

WESTERN COLLEGE

Oxford, Ohio

A Brief History of a Pioneering Institution

Western College began officially in 1853 as the Western Female Seminary, an institution that today would probably be referred to as a “secondary or high school.” The Seminary was founded by citizens of Oxford, Ohio, led by the Rev. Daniel Tenney, pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, and his wife, Mary Adams Parker Tenney, at a time when society did not generally deem the education of women necessary beyond primary school. The first class arrived on campus in the fall of 1855.

The founders wanted to create a residential institution of higher learning for women. They were greatly influenced by the relatively new and very successful Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Its founding principal was Mary Lyon. (There have also been rumors over the years that local Oxford clergy wanted to address the questionable behavior of certain Miami University men by surrounding them with genteel young women!)

The first Western Female Seminary principal, Helen Peabody, was a graduate of Mount Holyoke Seminary. She was also a former teacher there. After accepting the position and moving to Oxford in the summer of 1855, she and Rev. Tenney recruited eight young women to be teachers at the new Seminary, all of whom were recent graduates of Mount Holyoke. Later, Western College strove to have at least two graduates of Mount Holyoke on its faculty roster.

The Holyoke Plan

The Seminary’s philosophy and academic program were based upon “The Holyoke Plan.” Key elements were affordability, a demanding and required curriculum, and the building of community. Costs were to remain low to permit the enrollment of “indigent young ladies of promise.” This was achieved in part by requiring the students to perform domestic tasks.

All Seminary students, and later all Western College students until the early 1970s, were required to live on campus, with members of each of the classes living in each dormitory. The founders and subsequent leaders believed that living and learning together created a supportive environment and the building of a community. Faculty also lived in the dormitories in the early days and ate in the single common dining hall with the students. Attire for dinner for many decades was relatively formal every evening, and even dressier on Sunday noon after chapel services.

During their three Seminary years, all students were required to study “Analysis of the English Language,” Latin, natural philosophy, trigonometry, botany, chemistry, and many other academic subjects. They also took what were termed “extras,” such as music, drawing, French, Greek, reading and calisthenics.

Much of this plan, particularly the non-academic portions, continued throughout the existence of the Western Seminary and almost to the end of Western College.

Women's Education

The Western Female Seminary was founded on the concept that separate education for women allowed for greater growth and maturation by building self-confidence. The students could acquire and pursue increasingly diverse interests and enhance their abilities without competition from men. Course offerings changed as the roles of women in American society evolved, moving from an emphasis on religious training of potential missionaries to preparation for homemaking, and later, as a college, to teacher training, personal development, including physical training, and career development in many fields.

Selection of a Woman as Trustee

In 1887, the Seminary's Board of Trustees named its first female member, Olivia Meily Brice. Mrs. Brice, an 1866 graduate of the Seminary, had been serving as president of the Western Alumnae Association and thus also became the first Western alumna trustee.

Elevation to College Status

In 1888, Leila S. McKee became the second Seminary principal. A Seminary graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wellesley College and Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, Miss McKee had earlier spelled out numerous ideas for expanding the school's academic program. Over several years, she and the trustees organized courses of instruction by departments and took other steps toward becoming a college.

The First Decades of the College

1894 In June, the Western Female Seminary became "The Western: A College and Seminary for Women." Miss McKee became President McKee and one of the youngest college presidents in the country. She was also the first woman to join the Association of Ohio College Presidents.

1895 The College awarded its first B.A. degrees to four students in June. The recipients were Annette Covington, Anna Furry, Jennie Wright, and Jessie Trimble.

Mary Ann Sawyer, an instructor in chemistry and physics, was named Dean of the Western College and Seminary. She became one of the first deans of an American college or university. Lacking guidance on what a "dean" does, Miss Sawyer helped to define this new role. Over her years at Western, she also served as Acting President twice: in 1906-1908 and later in 1912. She was instrumental in the building of what was later named Sawyer Gymnasium.

1902 The first international student, Suzono Yukuyama, came to Western from Tokyo, Japan.

1904 Western became the first American college to offer academic credit for Domestic Science. It also added a Department of Physical Training.

Western College's upper-class students honored the incoming freshmen on the first College Day, and seniors wore their caps and gowns for the first time on Senior Day.

1905 Western celebrated its Golden Jubilee and honored "the Western girl" as missionary, homemaker, and professional woman."

