*, perhaps with a touch of envy, saw fit to highlight this feature of the Webber experience. "In Florida," it reported, "every opportunity is given these girls to be out in the healthful sunshine during the greater part of the day and the tan with which they will return [to Boston] will incite the envy of their friends who have had to remain at home."

Local Florida newspapers were more blunt, homing in on the rich-girl angle with eye-catching headlines like "Fees High at Novel Institution," "School Shows Heiresses How To Hold Money," and "Society Girls Babsonized at Exclusive School."

Despite the panning, Webber College survived, but not as a sister institution of the Babson Institute. In 1940, the war in Europe and the national defense buildup in the United States disrupted domestic travel conditions and forced Webber College to abandon its Boston base and to operate year-round in Florida. The move snapped the ties that bound the two schools; and Webber College went its separate way.

During the early years of the Great Depression, a remarkable experiment which included female students took place at Babson Park. Roger Babson had concluded that the government was not responding to the plight of unemployed white-collar workers and professionals who, regardless of gender, needed jobs. Babson, the entrepreneur, spotted in that need an opportunity to snatch profit from the jaws of adversity. The result was the School for Positions, which, like so many other ventures launched by Roger Babson, was one of a kind.

In August 1933, the School for Positions opened its doors. Its purpose: to enable local unemployed professional and white-collar men and women to land jobs in the worst job market in the nation's history.

Among the seventeen men and five women who signed up for the two-month course were graduates



of Harvard, Dartmouth, Tufts, and MIT, and a banker, electrical engineer, plant superintendent, graduate nurse, and sales executive. For the first month, they attended classes during the morning in Park Manor South; they spent afternoons analyzing their individual strengths and weaknesses and researching the job market, with an eye out for the kind of work that might prove interesting.

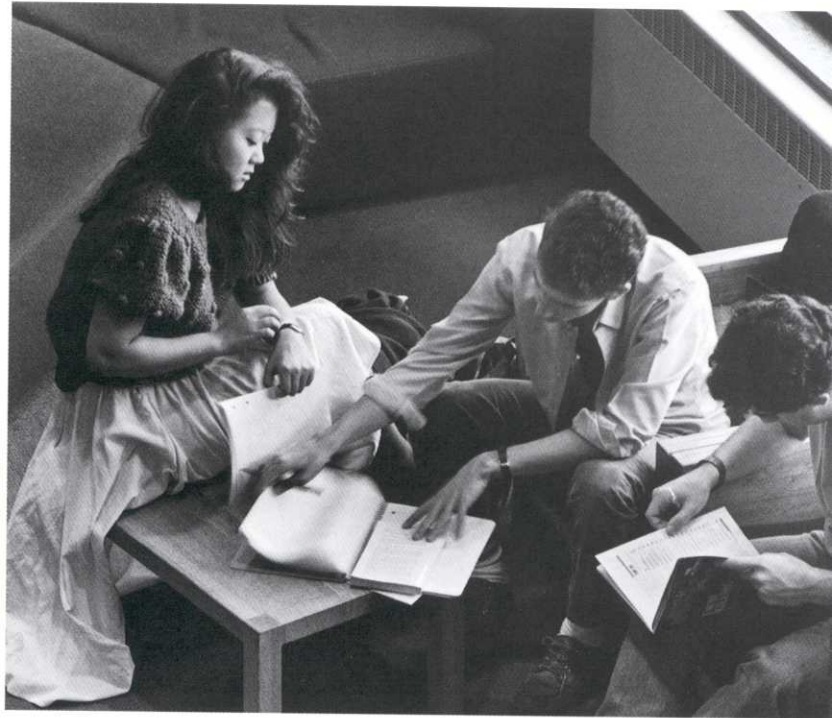
The second month was devoted to job hunting, a formidable task at a time when up to one-third of the nation's work force was unemployed, but one made easier by another great Roger Babson idea—to have each student broadcast daily his or her job qualifications over the Institute's radio station, WBSO. "This," the school proudly boasted, "is probably the first time radio has ever been used to apply for jobs." In the afternoon, the students were out pounding the pavement and knocking on the doors of prospective employers. The following morning, they shared experiences at a "sales meeting."

