

San Francisco town hall meeting 11-11-06 Summary by Sonja Brodt '90

Notes from November 11, 2006 R-MWC Town Hall Meeting, San Francisco

Attending: Ginger Worden, Skip Kuhn, Heather Garnett, and Alice Ball '61, a former trustee from Atlanta, plus at least 20-25 alums, with at least 4 husbands/boyfriends.

Opening statement by Ginger Worden was very similar to what she was reported to have said at Chicago and LA. I did not note everything, but it included references to her leading protests to wear slacks on campus, her friendship with former R-MWC President Linda Lorimer, the beginning of the ACE program (during Lorimer's time, I think??) that mobilized alumnae to recruit more prospective students, and the fact that Lambuth Clark (interim pres after Lorimer) identified declining enrollment as the single biggest issue. President Bowman was hired to work hard on visibility, which she did with numerous projects/initiatives, including the Pearl Buck Award, that brings distinguished women onto campus.

She noted that Trustees can serve 2 5-year terms.

The college has never been meeting the 200 student enrollment target.

During Ginger's tenure as Trustee, they were spending 7% of the endowment every year.

At some point Georgia started offering scholarships to anyone with a B-average or better in-state, Agnes Scott had to increase its tuition discounting as a result, and R-MWC was therefore losing students to Agnes Scott.

R-MWC has 61% retention rate, 63% tuition discount.

Referring to Jolley Christman's letter in Nov 05 about studying coed option, Ginger noted that "we could not imagine that this could really happen" and "we were all so committed to it being a women's college."

Ginger made a big point about Wheaton being "consciously coed", and how the converted colleges that they had studied had many of the same good attributes as before, which really encouraged her.

She apologized about the poor communication with alums "that's all I can do is to say I'm sorry" about not getting information out to alums better.

She pointed out it was crucial to get to 1000 students enrollment, because many granting institutions don't give funds to colleges under 1000.

Ginger quoted Pearl Buck, something to the effect that world peace and [something]... depend on "energy of women combined with men's".

Ginger said she was "grateful" to alums for supporting student strikers.

A&S study is proprietary – "their methodology is what they have to sell in the marketplace."

She noted that the college is very different today from when she attended, but she has come to love it as a changed place.

She said “so now we are assembled as a community to take the strategic plan” forward.

She admitted that “global honors” is a market-driven concept, but it is also what Randolph-Macon already is anyway. Noted first Chinese student, etc.

She mentioned ideas of how alumnae could get involved in global honors. 1) Alums could have travel trips (like they do now) that include service learning components in communities of international students at the college (i.e. alums go the student’s community and do some sort of volunteer work for the community while there). 2) Alumnae could administer a fund that communities in other countries could apply to for micro-loans.

Ginger mentioned that the college stopped having men as occasional degree students on campus when Title IX came into effect, because they didn’t want to take on the added cost of having to offer required athletics to men.

She noted there are now 2 masters programs on campus.

Questions:

Sonja Brodt (’90) said she appreciates the apology for poor communication, but there is more to it than just giving information. The Trustees put a lot of time and resources into research for the strategic plan, but when dedicated and knowledgeable alumnae (who have the same academic qualifications as required for employment at companies like A&S, for example) work hard to add more research to enlarge the perspective, they are ignored. Given that other colleges like Mt. Holyoke have a very open and inclusive strategic planning process, what has gone wrong in the relationship of R-MWC alums with their alma mater, and how can this relationship now be set right so that the alumnae can help in planning the future of their college?

Ginger’s response was that Mt. Holyoke is operating from a place of abundance, and Randolph-Macon is not. She does not think there is anything “broken” about the relationship. All colleges that have gone coed did so by decision of their boards of trustees; it is the obligation of the BOT. “We cannot have a vote of all 13,000 alumnae”, there is no way to have a process that could take input from all alums. (some older alum muttered softly “why not?”)

Alum (from ’60’s?) said her mother was at R-MWC with Pearl Buck. She thinks it is not fair for Ginger to take Pearl Buck’s words and present them as if she was speaking for coeducation. Ginger thanked her for this comment.

Above alum’s husband asked what is the appraised value of the artwork, Ginger said she did not know. He asked why there was no response directly to PEC’s “20 Reasons to Change Your Vote” document, and Ginger responded that PEC didn’t get the document to them until after they had raised the money to file the lawsuit. She also stated that the Board of Trustees president never received a request to hear the “20 Reasons” presented at the Oct meeting.

Someone asked how many male applicants to date. Skip said there are 20-30 so far, and they will not

be offered any different aid than is offered women.