1908 The Ohio Legislature ratified the change of the College's name to "Western College for Women."

1910 Edgar Stillman-Kelley, a well-recognized composer of music and the first resident fellow for creative work at an American college, came to live in a house on the Western campus, becoming the first artist-in-residence at a college in the U.S. His wife, Jessie Gregg Stillman-Kelley, had been hired by the College to be director of piano instruction and later became associate professor of piano.

The college's annual yearbook, *Multifaria*, was introduced by the students. Publication of the *Alumnae Quarterly Bulletin* began.

1912-1916 The College introduced new concepts of majors and minors, semester hours, and a letter grading system. The psychology and education departments worked together to design a new teacher training program.

The Western College Honor Society was formed.

1913 The preparatory division of the College was dropped. From then on, all entering students received college classification.

A "Consciously Christian" Institution Over Time

Both Western Female Seminary and later Western College self-identified over many years as "consciously Christian," although neither was ever affiliated with a particular Christian denomination. By the late 1950s, a more and more religiously diverse student body, including those from non-Western parts of the world, led to decreasing requirements related to Christian religious observances. Sunday chapel and weekday morning chapel services evolved accordingly.

Weekday chapel attendance was initially required four days a week, then three, and then two days. Until 1969-1970, there was a requirement that students attend Sunday morning worship services, but by the early 1970s, the Sunday services had become non-compulsory and quite informal, with attendees sitting on the floor rather than in pews and their attire more and more casual. Also, by 1970, assemblies in Presser Hall had largely replaced weekday morning chapel services. Both before and after the move from weekday chapel to assemblies, the diversity of visiting speakers greatly expanded the students' learning experiences.

The Honor System and Freedom with Responsibility

Helen Peabody, as Principal of the Seminary, initiated the concept of students living by self-enforced rules – an "Honor System." Over the years, these rules evolved as society changed, but until very late in the existence of the College, the overall structure remained much the same during both the Seminary and College periods. Tests, including final examinations, were not proctored. Students were expected to follow all nonacademic rules and to report breaches to elected student officers. This expectation applied to every aspect of common life, including dorm closing hours and the entertainment of visitors. Students aware of broken rules were to discuss the matter with the apparent culprit(s) and to report to student leadership any violations not self-disclosed. The Honor System as a concept survived challenges but remained relatively intact until the end of the

College. However, enforcement was another matter. (For more details of the Honor System's history, see Where the Peonies Bloomed: A Memoir of My Years at Western College by Phyllis Hoyt, longtime Dean of Students and last Vice President.)

In 1970, Western began the implementation of "Freedom with Responsibility," a new approach to campus life. Like the Honor System, it addressed both academic and community living rules and codes of conduct. The faculty, all of whom were to be titled "professor," designed their own "learning units," and the students were free to create their own learning/academic programs with guidance from professors and each student's tutor. The letter grading system, which had succeeded an earlier system based on percentages, was replaced by professors' written evaluations of each student's work in his or her classes. The calendar was divided into four "modules" of differing lengths, one of which was designed to permit students to study or undertake projects off campus for four weeks. The non-academic/community aspects of the new program included the elimination of dorm closing hours, giving the students key cards for the dorms, open visitation, and co-ed dorms after the College opened to male student enrollment. (For more details, see the book by Phyllis Hoyt.) The Honor System was never formally abolished, but by the closing of the College in 1974, it had become increasingly vague and unenforced.

College Governance

Student governance at Western College began in 1907 with the formation of the Student Government League. In 1926, the Western College Government Association (GA) was chartered with a Judicial Board and a Parliament.

Over the years, the College developed a governance system somewhat different from that of the usual American college or university. The GA included students, faculty, and staff, although only students could be elected officers. The Parliament determined policies and rules for campus life and was chaired by the GA vice president. Judiciary sat in judgment regarding serious infractions of the rules and the Honor System, with each member having an equal vote. House councils in each dormitory consisted of representatives of each floor and were presided over by the dorm chairs. Students, faculty, and staff all voted for the student officers. For many decades, the GA constitution was reviewed every five years by students and faculty members, with approval by the Board of Trustees.

In 1970, the College's Board of Trustees changed the GA to the "College Governance Association" and designated it "the source of authority for college affairs." Parliament became the "Community Council" with all groups assigned specific tasks and accountable to the Council. All campus-wide task groups were made up of four students and one professor.