The fee for the course was \$75, and it carried a guarantee of a \$65 refund to anyone who had not landed a job within sixty days of his or her last radio broadcast. There were few takers for the refund. The course ran for several years, and it ran in the black.

However, the School for Positions did not signify the reemergence of coeducation at Babson, despite the fact that it admitted women. It was a noncredit, nonacademic course fitted to the needs of a special group—unemployed white-collar and professional workers. Another generation would pass before coeducation emerged from its long hibernation.

The awakening came in September 1961, when the graduate evening school opened its doors to male and female M.B.A. candidates. For the first time ever, Babson admitted women to a degree program, albeit several years were to pass before the first woman enrolled. That precedent sent a signal. If a woman could earn an M.B.A. nights, why not days?

Why not, indeed? Carolyn Levosky of Newton took the initiative. She applied to the daytime graduate school for the fall of 1967 and was accepted, thus becoming the first coed on campus since 1926. In an interview, Levosky made it clear that she was



*Although a handful of women attended Babson briefly in the 1920s and '30s, it was not until the late 1960s that the college became fully coeducational. In 1994, women comprised thirty-six percent of the undergraduate students.*

interested in getting an education, not in being first. She had decided on Babson, she said, because of its small size and its reputation for close personal contact between students and faculty.

Asked about her initial impressions, the University of Massachusetts graduate replied: "When I walked into Accounting to pay my bill, the secretary greeted me by saying, 'Oh . . . so you're the one.' Until then, the thought that it was unusual for a girl to attend Babson Institute had never crossed my mind. . . . At first I was a bit shocked, but everyone has been very nice to me."

Carolyn Levosky was not surprised that this was the case. "Very quickly, the other students accepted me and judged me on my merits," she recalled. "Being the only woman was a positive experience."

Upon graduation in June of 1969, Levosky joined Mrs. Mustard and Mrs. Brierly as one of Babson's three alumnae. A year later, Carol Horgan of Chestnut Hill became the first female evening student to receive an M.B.A. She was also the first woman to enroll in the evening graduate program when she began her studies in 1965.



*After World War II, students from Latin America replaced Canadians as the dominant international group.*



*In 1989, Sumalee Kongkatong '91 of Thailand joined in the festivities of Babson's first International Week.*

What was taking place at the graduate level was also in the works for the undergraduate school. The recently drafted master plan called for the admission of women to the undergraduate program, a prospect that disturbed some of the alumni. They wanted to know, "Why and to what extent are women to become part of the Babson scene?"

Dr. Kriebel met the question head-on: "As a graduate myself of an all-male institution, I think I understand the feeling of exclusivism in an all-male college: the 'women are for parties only' attitude that exists on many a male campus. Such an attitude is out of touch with current developments." Women, he noted, were assuming in ever-increasing numbers greater responsibility in the business community, and that trend dictated a shift to coeducation. (Nearly half a century earlier, Roger Babson had made the same observation.)

The first female undergraduates were Sandra Adams and Anne McCormick, who transferred into Babson in September 1968. The previous spring, McCormick, the daughter of a Babson alumnus, interviewed with the admissions office and was told that the school expected to take in more than fifty coeds in September. Thus, it came as quite a shock to her when she showed up for the first day of orientation to find herself the only coed present. "There were a lot of women at first," she recalled, "and then they all left, because they were all mothers and girl friends, and it was just me." Adams joined McCormick shortly afterward, thus increasing the total coed contingent on campus to three, one graduate student (Levosky) and two undergraduates.

McCormick received the same kind of friendly reception as had Carolyn Levosky the previous year. "I never felt the slightest tinge of uncomfortableness or lack of acceptance," she said. "I was an oddity, but I don't think that is the same thing as not being accepted. The professors, particularly, were all great."

