

Little Rock, Arkansas 11-18-06 Town Meeting
Written by Jean Anderson '53
Reviewed by Hebe Mace '51

The wine and cheese reception for our small group (approximately 15 people) was held in a private home. There were three representatives of the College, eight alumnae, only a few of whom had previously met, and one mother. The College representatives were the Trustee Rep Katheryn G. Goodman, Development Officer and Anne Haley, '07, formerly a leader of the student Coalition to Preserve Women's Education.

After a few opening remarks the Trustee Rep suggested we begin our conversation with introductions, starting with the College representatives and continuing around the circle. In the course of the conversation, Anne Haley'07 detailed her position change, from student support (The Coalition to Preserve Women's Education) to Administration – Board of Trustees support. The Coalition prepared and presented a proposal to the Board of Trustees before September 9 and was allowed follow up questions/suggestions. Consistent Board of Trustee response: We've tried that or we've done that.

The first remark concerned reaction to description of the "Strategic Plan" which appeared in repeated mailings. Hostess Missy Thomas Irvin related her family's immediate query, **What IS this?** All alumnae present agreed that it was fluff, carefully chosen words but with no substance.

Ensuing questions and comments concerned restricted participation in the planning process, the inappropriate use of jargon, involvement and reaction of faculty, meaning and implementation of the "global honors" curriculum, the current situation of Sweet Briar, Agnes Scott and Mount Holyoke; marketing changes (i.e., little or no alumnae involvement in recruiting students) and suggestions (i.e., recognition of the importance of parental influence) and the statement that Maier Museum paintings could be sold. Alumnae specifically asked if R-MWC traditions would be preserved, if the Honor Code would remain intact, and why the process has been and is being conducted in extreme haste, with equivocal community communication and little opportunity for meaningful reflection and reaction.

Attending alumnae spoke, listened and asked follow up questions of each other and the College representatives. All three College representatives listened, responded and, at times, took notes.

A retired English professor asked questions about the status of faculty: are faculty salaries now below the average for similar institutions? Can the college recruit qualified new faculty as necessary in order to implement such a radical curriculum change? Is there a Faculty Senate at R-MWC and if so, has it made any statement to the Trustees? Response – faculty salaries has been further reduced, Inference –Can R-MWC recruit faculty for a curriculum change when position continues to be weakened? She asked why the Faculty Senate was silent. Response – the faculty was divided, therefore no statement could be made. Other questions and remarks concerned the reluctance of the Administration and Board of Trustees to react early on to warning signs and to communicate concerns to interested parties of the R-MWC community. [The Trustee Rep offered to send a catalog to her.]

Another alumna asked which 2-3 areas, would be implemented in Fall 2007, as stated in a summary of the Chicago meeting. Anne Haley stated that six implementation committees were currently

engaged and described the work of the Alumnae Connections Working Group of which she is a member. This group will submit a report to the Implementation Steering Committee in February 2007. [A later visit to <rmwc.edu> revealed that only the Alumnae Connections Working Group and the Business Committee had report deadlines.]

Other alumnae asked why alumnae were no longer requested to help in recruiting students? why marketing didn't target parents as well as students? and stated that although the Reading Program attracted students, they really wanted more choices.

The Trustee Rep stated that the Maier paintings were not for sale, traditions would be preserved, perhaps new ones might be established; the Honor Code would remain intact.

Anne Haley expressed the opinion that female students would, by their example, orient male students to become an integral part of the R-MWC community.

This question was asked: Why not slow down; call a halt to the process, let emotions cool, then allow alumnae to have an experience similar to Anne Haley's before proceeding? Response – that can't be done for 13,000 alumnae. Follow up – of course not, it could be done through committees. [Note: intention was to suggest an AD Hoc Committee to Understand and Restore Communication and Trust among the Administration, Board of Trustees, Students, Faculty and Alumnae.]

Time was running out. One alumna had already left, others had to leave because of previous commitments.

Katheryne Goodman asked that all take the handouts provided. She and the Trustee Rep said they would like to hear from us. Katheryne Goodman offered her card.