Student Counseling

Development of student counselors was pioneered by Western College, particularly under the leadership of Dean Phyllis Hoyt. For many decades, sophomores served as counselors for freshmen, and seniors for juniors. In later decades, juniors served as Big Sisters for incoming freshmen. During that later period, an incoming junior was elected each year to the unique position of Junior Chairman, a role created to assist Dean Hoyt in managing aspects of the counseling program. The Junior Chairman served as Freshman Class President until the entering class elected one of their own several months after arriving on campus.

Physical Education Highlighted

Physical education was important on the Western campus from its earliest days. The Seminary, under the direction of Principal and later College President Leila McKee, stressed that physical fitness was a necessary element of a good education. Miss McKee wrote, “A model institution should have a distinct department for the culture of the physical nature. A well-furnished intellect and a glowing heart, if connected with a dormant or enfeebled body, can be of little worth.”

Western College and the earlier Seminary were considered “progressive” in their emphases on physical education and their quick adoption of different sports on the campus, typically only 2-4 years after they were introduced in the United States. Playing fields and other structures supporting athletics, including a golf course laid out in 1895, and the Sawyer Swimming Pool and Gymnasium built in 1912-1913, became important and lasting aspects of the campus under Miss McKee’s leadership.

This emphasis changed in the 1930s with the impact of the Great Depression and the advent of the concept of non-competitive athletics that were open to all, not only to those aspiring to achieve expert status.

Milestones in Physical Education at Western

1855 The first organized exercise program was created. Dance and movement were included in the curriculum.

1890-1891 Basketball, tennis, “wheeling” (bicycle riding), and baseball were introduced.

1894 Swedish gymnastics was taught as part of physical education courses.

The Western Athletic Association was formed. The AA was very active through the 1910s and the 1920s.

1896 The first Field Day was held on campus, with the Western Seminary presenting seven basketball teams, ten “wheelers,” and tennis, baseball, and cricket teams. Track and field events were also included. This tradition survived for many decades.

1912-1930s Additional sports included field hockey, swimming, horseback riding, badminton, and bowling. Stables were built in 1934. In 1935, there was a mysterious disappearance of the horses, but the program started again shortly thereafter.

Post-1930s Athletic programs continued, but were less central to the mission of Western. The only major investment in athletic facilities during this period was a rejuvenation of the golf course in 1953.

More “Firsts” and One “Last”

1917-1918 During World War I, Western students planted “war gardens.” Eight Western “farmerettes” worked 40-hour weeks one summer on the College’s 420 acres.

1925 Western was one of the first American colleges to offer training in modern dance.

1931 Western's weekly student newspaper, *Round-Up*, began publication, as did *Scope*, a student literary publication featuring fiction, essays, and poetry.

1932-1938 The College first conferred Latin honors upon members of the graduating class and began the requirement that seniors pass comprehensive examinations in their majors in order to graduate. Western began to apply credits in Music toward a B.A. degree.

1933 In response to requests from Western alumnae, the Board of Trustees agreed to the first election of Western alumnae as trustees for three-year terms each. Later, a third alumna was added. Alumnae trustees included those elected to permanent membership by the Board of Trustees itself and those elected directly by the alumnae for set terms.

1937-1938 An Alumnae Office was established on campus. The first Alumnae Council was held in 1938.

1939 The College admitted a German refugee student.

During World War II, Western students once again raised food crops, this time naming them "Victory Gardens." They also received instruction in Morse code and worked with churches and other organizations in Oxford, such as the Red Cross and the local branch of AAUW in their war-related activities.

1942-1945 The College established a Department of Theatre and a major in theatre. Puppetry was offered through the English Department. New faculty members, William and Ruth Duncan, directed the theatre program and also brought their nationally recognized Tatterman Marionettes and radio broadcasting skills to these endeavors.

1945 The College celebrated the formal opening of its radio studio. Western became the first women's college to broadcast every weekday over a commercial station, Hamilton's WMOH. These broadcasts included interviews by students of many nationally and internationally known visitors to the campus.

1955 The College admitted its first African-American student.

1960 The College invited, for the first time, several rising seniors to "read for honors" in their major subjects. Each of these students was required to prepare an honors project. Those participating asked a faculty member to oversee and then evaluate their research and their final project/paper.

1971 The College's Board of Trustees voted to admit men as students beginning in January 1972. Starting in the 1960's, men had been able to take classes but were not then eligible for degrees.