The only thing that McCormick thought out-of-the-ordinary was the strong sense of competitiveness that her male classmates exhibited toward her. But that worked to her advantage. "They were very interested in what my grades were at all times," she

recollected. "If we had a situation where . . . blue books . . . were passed back to you, mine was opened and read by everybody who passed it back to me, to see what my grade was. And it had an effect on me of making me a much better student than I'd ever been."

But as far as Anne McCormick was concerned, there was not the slightest sign of resentment:

*I honestly feel that there was never the feeling at Babson, as with many other men's colleges in New England, against having women. I don't think the alums were ever up in arms like the Bowdoin and the Williamses and those colleges. I really don't think that was ever as strong here. . . .*

*One thing I can't stress enough is how accepting the campus was. . . . I ran for student government and won. . . . Student government was a very real thing and there was a serious election and contest and that sort of thing. . . . There was not just a small group that was sponsoring [me]. It was a general overwhelming response.*

Anne McCormick, Sandra Adams, Carolyn Levosky, and Carol Horgan exuded the kind of pioneer spirit that Roger Babson so much admired. So did Ina Mae Harmon of Camden, New Jersey. The second woman to enter the full-time M.B.A. program, she was the first black woman to enroll at Babson and the first to graduate. These first few trailblazers opened up the path to management education for women at Babson College. Others followed, slowly at first and then in ever-increasing numbers.

Adams and McCormick graduated in 1970, a pivotal year in the history of coeducation at Babson, for not only did the college award baccalaureate degrees to women for the first time that year, it also admitted 37 women to its freshman class. Not an impressive number, perhaps, but with 886 males on campus, it posed certain problems that demanded quick solutions—there were no women's organizations on campus, no gym facilities (which meant no athletic programs or gym classes for women), and, most serious of all, no housing accommodations.

Obviously, the college would need to restructure some of its existing facilities and build new ones to meet the needs of its expanding female population. Fortunately, school planners had already taken this into account.

Tuesday, September 8, 1970, was D-Day (Dorm Day). Twenty of the thirty-seven female freshmen occupied the top floor of Park Manor Central. Concerns about their reception were quickly dispelled. "It's great," commented one male neighbor, a few days after D-Day. "Everybody worries now about looking nice. The guys aren't so grubby. As soon as three girls sit down on a blanket, the whole dorm is out there playing football."

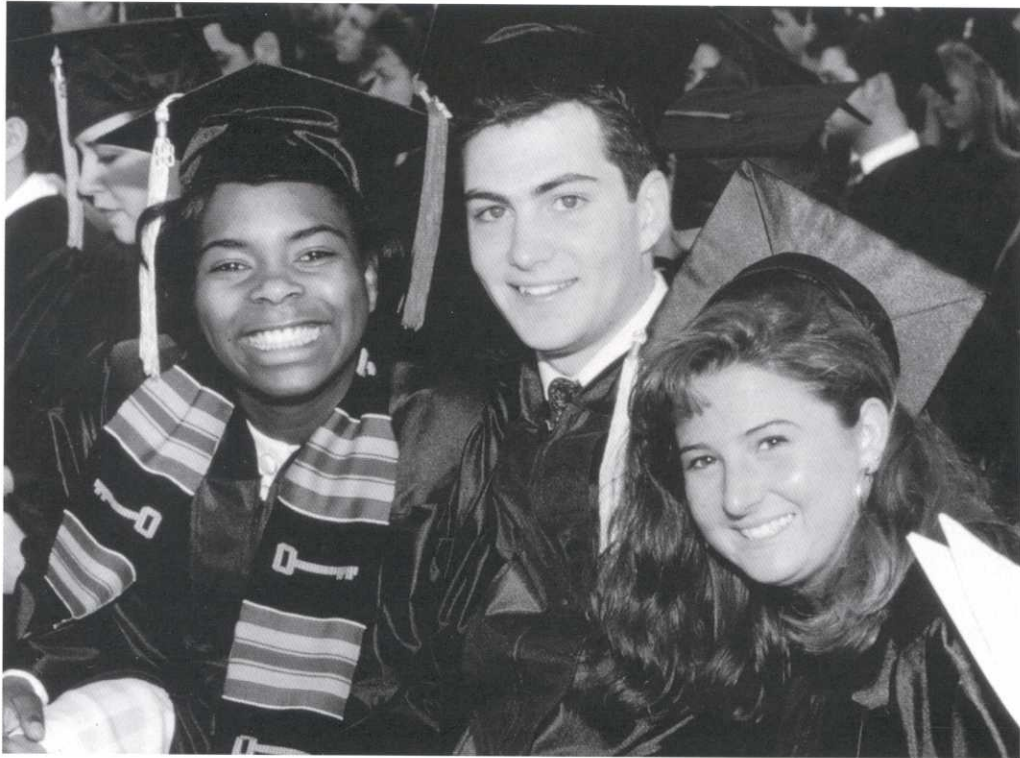
Security rivaled that of a sheik's harem, and a good thing it did. One enterprising male, in a move that anticipated the Watergate burglars by two years, taped the latch of the door to the women's quarters, which was kept locked at night. An alert senior proctor spotted the tape, putting an end to whatever plans the would-be interloper had in mind.

