

## THE STORY OF RIVIER'S LEGACY CONTINUES

Jennifer J. Liskow'02G\*  
(From: *Rivier Today*, Spring 2009)

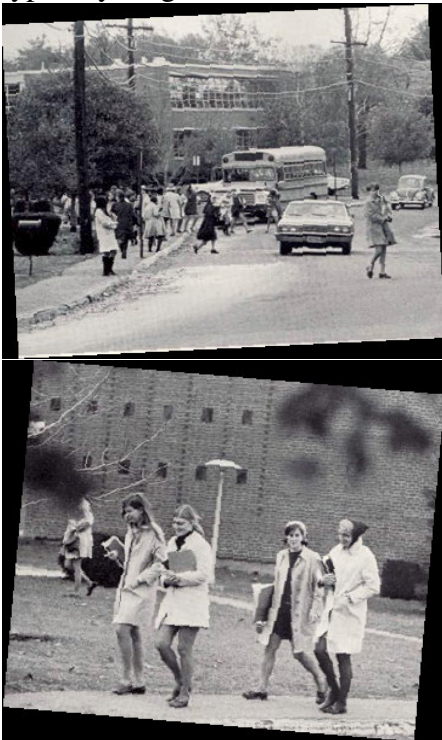
*Editor's note*: This is the second half of a two-part series exploring Rivier's history and heritage. The first half, printed in the previous issue of *Rivier Today*, is available online on the College's 75th anniversary website at [www.rivier.edu/anniversary/75](http://www.rivier.edu/anniversary/75).



When the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary established Rivier College in 1933, they focused on educating a group of students who didn't readily have access to higher education. Almost 40 years later, they began serving a group facing a different set of obstacles: Federal Aviation Administration employees who worked rotating shifts. The partnership with the FAA signaled that the College had taken on a new role within the greater Nashua community.

In 1967, FAA Chief of Personnel Carl Amelio and Rivier President Sr. Clarice Dion, p.m. started discussing a program for FAA employees that would allow them to earn degrees while working around unpredictable schedules. “Some of us might work seven midnights in a row then have two or three days off then start again on days,” explains Joe Wozniak '76, who worked as an electronics technician. Many of the FAA's 600 employees worked rotating launches, including air traffic controllers, radio and radar technicians and others.

To solve the problem, Sr. Clarice devised a unique system. If a certain number of students missed an evening class due to work schedules, the instructor would repeat the class the following day. The lectures, discussions and exams mirrored the previous evening's class as closely as possible. “We repeated classes all the time,” says Sr. Arlene Callahan, p.m. '67, who taught history to the FAA students. “The only way we could tap into them and get them into college was to guarantee they could go at night or during the day,” she says. Classes often had 30 or 40 students—more than Rivier faculty typically taught at once.



The system worked. “We all profited from it,” says Ray Patchen '76. “We wanted the education. I went year-round, summer and all, and finished my degree in three years,” he says. He and Wozniak both emphasize that evening students had to meet the same degree requirements as day students. “There was no easy way,” Patchen says. “I had the same program that the young ladies had during the day.”

FAA students did, however, earn transfer credit for courses they had taken at the Federal Aviation Academy. “Sister Clarice was really ahead of her time in what she did at Rivier,” says Wozniak. Through the partnership with Rivier, 130 FAA employees earned undergraduate degrees; another 10 earned master's degrees.

“These men wanted to be here, wanted to get a degree,” says Sr. Arlene. “This College really tried to adapt methodology to their needs—that's what made the program so special.” Sr. Clarice realized that many of the adaptations Rivier had made could work for others interested in earning degrees while working full-time. The Undergraduate Evening School offered non-traditional students access to a college education.

### New Programs, New Partnerships

The College didn't limit its outreach to undergraduate evening students alone during this time. Rivier had long offered business programs and graduate degrees in several disciplines; in fall 1974, the College established an M.B.A. program. The program focused on providing a sound overview of management, including courses in finance, marketing, policy formulation and organizational behavior. Under Dr. George Shagory's leadership, the M.B.A. program grew from fewer than 50 students to more than 300 in just 4 years. Again, Rivier had clearly found—and filled—a void in the region.

In 1982, Carl Amelio saw another opportunity for Rivier to collaborate with a Nashua institution to benefit the community. Launched in 1983, the Rivier-St. Joseph School of Nursing drew on the strengths of both organizations, combining classroom and clinical experiences to create better-trained

nurses. The joint venture grew rapidly over the next decade. By 1993, the school had added three new programs: a part-time associate degree, a baccalaureate degree, and a master's degree.

As the College's academic offerings and student body grew, so did Rivier's Athletics Department. Joanne Merrill began working at Rivier in 1980. "It was the first time the College had specifically hired an athletic director with the intent to develop the program," she says. While Rivier had field hockey and women's basketball teams that played against other schools and had some intramural sports, athletics wasn't a large part of the College culture. When Merrill started, the gym was in the space now occupied by Rivier's art studio. "It was above classrooms—we couldn't practice weekdays between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. because it was too noisy," she recalls.



The Muldoon Health and Fitness Center offered the Raiders a place to practice without fear of interrupting classes. When the gym was completed in 1984, Rivier discontinued field hockey and added volleyball and softball teams. Merrill was the only full-time person in the department—all the coaches worked part-time.