1974 The College held its last Commencement at which the speaker was Trustee Martha McKee Keehn, class of 1943.

Special Events and Traditions

Many Western College traditions began early. One of the earliest was **Tree Day** each spring, which was introduced to the campus by President McKee from her time at Wellesley College and

first celebrated at the Western Seminary in 1890. In later years, each freshman class planted a tree-on-Tree Day with a shovel adorned with its class colors.

College Day evolved into a day to officially welcome members of that academic year's freshman class. Freshmen wore pinned ribbons reflecting their newly chosen class colors, consisting of one of the two colors of their sister class (the juniors) and one of their own. Selection of those colors and the design and unveiling of class flags became important milestones beginning in 1929. The design of each class flag, using their class colors, was a closely guarded secret until revealed with much ceremony on **Flag Day** the following spring.

Each class, during junior year, selected its "garb" – a dress or a suit in the class colors that would be worn when ushering in chapel or otherwise performing official duties.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the senior class presented a play each year. Later, there were annual "senior stunts" as well as international student shows.

Another favorite yearly event was **Dad's Weekend** when the students' fathers were invited to visit the campus and participate in special activities, often including a parade. This later became **Parents' Weekend**. Other traditions/activities included **Senior Howl**, which involved the use of the **Beechwoods** or some other spot for a special picnic, and, later, seniors traveling off campus for an unsupervised weekend. Still later, a formal **Senior Reception** was added to the calendar.

Campus Activities in the College's Later Decades

College Choir The Western College Choir was for many years a participant in chapel services on campus and also a messenger to the outside world. It attracted many visitors to Western's annual Christmas Vespers. In the 1950s and 1960s, the choir sang with the men's choruses of Wabash College and Kenyon College to present concerts in Oxford, Wabash, and Gambier.

Theatre Productions Beginning in the early 1900s under the leadership of Gertrude Leonard, the College developed a reputation for excellent dramatic productions of many varieties. These included, in later years, medieval religious cycles, Shakespeare, and elaborate musicals. All students, not just theatre majors, were encouraged to audition for parts. Men's roles were often filled by Miami University students or other members of the Oxford community. Most productions were staged in Leonard Theatre, although Ernst Nature Theatre and other outdoor locales on campus were also utilized. In the mid-1900s, these productions were directed by William I. Duncan and then by Alfred (Al) R. Sugg, with scenery crafted or identified outdoors for both directors by Edgar (Ed) H. Chapman.

Publications Throughout its later years, Western students continued to produce several publications each year. These included the College newspaper, *Round-Up*; *Multifaria*, the annual yearbook compiled by juniors in honor of graduating seniors; and *Scope*, the periodic literary magazine.

Radio Throughout the later decades, Western students continued to produce radio broadcasts five days a week, supplying both the technical staff and the on-air participants.

Religious Organizations Several campus organizations brought a religious perspective to their work. These included the branch of the YWCA, the Religion-in-Life Program Council, and the Campus Benevolences Committee.

The Setting: Stone Bridges, Lampposts, Buildings and Grounds

The many stone bridges and lampposts on the Western campus were constructed between 1922 and the early 1930s by Cephas Ashler Burns, an Oxford native and the son of the first African-American elected to the Oxford Village Council. Mr. Burns went to local public schools and learned the stonemason trade from his father. He collected the cannonball stones used for the bridges and lampposts from local creeks, designed the structures, and, with his African-American crew, built them. Mr. Burns also did the stonework on several Western buildings and others at Miami University.

Peabody Hall, named for the Western Female Seminary's first principal, Helen Peabody, is the third building to stand on its present site. Two earlier structures burned in 1869 and 1871. The walls of the second remained and were used for the present structure. For many years, Peabody Hall served as a classroom building, dormitory, and dining hall for all students, faculty, and staff. Over the years, it housed the College's first chapel and its administrative offices, science laboratories, theatre, and a pre-school, with the upper floors always remaining a student dormitory.

In 1944, the theatre in Peabody Hall, after being redecorated and modernized, was named **Leonard Theatre**. The name honored Gertrude Leonard, a Western graduate who, from 1910-1947, taught Greek, English and public speaking at the college and directed many student theatre productions. In the words of Narka Nelson, "She had the good producer's talent for choosing the right person for the right part and was able to surmount every obstacle, including that of casting girls in men's parts in plays that were not intended to be comedies." (Narka Nelson, The Western College for Women 1853-1953, Western College, 1954, pg. 139)

In 1889, construction began on **Alumnae Hall** which initially housed the college library, science laboratories and an art gallery. It was dedicated in 1892. Later, it became a classroom and faculty office building primarily for the English, foreign language and social science departments.

