



Should the pronouncement of gender parity among U.S. med students come with an asterisk?

A new analysis reveals that MD programs are far from equal when it comes to the matriculation of women

Jeffrey G. Harris, MBA & Richard A. Skinner, PhD

Nancy Andrews made headlines when she became dean of the Duke University School of Medicine — not only because of her obvious academic and administrative prowess but also because of her gender.

The Wall Street Journal: “Duke Taps First Woman To Lead Medical School.”

The New England Journal of Medicine: “Climbing through Medicine’s Glass Ceiling.”

NPR.org: “Andrews Makes History at Duke Med School.”

It was 2007, and Andrews was indeed the first woman tapped to lead a top-tier, research-oriented medical school.

“It really caught on and surprised me at how much attention it got, especially in 2007,” Andrews, MD, PhD, said in a 2014 interview with *Fast Company* magazine.¹

What really drove home the novelty of her appointment, Andrews said, was an outing arranged by the people trying to recruit her to Duke — a visit to the school that her children would attend.

“As we entered the school, its principal vigorously shook my husband’s hand and welcomed him, saying, ‘You must be the man of the moment,’” Andrews wrote shortly after assuming the deanship. “Unfortunately, it is quite understandable that it wouldn’t have crossed his mind that I might be the ‘woman of the moment’ instead.”²

At the time, Duke was viewed as “a very macho place,” Andrews told *Fast Company*’s Gwen Moran. In fact, she noted, the university’s students were sometimes referred to as the “Duke Marines.”

Thirteen years later, Duke’s medical program is once again at the center of the ongoing struggle for gender equity in American higher education. This time around, though, the storyline couldn’t be more different.

According to the latest installment of the Association of American Medical Colleges’ annual survey of MD-granting institutions, the Class of 2023 at Duke’s School of Medicine boasts a higher female-to-male ratio — roughly 7-to-3 — than any other such cohort in the United States.

Duke's emergence as America's *most gender diverse* MD program is illuminated by a new analysis of the AAMC's fall 2019 enrollment census. The association's annual survey showed that U.S. medical schools admitted more women than men (52.4 percent vs. 47.6 percent) for the third consecutive year and that overall enrollment had tipped female for the first time ever, hitting 50.5 percent.³

"The steady gains in the medical-school enrollment of women are a very positive trend," said AAMC President and CEO David J. Skorton, MD. "We are delighted to see this progress."⁴

Delighted — but not satisfied.

"We must do more," he said, "to educate and train a more diverse physician workforce to care for a more diverse America."

Skorton's words take on added significance in light of a recent analysis of the AAMC's data by Harris Search Associates, a global executive recruiting firm that specializes in academic medicine. Armed with the AAMC's annual census figures, the firm set out to answer a critical question: Do women enjoy an equally strong presence in medical schools across the country — or is their newfound majority status attributable to a handful of major programs with disproportionately large female enrollments?

The short (and admittedly resounding) answer: Yes.

Notwithstanding a few notable exceptions, which we'll address momentarily, female matriculation rates are relatively strong from coast to coast. Still, the incoming classes at some medical schools (Duke's, for example) were so demographically lopsided in favor of women that they tended to skew — or at least distort — the gender breakdown for matriculants nationwide."

Harris Search researchers found, for example, that 16 schools have first-year classes that are at least 60 percent female.

As noted, the Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, North Carolina, had the highest concentration of women among fall

2019 matriculants — 69.4 percent.

Next came the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Medicine (CSOM), where women account for 66.7 percent of first-year students — up from 64.6 percent during the 2018-2019 academic year, when the school had the nation's fifth-highest concentration of female students. The year before that, the school was, by the same measure, No. 1 in the country.

CSOM is a seven-year program that combines undergraduate and medical degrees for about 475 students. It was established in 2016 as an outgrowth of the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education, which took students through the second year of medical education, at which point they transferred to medical schools for the remainder of their training. CSOM, which recruits top New York City high school students, largely from historically underrepresented populations, is scheduled to confer its first medical degrees this spring.⁵

