

August 15, 2006

Trustees of Randolph-Macon Woman's College
Jolley Bruce Christman, President
2500 Rivermont Avenue
Lynchburg, Virginia 24503

Dear Trustees:

We, the undersigned graduates of Randolph-Macon Woman's College, wish to express to the R-MWC Board of Trustees our vehement opposition to the board's decision to turn our college into a "global honors college. . . in a coeducational environment". We believe that the proposed changes constitute a complete rejection of the principles that have guided R-MWC for the past 115 years.

If the board votes to pursue this misguided, poorly developed strategic plan, not only will we cease to encourage our daughters, granddaughters, nieces, or friends to attend the newly formed college, **we will no longer support the college financially**. We will not contribute to the Annual Fund or to the college's endowment. We will change the terms of our wills and charitable trusts to eliminate any bequest or gift to the newly formed college. While we have been given no opportunity to vote on September 9, we will not hesitate to cast our votes from that day forward.

Our decision may appear to be a rash and overly emotional response to the board's actions. Nothing could be further from the truth. Like the board, we have had a year to evaluate our commitment to R-MWC and to consider our response to a decision by the board to embrace a course of action that is antithetical to R-MWC's core mission – to provide an outstanding education to young women, an education grounded in a substantive liberal arts tradition, an education designed to prepare young women to face the challenges of life.

Over the past year, each of us has considered whether we could support the very dramatic change the board is currently contemplating. We would like to take the opportunity to highlight five of the major reasons for our opposition that we all share.

1. The Process of Developing the Strategic Plan

We believe that the R-MWC alumnae have been completely ignored by the board and shut out of the process of reviewing the college's mission and developing the strategic plan. We are concerned by reports that the views of the senior faculty and current students have similarly been ignored. The actions of the board have been cloaked in secrecy. We understand that from time to time the board has seen fit to share snippets of information with select small groups but that these groups were directed to keep that information confidential.

We believe that the secrecy of the process demonstrates that the board is not only aware that its decisions will be unpopular, but is fully aware that if the process had been truly transparent, the R-MWC community would understand that the decision the board is poised to make is based on flawed, intentionally-biased assumptions designed to produce a pre-ordained result.

The board's secrecy speaks volumes. It says that the board does not trust those who have been educated at its hands. It says that the board does not believe that the alumnae or the current student body have any ability to understand the problems that face the college. And, it says that the board has lost sight of its strongest and best assets – those who are privileged to hang a diploma from Randolph-Macon Woman's College on their walls, and those who are wise enough to desire one.

The board's secrecy during this process also indicates that the board is not confident that its actions are in the best interests of the college. If the board was comfortable that it was actually working in the best interests of the college, the process would have been open and inclusive. The financial status of the college would have been fully disclosed. The proposed strategic plan would have been released openly to the alumnae and current students. The board would have welcomed public comment and input on the proposed plan, would have held open forums for evaluating and critiquing the methodology of the A&S study, and would have openly considered viable options to solve well-defined problems without considering wholesale changes in the character and content of the college's program.

We are interested only in ensuring that R-MWC continues to thrive as a vibrant educational institution committed to providing the highest caliber education to the young women of today and tomorrow. We understand that some changes may be required to ensure this.

We do not believe, however, that change as drastic as that the board is currently evaluating can or should be undertaken after only one month's consideration. The faculty, the alumnae, and current students should have more than one month to react to the current draft proposal. As structured, the process does not even contemplate making the draft proposal public until *after* the vote on September 9. The draft strategic plan contemplates supplanting everything that we hold dear: the college that made us who we are today. And we won't even know what the plan says until the Trustees have already voted to abolish our alma mater.

An open process serves two important functions. First, it ensures that all stakeholders are provided sufficient time to analyze and interpret the recommendations of the A&S Group and the draft strategic plan, making alumnae, student and faculty "buy-in" more likely. Second, and perhaps more important, an open process ensures that the board operates in an honest and responsible manner. In short, sunlight is a very powerful disinfectant.