The female freshmen had mixed reactions to all the attention. On the one hand, it was flattering; but on the other, it drove home the point that they were the few among the many. One of them likened the experience to "being thrown into the lions' den."

Still, their tiny numbers bred a sense of solidarity and purpose. "We felt that the way we performed would determine the future of coeducation at Babson," recalled one. "Whenever we were asked to do something on campus, we did it." And they did it exceptionally well, both academically and as leaders on campus. On their way up, Babson's first generation of coeds established a number of firsts. To name a few: first international coed (Dominique Pidou '71); first female class president (Cheryl Williams '73); first female managing editor of the student newspaper (Ellen Monahan '73); and the *Free Press's* first female editor-in-chief (Elizabeth McCarthy '78).

Coeducation was an idea whose time had come. June Cohen '71 chose this as the theme of an article that she wrote for the *Babson Bulletin*:

*The successful introduction of coeds on the Babson campus has been a joint effort by all members of the Babson community. The days of Babson*



*Happy graduates of the class of '93 at Commencement.*

*Institute for men have passed, and the days of Babson College for men and a few women are rapidly coming to an end. As graduation approaches for me, I feel confident that Babson College will develop into a truly coeducational college of management. The coeds now enrolled can be proud of their pioneering efforts, and the administration can be proud of its foresightedness in recognizing that there is a demand for women in the management area. Babson is meeting this demand by providing women with the same fine education that once only men could receive.*

Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since June Cohen penned these words. The passage of time has done nothing to diminish either the accuracy of her observations or the sense of immediacy conveyed by them. The tradition of excellence established during the early years of coeducation has continued. To cite one example, Marci Soreff (Lerner) '86, M '91, set a record that may be tied but will never be broken. She is Babson's only two-time

valedictorian, having ranked first in both her undergraduate and graduate classes.

Seventy-five years have passed since the Babson Institute first proclaimed itself open to young men regardless of race, creed, or color. Changing times have extended the writ of nondiscrimination to cover all members of the Babson community. Today the college stipulates that it does not discriminate "on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation/preference, life-style, age, handicap, and veteran status."

In June 1992, Babson issued its "Statement on Valuing Differences," setting forth the college's policy and goals regarding diversity. Babson, the statement reads, "strives to be a diverse community that values differences and cherishes opportunities to interact across class, racial, gender, ethnic, national, and other lines, in order to enhance creativity, productivity, innovation, and quality of life. . . ."

It would appear from Babson's expanding concept of diversity that the college is engaged in a never-ending process.