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## 40 Years of Change in Women's Sports SMC hosts colloquium on Title IX

*Rebecca Eckland*

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Title IX. Passed in 1972, it changed the lives of female athletes. The Kinesiology department of Saint Mary's College hosted a colloquium on Title IX June 11-14.

Claire Williams, Associate Professor of Kinesiology at SMC, noted the importance of continuing the discussion.

"Although girls and women today participate in sports in unprecedented numbers, sport remains largely a male domain," she said. "Title IX's 40th anniversary provides an opportunity to celebrate and evaluate the status of girls and women in sport and the impact of the law on these opportunities."

On Monday, scholars Alison Wrynn of UC Long Beach and Maureen Smith of California State University, Sacramento, lectured on the early history of women in sport prior to 1972.

Wrynn—who holds a PhD from UC Berkeley in Sport History—explained that in the 19th century, cultural assumptions encouraged men to develop physical strength by doing sports. Women, however, were thought to be better suited to raising children, making sport an irrelevant pursuit.

By the early 20th century, participation in sport was conflated with emancipation. Men who played sports could also vote. Women could do neither. Female athletics was both political and physical—the 1920 Olympics featured American female athletes who could compete and vote for their choice of the next U.S. President.

In the 1950s, track and field was the sport that highlighted African American female athletes. The Tigerbelles from Tennessee State University became U.S. icons, representing the country in competitions against the Soviet Union in a time when segregation was still rampant.

Yet, surprisingly little changed immediately after the passing of Title IX. Wrynn was eleven and in junior high when Title IX became law. "Before Title IX, girls had to take Home Ec and boys, Shop. After, everyone took eight weeks of Shop and eight weeks of Home Economics."

In her high school years, Wrynn noticed the addition of multiple uniforms for young women practicing various sports. "It wasn't quite what the boys had; but the girls had more than just one outfit," she said.

Smith—past President of the North American Society for Sport History—recalls that prior to the passage of Title IX, female athletes were given the worst practice times at her high school gym. After Title IX, the schedule for teams began to rotate.

Ten years after Title IX's passing, changes began to take place that were not merely symbolic. In fact, Title IX's real effects were examined in the later days of the colloquium which covered topics: Understanding and Analyzing Title IX's Requirements, Athletic Administration, and the Promise of Equality for Low Income Girls.

Title IX has made a difference: Wrynn and Smith emphasized that 2012 is the first year the Olympic Games will feature an equal number of competitions for male and female athletes.

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