That changed when the undergraduate day school began admitting men in 1991. Jim Domoracki joined the athletics staff as Assistant Director of Athletics. Rivier added more new teams over the next three years: women's cross-country and soccer and men's basketball, cross-country, soccer and volleyball. The expansion was a part of a plan to increase enrollment—for both male and female students.

### **A Co-educational Day School**

While enrollment was a factor in the decision to become a co-educational school, there were other convincing arguments, says Lynn Jansky, Vice President for Student Development. "One argument was that Nashua needed a Catholic college to prepare both men and women to take on leadership roles in the church," she says. Rivier's graduate and evening schools were co-ed; when too few women registered for a day class, students were placed in evening classes. "When we talked about being a women's college, we had a lot of explaining to do," Jansky says.

The College also had a lot of explaining to do to resident students. "They were losing something that was important to them," Jansky says. Many had difficulty letting go of Rivier's identity as a women's school when they had chosen the College for that reason. She and a group of female faculty members met with students to discuss how they felt and help them adjust. Some alumni were initially displeased as well, Jansky says. Others supported the decision as best for the long-term health of the College.

Although the first class of male students included less than ten men with only seven living on campus, the College had to make changes to the residence halls. Housing accommodations for men and women had to be equal to comply with the law. Men lived in one wing on the first floor of Guild Hall, while Sisters occupied part of the other wing. Plenty of men wanted to come to Rivier—their numbers grew steadily in the following years.

### **Worldwide Connections**

Another new population of students began appearing on campus in the early 1990s. Students from China, Japan, and Korea began enrolling in both undergraduate and graduate programs. In 1994, Sr.

Jeanne Perreault signed an articulation agreement with Ake no Hoshi Junior Women's College in Japan, allowing students to transfer into Rivier as juniors in the psychology and liberal studies degree programs. Sr. Jeanne also formalized a sister college relationship with Ken Mei Junior College, run by the Sister of the Presentation of Mary in Japan.

Ansong County, a Korean city, became Nashua's sister city in 1988. In 1994, Ansong County made a gift to Rivier to support the College's kindergarten program. The College also received a gift from Dongduck University for Women in Korea. Nashua businessman In Kyong Chung had helped forge a relationship between the two institutions. Rivier's computer science program attracted many students from China as well. Rivier's student body became more diverse, representing many different cultures.

### **Being a Good Neighbor**

While the College reached out to people and groups across the world, it remained committed to being a good neighbor to the people of greater Nashua. The College had long invited the public to programs and lectures on campus. In 1997, in partnership with Elderhostel, the College established the Rivier Institute for Senior Education. RISE provided educational and social opportunities for area seniors. Many alumni appreciated the opportunity to return to the College in a different context. (For more on RISE, see the article written by Georgi Laurin Hippauf in this edition).

A commitment to service pervades the Rivier culture. "From our founders to graduates today, the College is committed to looking beyond academic values," says President William Farrell. The Sisters of the Presentation of Mary have modeled service through all their missions, including Casa de L'Esperanza de los Ninos—the House of Hope for Children in Houston, Texas. Students who participated in service trips were inspired by the Sisters' dedication and ability to bring people together to help children with HIV/AIDS and broken families lead better lives. In 2005, the College awarded the organization an honorary degree.

Rivier's service isn't limited to organizations sponsored by the Sisters. Over the years, members of the College community have performed volunteer work ranging from tutoring elementary school children, serving food at the Nashua Soup Kitchen, building homes in some of the poorest cities in the country with Habitat for Humanity, and much more. Rivier students, faculty, staff and alumni have made a difference in the communities and around the world through their actions.

### **Building for the Future**

That commitment to service isn't likely to change any time soon. In fact, it seems to grow as the College itself expands. Rivier continues to find new ways to serve different groups within the community. The President's Circle represents a recent initiative to bring together business and community leaders to discuss matters affecting the well-being of businesses, organizations, and citizens in the region, receiving praise from participants.

The College also continues to develop academic programs that meet distinct needs within the region, such as the doctorate of education, designed to help educators become leaders in developing effective educational policies. "Rivier has demonstrated a willingness to change practices and do what was appropriate for the times," says Dr. Farrell. "We must continue to do that."

Dr. Farrell points out that while the Sisters built the College on their own, over the last few decades Rivier has developed two-way partnerships with the community. Those partnerships have helped the College expand, contributing to the success of Rivier's first capital campaign. Support for the campaign

allowed the College to invest in academic program development, scholarships, and facilities, including the renovation and expansion of Regina Library.

“The Campaign we’ve completed represents the future. Our service to the community will continue—now the community has joined us,” Dr. Farrell says.

Today Rivier has more than 12,000 alumni living around the globe working in almost every field imaginable. As the College grows, campus leaders look for innovative ways to live out our mission. The next 25 years hold great promise as we do our best to build on our successes and continue the legacy of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. ■

To celebrate the College’s 75th anniversary, we’ve launched a special website. Explore Rivier’s history, read alumni success stories, and share your favorite Rivier memories at [www.rivier.edu/anniversary/75](http://www.rivier.edu/anniversary/75).



\* **JENNIFER LISKOW** is Rivier’s Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications and teaches in the College’s Professional Communications program. Jennifer earned her bachelor’s in English and communications from Notre Dame College in Manchester, N.H. in 1996. In 2002, she completed her master’s in writing and literature at Rivier. She began writing in junior high school; since then, she has had poems, short stories, features and essays published. She serves on the Board of Directors for NH Roller Derby, the state’s first competitive flat-track roller derby league.