

# HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

## STUDIES IN INDIANA WOMEN'S HISTORY

Session 2

April 2017

### **"A short skirt and a tight white coat:" Affirmative Action Women at the Indiana University School of Medicine, 1974-1995**

**ANGELA BOWEN POTTER\***

During the last century, the Indiana University School of Medicine (IUSM) and the IUSM Medical Center was literally the center of the state medical establishment, possessing an unparalleled combination of political power, medical education monopoly, and economic success. In terms of admissions, IUSM solidified its position as one of the nation's largest medical schools, not only in the training of physicians but in the broader field of health care delivery. Aside from the growth of the overall class size, the composition of the class shifted dramatically to continue to integrate minorities and grow percentage of women. At IUSM, the proportion of female graduates continued to grow steadily over the period, and slightly above this national curve.

Behind the admissions numbers lay strong initiatives by the faculty to help increase the profile of women in Medicine. Due to Affirmative Action policies and broader demographic changes in the field, women and minority students began to have more diverse faculty role models. Women continued to be more prevalent in "female" areas of obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics and family medicine but there were new women leaders across campus. Gender discrimination continued an issue towards the end of the twentieth century, and took on a more sexual tone in the charged environment of the 1970s, earlier comments challenged a woman's right and ability to be a doctor, by the 1970s, some men complained that women held an unfair advantage due to their gender. The professional divisions between physicians and other medical professionals, such as nurses and allied health workers largely prevented actions to organize around gender issues and often exacerbated gender tensions and bias. This paper is part of a larger project on the IUSM, funded in part by the IU Bicentennial Commission and the IUPUI Medical Humanities and Health Studies program.

\* Angela Bowen Potter is Program Coordinator at Medical Humanities and a PhD Candidate in History at Purdue University.