Someone asked what is going to be additional cost of enrolling men. Ginger and Skip responded \$400,000 addition to athletic budget, plus whatever the cost of longer beds. But the questioner also wanted to know the cost of recruiting them. Skip noted that there is currently a high recruitment cost per student enrolled (\$8,000 per student??). This is expected to decline over time with coed.

Ginger noted name will be unveiled Dec 9th 2 pm Eastern Standard time. She hopes it will somehow include Randolph or Macon. Mentioned other possibilities that have been floated (ones we've heard before).

Alum ('06) noted that there is a disconnect between the students and trustees. When she was a student there was an event (a dinner I think?) at which students were invited to meet trustees. The trustee at her table barely spoke to the students. She confirmed afterwards with a fellow student that the whole event was uncomfortable and unpleasant. Usually when trustees came on campus they had their fancy dinners by themselves and then left. She is resentful because trustees don't have their hand on the pulse of the college. It feels hurtful to people like students and alums who have a close emotional connection to the college, because the people who are making the decisions do not have this connection. This decision may be coming from the head (with all the research), but it is not coming from the heart. Ginger thanked her for this input and thought it was a good idea to make sure the trustees are less rushed for time when they come to campus and that they get to know students better.

Alum, '93 asked What do you hope to gain from doing these meetings? Are you seeking input, or not, or [other options mentioned] Ginger responded, "you are right – we are not seeking input" [gave more response I did not note]

Ginger: It is not a statement by the college that single-sex education is not important.

At some point someone (the official hostess, perhaps?) asked us all to clap for Ginger for taking on this difficult job at this time. Most people clapped.

Alum asked why did not consider what are deficiencies in academic programs that are not attracting students. She thinks probably programs offered need to be fixed first. Ginger responded that faculty-student ratio is already so small, they cannot afford to add more academic programs, too expensive.

Alum ('53) stated that even in the 50's they were talking about needing more students. "What I got from college has nothing to do with it being single-sex." It was close faculty contact [and other attributes I did not note]. She joined the Navy while she was there (at R-M) – which proves that she was not afraid of men.

Someone brought up case of Mills College. Ginger said Mills was never able to fix its undergraduate marketing problems because it still has not achieved 1000 enrollment (in undergrad). Have coed grad programs [which enable it to continue].

Someone asked about alumnae asking for money back. Skip said that only around 11-12 have asked for money back, and 9-10 of these had given to the annual fund, not the capital campaign, and the

annual fund is spent immediately to educate women (i.e. the money they had donated was already spent).

Alum said that there is a big disconnect between what is being written from campus and what alumnae are experiencing. Like we are living in parallel universes.

Heather stated that Emily Gill Mills (sp?) is the new Alumnae Assoc President. She said “we are going to be managing decline, we have been doing this for a long time”

Alum '95 said that Randolph-Macon seemed to be fumbling through this as it goes along, losing everything that is unique about it. Where is the plan to go forward strongly? She does not see any such plan.

Someone (Ginger, Skip??) said they need to get net tuition revenue up.

Sonja '90 asked if there is not a disconnect between the fact that the college has always prided itself on a very high percentage of alumnae giving, on the one hand, and on the other hand not taking any alumnae input in visioning for the future of the college. Why should alumnae continue to give, when the entire mission of the college can be changed at any moment? Ginger repeated that there is no process that can allow 13,000 alumnae to have input into the decision process, and that the BOT did the right thing by taking responsibility for this decision. As for giving to the college, that should come if it feels right to you.

Alum (68) noted she is sad about decision but at same time she thinks women should show men how it should be – it is a new opportunity for the college to have men. [at some point earlier in the meeting, another alum ('60's or '70's?) said shame on any of us who think that women today cannot stand up to men.....]

At very end of meeting when Heather and Ginger were trying to close, the husband who had asked about value of artwork earlier spoke up at length, asking Ginger how could she lie about certain facts, referencing papers he had in front of him, detailing at length the dates that the “20 Reasons” was sent to trustees, BEFORE the last lawsuit was filed, and with the stated offer that lawsuits would not go forward if trustees agreed to discuss issues, and that therefore what Ginger had said earlier about not having received the request was not true. Ginger said that the choice as presented to them was basically just to retract the vote and stay single-sex or face the lawsuit, implying this was a problematic set of choices. The man countered that the offer was that they just needed to DISCUSS the issues (not retract the vote per se) to stop the lawsuit.] He also brought up several other related points about things not being portrayed accurately (I didn't do as good a job of catching all details).