BY THE NUMBERS



36 Percentage of currently active U.S. physicians who are female

50.5 Percentage of students currently enrolled in U.S. allopathic medical schools who are female

2.9 Percentage of U.S. medical school graduates in 1915 who were female

15.4 Percentage of U.S. orthopedists who are female, making orthopedics the most male-dominated medical specialty

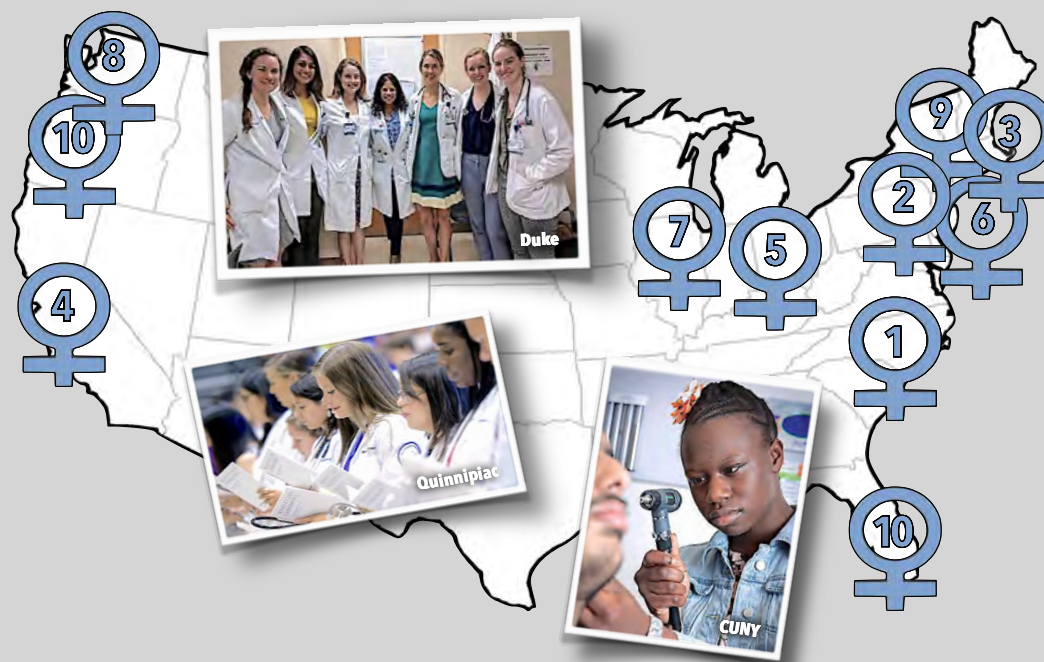


171 Number of years that have passed since the graduation of Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to earn an MD in the United States

Sources: Kaiser Family Foundation; AMN Healthcare; Association of American Medical Colleges; American Medical Association; National Library of Medicine; Time.com; Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

WHERE WOMEN DOMINATE

A new analysis identifies the U.S. medical schools that boast the highest concentrations of women among their first-year students*



RANK	INSTITUTION	% FEMALE
1	Duke School of Medicine	69.4
2	CUNY School of Medicine	66.7
3	Quinnipiac-Netter School of Medicine	66.0
4	UC-Davis School of Medicine	64.2
5	Wright State-Boonshoft School of Medicine	63.9
6	NYU School of Medicine	62.5
7	Loyola-Stritch School of Medicine	62.4
8	Washington School of Medicine	61.5
9	Dartmouth-Geisel School of Medicine	60.9
10 (Tie)	Florida Atlantic-Schmidt College of Medicine Oregon Health and Science School of Medicine	60.6

* Based on 2019-2020 matriculation figures compiled by the AAMC

CSOM trumpeted its commitment to gender, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity last year in a school newsletter: “CUNY is a rarity: a medical school whose student population today approaches the diversity of the communities it seeks to serve.”⁵

No. 3 on the ranking of medical schools with the most female students is the Frank H. Netter School of Medicine at Massachusetts’ Quinnipiac University, where women account for 66.0 percent of first-year students.

Like CUNY’s CSOM, Netter has skewed female for several years. During the 2017-2018 academic year, for example, it ranked second among the nation’s allopathic medical schools, with a first-year class in which women constituted 64.5 percent of students.

Netter’s gender diversity even caught the attention of the keynote speaker at the school’s 2017 white coat ceremony. Margaret Bia, MD, a professor of medicine at the Yale School of Medicine and a widely recognized transplant nephrologist, recalled that she was one of only five women in her med-school class.

“I was the token female in a class of a hundred white men at Cornell University,” Bia told Netter’s incoming students. “The culture of sexism was rampant.”⁶

The 13 remaining medical schools with incoming classes that were at least 60 percent female: the University of California-Davis School of Medicine (64.2 percent); Wright State University’s Boonshoft School of Medicine (63.9 percent); the NYU School of Medicine (62.5 percent); Loyola University’s Stritch School of Medicine (62.4 percent); the University of Washington School of Medicine (61.5 percent); Dartmouth College’s Geisel School of Medicine (60.9 percent); Florida Atlantic University’s Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine and the Oregon Health and Science University School of Medicine (tied at 60.6 percent); the University of Michigan Medical School, the Penn State College of Medicine, and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (tied at 60.5 percent); the University of Maryland School of Medicine (60.1); and the TCU/UNTHSC School of Medicine (60.0 percent).

If those 16 schools were taken out of the mix — women and men alike — the overall gender breakdown for first-year students at MD-granting institutions would be 51.5 percent woman vs. 48.5 percent men (compared with the previously noted 52.4 percent vs. 47.6 percent). The gender gap would therefore drop by more than a third — down to 3 percentage points from 4.8 percentage points.