Patterson Place was built in 1898 as the summer home of James Patterson, a friend of the College who donated a portion of his adjacent property for the site of McKee Hall. In 1914, the house and its grounds were gifted to the College by his heirs and served as the residence for its presidents.

McKee Hall, a second dormitory, was added in 1904. It was named for Principal and later President Leila McKee, a graduate of the Western Seminary, and also for her father who was a trustee and a college friend. The building later housed the philosophy and religion departmental offices.

Sawyer Gymnasium was constructed in 1912-1913. It was named for Mary Alma Sawyer who had served the Seminary and the College for many years as instructor and dean, and also acting president. It included a swimming pool, the first such facility in Oxford.

Construction of **Kumler Memorial Chapel** began in 1916. Its design was based on a church in a small village in Normandy, France. It was built with native Ohio stone. The chapel and its windows were made possible by donations from Ann Kumler Wight and Ella Kumler McKelvy.

They were the granddaughters of Elias Kumler, a very early donor to the Western Seminary, and the daughters of Jeremiah Prophet Elias Kumler, a member and president of the Seminary's Board of Trustees for many years, and his wife Anna E Kumler, a Seminary graduate. Dedicated in 1918, the chapel has stained glass windows that feature women prominent in Biblical stories.

Hillside, a structure initially designated to be temporary, was constructed next to the gymnasium in 1919 to meet the housing needs of an expanding student population. Over time, it was reconfigured from a student dormitory into a student infirmary and faculty apartments. Eventually, it gave way to an on-campus power station.

Ernst Nature Theatre was formally opened in 1924. It was named for donor Richard P. Ernst, a former U.S. Senator and longtime Western College Trustee. This outdoor facility was designed by the Olmsted Brothers Architectural Firm which had been established in 1898 by sons of Frederick Law Olmsted to carry on his earlier work for which he had become known as the "father of American landscape design."

The Heath Chime is a set of eleven bells donated by Elizabeth McCullough Heath in 1924. It is now housed in the Molyneux Western Tower on the Miami University campus.

Mary Lyon Hall, named for the founder of Mount Holyoke Seminary, was completed in 1925 and served as a dormitory, the site of the Home Economics Department, and additional classroom space until the closing of the College. It was demolished in 2020.

The Lodge was completed in 1926 as a gift from Colonel A.E. Humphrey, a Western College trustee from 1925-1927. It became the headquarters of Western's branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) as well as a favorite place for students to relax on campus.

Presser Hall was completed in 1931. It was funded by the Theodore Presser Foundation and housed the College's music and theatre departments as well as the College's radio station and a large assembly hall.

Clawson Hall was opened in 1946 and named for Edith Clawson, an alumna whose substantial bequest enabled its construction. In addition to providing dormitory facilities, Clawson Hall was the site over the years of several dining facilities, the last of which, **Alexander Dining Hall**, was built in 1970 as an attached structure. It was razed in 2019.

Boyd Hall was built in 1947. Originally called Science Hall, it was later renamed for Western President William W. Boyd. It served as the center of science and math instruction for many decades.

Thomson Hall opened as a new dormitory in 1963. Initially known as New Dorm, it was renamed in 1970 for Mary Dabney Thomson, the College's seventh president and later a trustee.

Hoyt Hall was erected as the new College library in 1970-1971 and named for Phyllis Hoyt, Western College Dean of Students, faculty member for many years, and later vice president.

In 1970, Western College was listed on the **National Register of Historic Places** in recognition of its diverse architecture and early emphasis on landscaping.

An International/Intercultural Emphasis

The first “foreign student” from American soil, the daughter of Native American and French parents, arrived in Oxford from the Dakota Territories in the 1850s. As early as the 1920s and 1930s, student assistants from France and Chile worked in the College’s Romance Language departments, and students came from China, India, Germany, Uganda and the Philippines.

Throughout American involvement in World War II, Mary Moore Dabney Thompson served as Western College president. During her tenure, a tentative plan of a new curriculum entitled “A Liberal Arts College in World Crisis” was created by Western faculty for implementation after the war ended. The plan included a potential major in World Cultures. After stepping down from the presidency in 1945, Mrs. Thompson continued as a member of the College’s Board of Trustees until 1953. She was replaced as president by Philip E. Henderson, a longtime College business manager and then vice president. Mr. Henderson encouraged the enrollment of more international students and, inter alia, agreed to serve as an administrative assistant for a group of American students going to the University of Oslo’s summer session in 1948.

