

**New York City Town Meeting 11-09-06**  
**By Peter Flemming, husband of Camilla Floyd Flemming '53**

There were probably 40-50 attendees, of which perhaps 4-5 were husbands. Ginger Worden made the presentation, and took most of the questions. Development Director Skip Kughn gave several responses, and a non-alumna Trustee gave one or two responses. The meeting commenced about 7:30 and ended a little after 9.

There were an 11-page RMWC hand-out, "Supplemental Materials", and a 4-page PEC hand-out, divide into 8 headings ("Facts about R-MWC's enrollment"; "Facts about R-MWC's tuition discounting", etc.). Each started with a graph showing enrollment trends: PEC's showed a gently undulating line from 700 in 1987 to just over 700 in 2005; RMWC's showed steep up and down peaks & valleys between 1985's 800, 1987's 700, 1991's 770, 1998's 690, 2002's 760, and 2006's 715. An interesting demonstration of how scale affects image.

The presentation went over the familiar territory, from the original inquiry, could RMWC survive (1) single sex, and (2) middle Virginia; through the claimed reluctance of the Trustees to consider co-ed, rather than "going down with the flags flying," or "merger"; to the goal of reaching a 1000-1100 co-ed enrollment within 6-7 years, thereby lowering the tuition discount ratio. Worden challenged (1) the Sweetbriar enrollment gain, as not yet having reached their '98-99 level, and (2) the Hollins comparison, based on its Roanoke basin site and its 20 co-ed graduate programs which build up their bottom line. Worden made her case for "Global Honors", citing Asian studies since the '60s, students from 40 countries, and the higher graduate rate for the foreign students. She said the student protests on campus were respectful and organized; that in response the college arranged two sessions – one on the college's Finances, with the outside auditors, the financial v.p. & several others, and the other on the co-ed Research, with A&S, trustee Elizabeth Maffey, herself and the financial v.p.; and that the student leaders indicate they wish to be "part of the transition," and did not believe "better dead than co-ed." She ended by quoting Pearl Buck, "world gov't & cooperation for peace on earth depend on the energies of women..." Her vision, she concluded, was "not another co-ed college", rather, a "feminist institution with men."

Beginning the Q&A, she said the value of RMWC was not just single sex, and that RMWC was not "run of the mill." She described the "Honors" of Global Honors as a rigorous, difficult education – admitting that many colleges similarly aspire; and the "Global" as the cross-cultural experience in a global society. She agreed that Reading was a fair example of international presence – but one site in one country not necessarily "global"; she cited the U.K.'s tri-mester system and underenrollment as problems in justifying Reading's continuation.

She forgot to answer the "why will men find RMWC attractive" part of a two-part question, answering, instead, the cost piece: 1<sup>st</sup> year, "not much", using unused dormitory space, some men's toilets, and 5 men's NCAA sports totaling some \$325-340,000; but admitting an entire new sports' field would eventually run to \$1.5-2 million alone.

Responding to a specific reference to Reading, the Art Collection, and the Riding Center, Worden said they would do "everything they can" to save X, or Y, or Z, but the 1<sup>st</sup> thing will be, to save the college. Regarding inadequate outreach: w/13,000 alumnae, any number not on the web, each mailing cost \$15,000; we are a small college w/o full-time PR staff.

An alum said (tearfully) how pained she was at the prospect of the co-ed change; but the “reality” is that as a guidance counselor at a presumably upscale high school she can’t “sell” single-sex, and to “sell” RMWC even as co-ed she would have to be able to show that RMWC has “national ranking.” Yet while she believed we “have to move on, have to make the change,” she was very upset the way it was being handled – the “this one year” timing (and the name confusion) will make it impossible to find applicants, most already having made their decisions. Worden admitted it was a “full-out stretch”, but there have been 20 (presumably male?) on-campus visits already, and they’re working hard.

Another Class of ‘72 rose to say as hard as everyone had tried, “our own daughters won’t go” -- & that was not solely because of single-sex, but also perceived weakness in the quality of professors and the atmosphere of learning. A recent grad said social life wasn’t an issue – there was always Hampden-Sydney for dating; but another recent grad (’03 “Global Honors” [?]) said there was no other option, and we must look forward (on top of which, her very own all-girls high school had just gone co-ed!).

To a complaint as to the college’s increased expenses, and having “too big” a development office and admissions office (to applause!), Mr. Kughn said the operating budget had been cut by \$1.4 million in the last 2 years, and is significantly below sister colleges; but that now faculty compensation had dropped from the 60-80% comparable comparison level to the 40-60% level. He agreed that the admissions staff had grown – they had added 3 regional recruiters (N.C., TX, and No. VA) – sadly, without success. As for fund-raising, the college’s 12 cents to the \$1 expense/revenue ratio was exceptionally low: and its capital campaign ratio of 14/100 was better than the 18-20/100 nationally.

To a plea from a recent grad not to kill the new “PER” (?) gym-dance type facility, Worden said they were looking thru “value engineering” at ways to hold down costs, even stretch out in phases, but that dance in particular was a priority.

Asked how she would maintain good women’s education in face of societal mismatch between men’s & women’s assertiveness, Worden said the college would keep a majority of women (nationally, 70-30 ratio), would emphasize strong development towards women leaders, and would have a “very, very intentional” emphasis on gender studies and world-wide women-in-leadership roles.

Asked how A&S had gone about researching its putative male applicant profile (and if in addition to SAT they examined their financial profile), Worden said A&S had proprietary rights to its data and demanded confidentiality; admitted this was “social science”, but did say that the male profiles were obtained only from those who would academically qualify *and were in the time frame of their decision making*. No response to “financial.”

To several complaints about non-solicitation of alumnae opinion and non-communication with alumnae, Worden admitted the internet and PEC had caught them very short, but that they wanted to work with the PEC people. But she claimed it was her lawyers which were holding up or censoring out the college’s ability to respond to PEC and alumnae. And she defended the trustees: 70% are [were] alumnae; the trustees didn’t set out to change.

An alum argued that if Hollins can discount by only 40-42%, what justifies RMWC discounting by 60%! And how can we believe that an administration which has been so unsuccessful up to now will do better going forward?

Another alum held up a recruitment letter which because the college is unclear as to its name, can't but put off any potential applicant.

It was at this point [the 60% discount] that the trustee stood up to describe the college's deteriorating financial position – that this year it was spending not 6% or 7.5%, but 10% of endowment, at which rate the college had little time to fix its problems.

Going back to other sister colleges, someone cited Mills, and either she or Worden pointed out Mills had a grad program, and was sited in [the major city of] Oakland; so far, Worden said, Mills had not met its \$35 million alumnae target, had not increased its enrollment, notwithstanding it did have more day students and grad programs. Worden admitted that Hollins was not only (relatively) fortunate in its location, but “foresighted” in having started up its graduate co-ed programs. Whereas RMWC already had 4-5 other colleges in its “catchment basin”

An alum complained that the trustees' decision ignored “the stakeholders”, and that she believed the A&S report “gave you back what you wanted.”

After which an alum's angry husband announced his angry alum wife was canceling her \$1-2 million bequest to RMWC, and would instead give it to his college, Harvard. Worden said she thought Harvard might not need it as much as RMWC, but she was certainly sorry to hear this.

At which point, during an extension of the husband's remarks, an alum expressed her regrets that “now this is getting ugly.” Which made it a good time for the meeting to close.