While it is clear that there are very real problems that need to be addressed to ensure the long-term success of the college, it is also clear that the college's endowment is strong, annual giving is strong, and there are resources to see the college through a few more years of study to ensure that the actions taken to save the college do not destroy all that we hold dear. Therefore, we implore the Trustees to slow down, open up the process, provide the draft proposal to all alumnae and students, and allow us to help. Please give us the chance to preserve this rare and special place for the future.

2. Curriculum

We believe that the decision to move to "a new educational platform that will strongly encourage experiential learning (service, internships, hands-on learning techniques, etc.) within a global honors perspective in a co-educational environment" is misguided. We are baffled as to what a "global honors perspective" is and we have significant doubts about whether the high school students polled by the college's consultants were any more informed about the meaning of "global honors" than we are. The words have a nice power-point-presentation quality about them, but in the end, they are meaningless.

And, more importantly, we are not certain that the board understands the new platform either. As reported on the college's web site, "The concise four-page *draft* document is a broad blueprint that will be brought to life by implementation teams appointed by the President of the College and the President of the Board of Trustees." *The Strategic Plan: Summary and Process to Date*, August 11, 2006. This statement alone indicates that there is a great void of information on just how this draft proposal will be implemented. It is inconceivable that a change as drastic as that being contemplated by the board can be contained in a mere four-page outline. Even without seeing the details of the draft, we are convinced that a four-page outline cannot contain sufficient analysis of the proposal to provide meaningful guidance to the board.

More significantly, it ignores the true academic desires of today's high school women. We understand that independent educational research has shown that college-bound girls have consistently indicated that they want stronger science and education programs and a business major option. We understand that many members of the R-MWC faculty have consistently urged incorporation of these requests into the school's curriculum. We have seen no indication that the college administration and board have seriously considered these requests. We see no evidence in the materials available regarding the A&S study to indicate that these options were considered or evaluated.

The college has a historic depth and breadth of curriculum offerings and requirements. Accordingly, there should be nothing to fear from offering vital, career-oriented majors such as business, marketing and computer science. We think that it makes sense to listen to what the potential consumer is looking for

when developing a program of study to ensure that the curriculum is responsive to the needs and desires of the students. We know that the board has attempted to seek market information. We just think that the board has not looked at all potential options for making the college more attractive. We believe that board has pursued a biased research study focused too intently upon international educational options, and has ignored less flashy but more practical curriculum changes.

We believe that the college should pursue stronger science and education programs, and should develop a business major, grounded in R-MWC's strong liberal arts tradition. Moreover, we believe that R-MWC should trumpet the new Masters in Education program and should continue to develop additional graduate-level programs. If concern over funding has been the major reason for not taking these steps, let us know. We stand ready to provide financial and volunteer support to ensure the implementation of appropriate curriculum changes, and will encourage others to do the same.

3. A Co-Educational Environment

We believe that the decision to admit men to R-MWC is, at best, misguided. At worst, it could mean the destruction of the college. The belief that a coeducational R-MWC will continue to provide the same level of attention to the educational needs of women is flawed. It is contrary to all research – research that time and time again confirms that women educated in a coeducational environment are not treated on par with male students and that women educated in a single-sex environment are generally more successful in later life than their coed counterparts.

We are mystified! We just don't understand why the board is ignoring the empirical data that support the simple fact that a single-sex education environment is better for women. We are particularly confused by the board's apparent decision to ignore these data in light of the fact that our sister schools, Hollins College and Sweet Briar College, have recently reaffirmed their belief that a single-sex education is better for young women. Clearly single-sex institutions continue to be relevant in today's society and to today's high school girls – how else can anyone explain the fact that enrollment at both Hollins and Sweet Briar has increased this year over last year? Those schools are facing the same issues as R-MWC. The administrations of those schools have the same data that the R-MWC administration has. How is it that the R-MWC administration has decided to pursue such a radically different path? Does the board secretly possess data unavailable to Sweet Briar and Hollins that contradicts the information publicly available? We are asking these questions; the board should be asking them, too.

Additionally, we believe it is imperative that we challenge the board's assumption that tuition revenue will automatically increase by changing the policy of

admitting men as degree candidates. How many men are likely to consider attending a college that doesn't offer business, marketing or computer science majors? (See prior Curriculum concerns.) Additionally, it is not enough to state that "other colleges have gone coed and survived." Such platitudes without specifics do not add much to the discussion. It doesn't take an R-MWC graduate to see the flaw in that logic!

