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Siena College

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America's First Ladies who "stepped out and did their own thing" rated highest in an extensive nationwide survey just completed at Siena College, Loudonville (Albany), NY.

Eleanor Roosevelt scored number 1 in effectiveness on 10 characteristics of First Ladies rated by the more than 100 U.S. college and university history professors who answered the survey.

Professor Douglas A. Lonnstrom, head of Siena's department of mathematics for business and statistics, assisted by Professor Thomas O. Kelly II, head of the history department, developed the random sampling of 300 history professors which showed clearly that non-traditional First Ladies scored the highest.

Professor Kelly says, "It appears that many First Ladies have been fighting for women's rights from the earliest days of the nation, and now with the lack of ratification of the ERA, they will have to go on fighting."

Eleanor Roosevelt, a most untraditional woman, received a high 93

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percentage rating on 10 characteristics which included value to country, background, integrity, leadership, intelligence, own woman, accomplishments, courage, public image and value to president.

On all but one of the ratings, Mrs. Roosevelt scored first with over 90 percentage points. On the single exception -- value to the president -- she came in third with 84.706 points while Rosalynn Carter and Abigail Adams both scored marginally higher with 84.902 averages.

Abigail Adams, whose husband John was president 1797-1801, rated second on all characteristics except value to the president where she was first and public image where she took fourth place.

"In a survey like this, we have to consider that recent first ladies have the advantage or disadvantage of being clearly remembered and/or colored by media-bias," Professor Kelly says. Still the top six First Ladies include four from the past 40 years and two from earlier periods.

Besides Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Adams in 1st and 2nd, the history professors rated Lady Bird Johnson 3rd, Dolly Madison 4th, Rosalynn Carter 5th and Betty Ford, 6th.

On the bottom were Mary Lincoln 42nd, Florence Harding 41st, Ida McKinley 40th, Nancy Reagan 39th, Jane Pierce 38th, Pat Nixon 37th. Other recent First Ladies rated as follows: Jackie Kennedy 8th, Mamie Eisenhower 31st, Bess Truman 15th.

Professor Lonnstrom found that books about the First Ladies rated them "as saints or near-saints." Obviously the history professors didn't agree. The highest ratings for integrity went to Eleanor Roosevelt 1st, Abigail Adams 2nd, Betty Ford 3rd, Rosalynn Carter 4th and Bess Truman 5th. The lowest ratings went to Mary Lincoln 42nd, Jackie Kennedy 41st, Florence Harding 40th and Angelica Van Buren 39th.

As far as value to the country, the history professors placed Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Adams 1 and 2 with Lady Bird Johnson 3rd, Dolly Madison

4th and Edith Wilson 5th. They put Mary Lincoln on the bottom at 42nd, Nancy Reagan at 41st, Florence Harding at 40th and Pat Nixon at 39th.

Top ratings on being her own woman were given to Eleanor Roosevelt as 1st, Abigail Adams 2nd, Betty Ford 3rd, Lady Bird Johnson 4th and Rosalynn Carter 5th. Three recent First Ladies received the lowest ratings. At the bottom was Pat Nixon at 42nd with Mamie Eisenhower 41st and Nancy Reagan 40th.

For accomplishments as First Ladies, the historians gave Eleanor Roosevelt a high average of 96, Abigail Adams in 2nd at 81. Following her, the rest of the top ten in accomplishments were Lady Bird Johnson, Dolly Madison, Edith Wilson, Rosalynn Carter, Betty Ford, Jackie Kennedy, Edith Roosevelt and Lucy Hayes. On the bottom were Mary Lincoln at 42nd and Nancy Reagan at 41st.

The design of the computer program to analyze the survey data was developed by Jeffrey Wisniewski, manager of the Siena College academic computer operations.

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Editor's Note: The country had 39 presidents, but 42 First Ladies, for various reasons

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