In other words, roughly one-tenth of the nation’s allopathic medical schools account for more than one-third of the numerical advantage that women currently hold over men among first-year students.

More significantly, perhaps, close to one-third of the institutions that reported their gender breakdowns to the AAMC (48 out of 153) have first-year classes that are majority male — even if only by small margins. Six schools reported first-year classes in which women constitute fewer than 45 percent of students. Three other schools reported first-year classes in which women represent fewer than 40 percent of students.

All of the foregoing schools actively pursue female applicants. Accordingly, their “underperformance” in the recruitment of women this past fall shouldn’t be construed as a byproduct of some deep-seated affinity for male applicants or, conversely, an aversion to female applicants. The broad disparities revealed by the analysis are, in all likelihood, attributable to resources, geography, and, above all, the relative effectiveness of each institution’s recruiting strategies — that is, to execution, not exclusion.

In the meantime, for inspiration (or solace), they can look to the Duke School of Medicine — and to the path it traveled between June 2007, when the school raised eyebrows by picking Nancy Andrews, a woman, to serve as dean, and this past August, when it boasted the “most female” incoming class in the country.

When she took over Duke’s medical program, Andrews was determined to help women overcome the “invisible” biases and challenges that remained in academic medicine.⁷

“I happen to believe strongly that diversifying all levels of academic medicine is not only politically correct, it is also the way to make our institutions better,” she wrote in an essay published shortly after her appointment.⁸

In that same piece, Andrews shared her theory as to why so few women had ascended to top leadership posts at medical schools across the United State: “Deans are often former department chairs, most frequently chairs in internal medicine. But in the United States, only 10 medicine department chairs are women — that pipeline is almost empty. Strikingly, only 9 percent of the chairs of all clinical departments are women, and many schools have no female department chairs at all. Since these leadership positions turn over slowly, the situation will not change anytime soon.”

Andrews wasn’t content to wait and watch.

“If institutions are to accelerate the emergence of more female deans, then they will need to consider women who have not stepped on every rung of the traditional academic career ladder,” she wrote, noting that Duke had deviated from tradition in appointing her to the deanship of its medical school. “Never having served as a division chief or a department chair, I was a somewhat atypical dean candidate.”



Duke University School of Medicine

Honoring a trailblazer

In March 2018, Mary E. Klotman, dean of the Duke University School of Medicine, left, and Duke Provost Sally A. Kornbluth, PhD, right, paid tribute to Klotman's predecessor, Nancy C. Andrews, MD, PhD, with the unveiling of the dean emerita's formal portrait. Klotman called Andrews a "visionary leader" who guided the school through a decade of "unprecedented growth and achievement" and "laid the foundation for the school's continued recognition as one of our nation's premier medical schools."

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Having concluded that "taking a creative view of leadership" would "enrich academic medicine," Andrews resolved to do everything possible to put other qualified women on the fast track to academia's C-suite.

Whenever administrative roles came open, for example, she insisted on assembling candidate pools that reflected society as a whole. In her first three years as dean, she quadrupled the number of women chairing departments within the school — from one to four.⁹

Similarly, Andrews gave women — and members of other historically underrepresented demographic segments — spots on important committees. She also ensured that they had protected time to advance their careers, and she encouraged them to cultivate relationships with colleagues who could put them up for awards or professional opportunities.

Perhaps no one should have been surprised, therefore, by what happened after Andrews announced her intention to step down from the deanship in June 2017.

Following a six-month national search for Andrews' successor, Duke selected an individual who had chaired the university's Department of Medicine for close to seven years: Mary E. Klotman, MD, PhD.

The news release announcing Klotman's appointment described her as "a nationally renowned physician-scientist and academic leader." A. Eugene Washington, MD, Duke's chancellor of health affairs, called her "a visionary leader, deft executive administrator, and congenial collaborator with an unwavering commitment to excellence." Richard Brodhead, PhD, then Duke's president, said Klotman had impressed colleagues with her "strength of purpose, clarity, judgment, and love of Duke."¹⁰

One thing *not* mentioned in the release: Klotman's gender.

Media outlets followed suit. In stark contrast to the coverage of Andrews' appointment a decade earlier, virtually every news story about Klotman's selection concentrated on her outstanding academic and professional credentials, and most ignored her gender altogether — a reminder that numbers aren't the only measure of societal progress. ■

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About Harris Search Associates

Harris Search Associates is a leading global executive search and talent advisory firm. Established in 1997 by Jeffrey G. Harris, the firm focuses on the recruitment of senior leaders to support the growth of the foremost universities, research parks, institutes, national laboratories, academic health centers, hospital enterprises, and organizations driving global innovation and discovery. Based in Dublin, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus, Harris Search Associates maintains regional offices in Dallas and San Francisco. The firm is a shareholder member of IIC Partners, one of the largest global retained executive search organizations, with 48 offices in 33 countries.

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