Moreover, we see no evidence that the board has seriously considered the major financial outlay that will be required to bring men behind the Red Brick Wall. We would like to see some evidence that the board has contemplated and evaluated in depth the major changes that will be required to make a home for men at R-MWC. For example, where will the resources come from to support the "equal" athletic opportunities required under Title IX? The answer on the web site is less than forthcoming: "We expect that these costs would be met by increased enrollment revenues, use of our unrestricted endowment and other assets, and fundraising." *Strategic Plan Frequently Asked Questions*, August 10, 2006. We fear that a decision reached in haste on this question will result in a myriad of unforeseen situations that will cause the college to dig even deeper into the endowment.

The only conclusion we can reach is that the enrollment problems encountered by R-MWC are not related to the fact that the school is single-sex. We believe that the problems stem from misguided and erroneous decisions about the program of studies to be made available to R-MWC students, however well-intended those decisions may have been. We believe that it is not too late to reverse course and give the students what they clearly want. We believe that the board has a responsibility to the R-MWC community to address the mistakes of the past rather than compound them now and in the future.

4. Rejections of the Honor Code

We are all grounded in the R-MWC honor code. It was the hallmark of our time at R-MWC. The honor code is the basis of the unique level of trust among the students and between the students, faculty, school administration, and alumnae. We continue to embrace the honor code today in our lives beyond the Red Brick Wall.

We are stunned and saddened by the apparent violation and rejection of the honor code by the board. Whether through misdirection, obfuscation or withholding of information, the board and the college administration have misled the alumnae, faculty and students about the strategic planning process time and time again. We have been told that the school is undertaking this process from a position of strength only to learn that the school is increasingly relying on its endowment to fund operating expenses. We have been told that classes and enrollment are both strong, only to discover that enrollment is dangerously low.

We believe that the administration and board's rejection of the honor code has broken the sacred trust that has existed for 115 years between the students, faculty, and alumnae. We are deeply concerned that the board may have breached its fiduciary duty to R-MWC and the R-MWC community.

5. College Name Change

While the apparently simple act of changing the name of the school may not seem to be a significant or substantial action, we believe that the opposite is true. For 115 years the name Randolph-Macon Woman's College has stood for excellence in education. It is a proud declaration of the college's commitment to providing the highest caliber of educational opportunities to each individual woman. No other name will convey these two principles.

A new name will signal that Randolph-Macon Woman's College no longer exists. There will be a newly-formed college that will occupy the facilities of R-MWC but it is sheer fantasy to believe that the college will be, in any way, a successor to our alma mater.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined here, if the board adopts the proposed strategic plan as it has been described in the scant information available to us, we cannot and will not continue to support the new college. For years we have sung the praises of our alma mater – serenading her in the night and pledging our loyalty and love to a school where wisdom rises. It is our understanding that the board believes that the alumnae will be angry for a while but will, after a time, return to the fold. Such an impression is profoundly insulting. This just isn't true. If the board adopts the sweeping academic and cultural changes currently under consideration, our school will no longer exist and there will be no fold to which we can return.

We stand united with our Alumnae sisters, the current students of R-MWC, and the faculty in our unwavering commitment to strengthening R-MWC and our overwhelming opposition to the adoption of the draft strategic plan.

If the board rejects the draft strategic plan on September 9 and begins the planning process anew, with involvement of the entire R-MWC community, we are ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with the board and administration of the college, in the spirit of open cooperation, to take all steps necessary to reaffirm R-MWC's mission and strengthen her ability to fulfill her mission. Together, we will work to establish some interim goals and a rational timeframe for accomplishing them. The alumnae can bring a lot of expertise to bear on solving the problems of the school. We are the college's best resource—and we are here for the asking.

If, however, the board adopts the proposed strategic plan, we will walk away from the newly formed college – and we will take our time, our talents, and our checkbooks with us.

Respectfully Submitted

1,214 R-MWC Alumnae and Donors

Please see the link below for all of the signers:

http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?rmwcalum