During the immediate post-WW II period, 15-20 international students enrolled each year, a process assisted by targeted scholarships and by the College’s cooperation with the Institute of International Education. The College selected, for the first time, an administrator to serve as an advisor specifically to and for foreign students. Two Western students each year from families then residents in the United States after being “displaced” from their native countries, were awarded financial support by the national YWCA.

In the early 1950s, the College faculty and the Board of Trustees devoted considerable attention to the upcoming celebration of Western’s centennial in 1953-1954. Two faculty members, Beatrice Brooks and Western alumna Ruth Oliver Duncan, became members of the committee established by the Trustees to formulate a plan for the future. On Commencement Day in 1953, the College announced that it intended to develop a “broad program of international education” to begin in the fall of 1954. The College would be seeking new faculty who could bring a personal international background and/or relevant professional experience to their courses. There were also plans to encourage even more applications from students from abroad. The Board of Trustees stated: “We believe that this new international and intercultural emphasis will best enable us to fulfill our educational mission and our responsibility to the society of our day.”

As part of their exploration and planning for this new campus-wide emphasis, the Board of Trustees and Western faculty had sought insight from organizations and individuals with experience in international and intercultural education. One of those individuals was Herrick Black Young, who had become a frequent visitor on the Western campus starting at least twelve years earlier. He had recently been invited to join the Western College Board of Trustees. In 1953, Dr. Young was serving as executive director of the International House Association, having earlier spent ten years in Iran as a missionary and professor at Alborz College in Teheran followed by fifteen years as executive secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. He was inaugurated President of Western College in January, 1954, following the unexpected resignation the previous June of Western’s then president, Dr. Edmund H. Kase, Jr.

Western’s intercultural program was based on a four-year cycle of emphases on the Far East (later termed East Asia), Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Each year a visiting scholar

representing that year's area of emphasis taught a class specifically focused on that area, in addition to other courses related to his or her own academic specialty. Other scholars and notables from the area were brought to campus to speak to the entire community at assemblies and to meet with faculty and students in more informal settings. Each spring there was an Area Conference open to everyone on campus and to visitors. Films featuring the year's area of emphasis were shown at campus-wide events and works of art might be on display. And each year Western's international students from all parts of the world staged beautiful and lively performances of dances and songs from their home countries.

A year-long academic course entitled "Intercultural Studies" (often referred to as "ICS") was soon required for all Western students, no matter their major fields of study. This course was created and led for many years by Prof. Thomas A. Bisson.

All students were also welcome to join the annual summer travel seminar to that year's area of emphasis. For the first twelve years, these seminars were led by President Young personally. Later, faculty members Gail James and Fred G. Sturm assumed in turn the role of summer seminar leader. Each of these seminars featured stops in numerous countries in the area which had been studied that academic year, and meetings with political and social leaders including presidents, foreign ministers, educators and other persons often already known by Dr. Young. The trips also included visits to natural areas and wonders such as Victoria Falls and the Taj Mahal. On occasion, arrangements were made for home visits, such as those experienced by Africa Seminar participants in 1958 in South Africa, and in what was then known as Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Special seminar events also included, for example, a group visit in 1958 to the home of The Mahdi in Khartou, Sudan, to allow him to decide whether Western College would be suitable for his granddaughter to attend. Apparently, the Western students on that seminar passed the test as Sarah el Mahdi arrived on campus that fall.

The Final Decades: Civil Rights and Racial Equity

In the U.S., the 1960's was a time of upheaval. The Western College community was affected both by reactions to the country's involvement in Vietnam and, more directly, by the growing civil rights movement.

In May, 1964, President Young was asked by a fellow college president and by the National Council of Churches' Commission on Race and Religion, on behalf of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFU) in Mississippi, to consider hosting an orientation program for college students and other volunteers being recruited by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to go to that state for the summer. The plan was for them to conduct voter registration drives in Black communities and to staff summer programs ("Freedom Schools") for Black children in towns and rural areas, especially in and around Philadelphia, Mississippi. After consultation with his cabinet, which included the two College deans, Isabel Abbott and Phyllis Hoyt, and the College's long time business manager and vice president for business and financial affairs, Willard Keebler, and after discussions with the Board of Trustees, COFU and SNCC were given the green light.

