

27 September 2006

M. Jolley Bruce Christman  
1933 Pine Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Dear Jolley,

The three writers of this letter have thus far played different roles in the controversy surrounding the R-MWC trustees' September 9 action. Now, however, because of our belief in and affection for the Randolph-Macon we have known, we are compelled to speak in one voice as we share with you and the other trustees our thoughts and concerns about finances, alumnae involvement, and our college's reputation and mission.

We understand that the college's financial situation, resulting from the decline in enrollment and the financial aid granted in an effort to get students, was the sole consideration in the board's decision to admit men. An A&S study was not needed to discover enrollment and financial problems of which administrators and trustees have long been aware. Enrollment and the balanced budget have always been concerns, requiring that resources be conserved and that desired but not essential expenditures be avoided.

We wonder if there has been adequate restraint in expenditures.

For example, recent years have seen substantial increases in administrative and semi-administrative positions. We cannot evaluate each such staff appointment, but the listing in the faculty-staff directory reflects this increase. We know that many of these appointments reflect national trends toward professionalizing such areas as student services, development, and alumnae relations. Especially in development and alumnae relations, using a larger number of professional staff has meant relying less on alumnae volunteers. We cannot help wondering whether following these national trends has served Randolph-Macon well, since we have so long and so successfully depended on—indeed, have nurtured—personal relationships and broad participation in our alumnae and development efforts. It is hard to ignore the fact that the rate of alumnae participation in giving has declined as fund-raising has become more professionalized and more expensive.

In addition to the resulting expenditures for salary and benefits, these expansions in professional administrative staff and especially in development staff have necessitated the expansion of off-campus space: Butler House, Doyle House, Alumnae House. These are admirable additions, but each has involved a capital expenditure and additional annual maintenance expense. Curtailments in administrative and semi-administrative positions would impact the operating budget favorably.

Another area of questionable expenditure, both recent and prospective, is the expansion of physical education facilities. We understand that young women participate in athletics and

fitness activities in far greater numbers now than in the past, and that up-to-date facilities are part of what attracts prospective students. Still, given the college's financial situation, we find ourselves asking whether so much expansion is wise: whether it was essential to add the handsome new athletic field, whether the projected \$20 million renovation of the PER building is the best use of funds at this time, and whether plans for the new facility could be scaled down.

A third area of questionable expenditure is the president's pay and benefits, as reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (18 Nov. 2005). We understand that benefits for two different years were mistakenly reported in the same year and that some benefits were deferred. Even so, was that large expenditure necessary, especially in a year when, according to the *Chronicle*, the college also reported an operating deficit?

Given what could be characterized as a lack of restrained spending in the past, what assurance is there that becoming coeducational will improve the college's enrollment and financial position in the future? The transition will be expensive. There will be additional staff. There will be major plant changes. Enrollment will likely drop, and to what extent it picks up, if it does, is uncertain.

In other words, we are sacrificing a treasure for what, at best, will be a lesser good, and at worst could be a financial disaster.

Alumnae involvement is another area about which we are concerned. We wish that a few years ago the college's total constituency, and especially the alumnae, had been told of the seriousness of the college's enrollment and financial predicament and had been enlisted to work on the enrollment problem. In past years, alumnae have helped with development and admissions. Now, though, we are hearing from many alumnae that their offers of help have fallen on deaf ears. Alumnae stand ready and willing to respond to R-MWC's financial challenges by recruiting students, supporting current students, and increasing their financial contributions. By the same token, many alumnae have said that they will no longer donate unless R-MWC remains a women's college. These comments have been dismissed because so many who have made them are young alumnae. But it is these very same young alumnae who will become the major financial contributors of the future. Why are we so willing to squander the talents and energies of some of our best ambassadors and the future financial support of some of our most loyal donors?

Finances and alumnae involvement are both extremely important to us, but the concerns about which we feel most strongly have to do with R-MWC's academic reputation and historic mission. With coeducation, R-MWC is headed for the certain loss of her cherished reputation as one of the leading colleges for women. The new college seems likely to become only a second-rate coeducational college, a result that seems especially ironic in light of the statement from A&S that the alumnae they surveyed cared more about upholding high academic standards than about remaining single-sex. In this connection, we wonder what the status of our Phi Beta Kappa chapter will be with the loss of our name and with the proposed changes in the nature of the college. Loss of this coveted mark of academic rigor would be tragic. Has this been thought of—and investigated?

In Randolph-Macon Woman's College we have a treasure. By becoming a coeducational college, we turn our backs on the message we have proclaimed for over a century, namely, the unique value and role of the women's college and the superior preparation of women for life and for careers afforded by such a college. These are not pious platitudes. Their validity is documented by numerous studies and reports by reputable educators and educational organizations. We cannot and should not deny the advantages, both to women students and to the society at large, of our college's being, in the words of alumna and adjunct faculty member Sonja Brodt '90, "dedicated 100% to women" and thereby sending "a powerful signal (and students may not always even be consciously aware of this signal) that here women can express and fulfill a well-rounded identity that can encompass a range of choices across the spectrum of academic fields and extracurricular activities, and they can do so completely free from the complications of having attention drawn to their gender." This message has been reaffirmed in recent days by statements from the presidents of Sweet Briar College, Hollins University, and Agnes Scott College in response to the announcement from Randolph-Macon.

We firmly believe that with careful management, dedicated and energetic leadership, and a challenge to all of the college's constituencies to work long and hard together, R-MWC can continue as a women's college. While it will not be easy to reverse the September 9 action, we ask that you seriously consider doing so. In our view, reversing the decision will do far less damage than proceeding in the direction set by the vote, which has already caused considerable heartache and which seems likely to result in protracted, costly, and destructive litigation.

We think that the heritage and mission of Randolph-Macon Woman's College continue to be worth our deepest commitment and hardest work. Like so many others who love our college, we stand ready to renew that commitment and do that hard work, so that women students may experience *vita abundantior* for many years to come.

We would like to talk with you about these matters at your earliest convenience. We will phone you to arrange a time.

Sincerely,

William F. Quillian, Jr.  
President, R-MWC, 1952-1978

Madeline E. Miller '66  
Trustee, 1978-1992, 1993-1998  
President, Board of Trustees, 1987-1992

Carolyn Wilkerson Bell '65  
Susan Duval Adams Professor of English, retired  
Faculty Member, 1971-2006