That summer a total of approximately 1000 volunteers from all over the country went to Mississippi for this project, including the 300 who attended the first two-week training session at Western in June. On Saturday, June 12, three days before that first group was to leave by bus for

Mississippi, two trainers, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney, and a volunteer Andrew Goodman, drove from the campus to the Meridian, MS, area to prepare for the arrival of the first volunteer contingent early the next week. The day after their arrival in Mississippi, the three men drove into Meridian to look into news of a church burning. They were detained by local law enforcement personnel and released. Later that day, they disappeared. By Sunday evening, word of their unexplained absence had reached the group leaders on the Western campus. The volunteers who were to leave for Mississippi the following Tuesday were told to consider their individual reactions to what had just happened at their intended destination. They were also urged to call their parents for advice as to whether they should go south in two days. Dean Phyllis Hoyt later wrote and spoke about watching the students walking around campus, alone or in groups trying to decide whether or not to go through with it. Dean Hoyt also remembered watching the students board the buses on Tuesday, June 15. In the end, no one in the group had backed out! The violent deaths of the three missing men were confirmed later that summer.

Various groups and individuals in Oxford, including Western faculty, supported the volunteers in Mississippi throughout the summer of 1964. A decade and a half later, several donors, including Miami University and the Oxford NAACP, constructed a memorial to Freedom Summer and to the three men slain in Mississippi, adjacent to Kumler Chapel on the Western College campus. Miami University, with assistance from the Western College Alumnae Association (WCAA), has on two occasions hosted reunions on campus of persons who were volunteers with the 1964 Mississippi project.

In 1965, beginning on March 7, there were large, but initially unsuccessful attempts to march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in support of Black voting rights. These marches were led by the Rev. Hosea Williams of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and by John Lewis, then age 25, representing SNCC. Teach-ins on the Western College campus had generated support from the college community, and funds were raised to meet the expenses of students who had been elected to represent Western on such a march. On March 21-25 five Western College students participated in the finally successful historic march to Montgomery.

The Closing of the College and Its Aftermath

By June 1973, it had become clear to the Western College Board of Trustees that, given its financial situation, the College could not continue to exist. The official closing date would be July 1, 1974. Its faculty, staff and students were thus assured one more year of classes and campus life.

Western students first learned of the closing through the media and were then informed in a letter dated June 19, 1973, by Phyllis Hoyt, Dean of Students, that the officers of the College had explored every possible alternative to closing. Dean Hoyt understood the students' acute "disappointment, anxiety, and despair." She acknowledged the turmoil and disruption that the closing would cause in their academic and personal lives. However, she shared her "hope for new and interesting possibilities and opportunities as a special college, in the British and American tradition, of a large university." A group of students also sent a letter to the returning and incoming students encouraging them to arrive on campus in the fall for the last year to keep alive the separate identity of The Western College.

Prior to the closing of the College, Miami University had agreed to pay off a sizable Western College bank loan debt in exchange for all of the College's physical property except artwork and

artifacts specifically associated with the College and its traditions. When Western closed, some students transferred to Miami to continue their undergraduate studies. Miami employed a few Western academic officers and faculty as well as all of the maintenance staff. The rest of the faculty and students sought alternative solutions to the dilemma they faced. In 1974, Miami's School of Interdisciplinary Studies known as The Western College Program was planned and developed as a separate division of the University. That program has undergone transformations but the history and spirit of Western College remain guiding principles.

The Western College Alumnae Association (WCAA) was registered in the state of Ohio in 1974 as an independent, non-profit association which has actively worked to keep alive the mission of the College for five decades. Miami University has supported the WCAA, including providing staff and office space for the Association at Patterson Place. In return, the WCAA has raised considerable funds for the University, especially for many scholarships offered to Miami students, and for the support of new and/or continuing academic and extracurricular programs at the University that reflect the values of the College.

On July 1, 2024, following the 50th reunion of the last Western College graduating class, the WCAA will dissolve legally and cease to exist as a formal association. But memories and the work of both the College and the Association will live on in numerous scholarships and other programs now part of Miami University, pursuant to articulation agreements entered into by the Association with the Miami University Foundation in 2011 and with Miami University in 2016. A Western College affinity group, "Western College Spirit, 1892-1977," has been formed in association with the Miami University Alumni Association to provide Western alumnae with a vehicle for continued involvement.