

Washington D.C. town hall meeting 10-11-06
Cathy King '95

Ginger spoke for about 30-40 minutes outlining what comes next for the college in the co-ed solution. She mainly focused on the transition process: talking about the six committees and their focus, talking about ways to "preserve" some of RMWC's tradition and focus on women under the new system, talking about the new name. The two front runners appear to be Conway College or Quillian College, by the way. There is basically no chance that the new school will bear any sort of Randolph-Macon name, since Randolph-Macon College owns the rights and they diplomatically but firmly said no. Kind of a relief, oddly.

She did spend some time discussing "Global Honors" with concrete examples of possible... what's the word I'm looking for?... possible methods, I guess; you can't really call them "curricula." For instance, one option suggested that the global studies could begin by giving students a firm foundation and sense of place/ responsible stewardship/ ability to effect change in Lynchburg, and then branch out from there. One means of establishing this sense of place would be to group new students into teams of ten (for example), have them study a document related to Lynchburg history, then go to the places where the events happened and talk to people or descendants of people involved. Pretty good idea, actually, and you've got to wonder why no one has tried it yet...

After the speech came the question session. I had the first question, and I asked how the opening of Founders College would affect us as basically another liberal arts institution in the same area. Ginger said that if it was the new school being opened by that group from Duke (which I think it is), that it was for-profit and based on the philosophies of Ayn Rand (which I had to look up since I never studied it), and therefore very different from us. Having now looked up the philosophies of Ayn Rand, I have to say I agree with the statement that it's very different from the global "Peace and Diplomacy Studies" discussed at the meeting. (Quick refresher: "Objectivism" believes that the achievement of personal happiness is the highest moral goal, and the hero of objectivism is the person who neither gives nor receives anything which is not deserved. Kinda sounds like the current American Way, and doesn't leave a lot of room for community, if you ask me).

An older alum got a round of applause when she asked why in the world the name-change post card had been sent out before the vote. Interesting story, that. Apparently the faculty wanted to see the plan before the board vote (well, duh), and since the Board could not recommend a plan to the faculty if the Board members themselves did not support it, Ginger apparently advised that they solidify their positions "in all but form" (and yes, that *is* a direct quote) at that time. So in other words, yes, Virginia, there really was a vote before the vote, so to speak. I managed to hold my response to that until I left the hotel, because frankly, it started with blasphemy and descended rapidly to the gutter.

There were definitely a couple of "can you *hear* yourselves?!?!!" moments... One was when she mentioned that we had students from 47 countries, but a few minutes later said that we just weren't that appealing to 17-year-olds. OK, if we can get the word out to 17-year-olds in foreign countries, why can't we get it to them in St. Louis or Indianapolis or Salina, Kansas? Another was when she (or it might have been Jolley) talked about another women's college (Hollins?). Because they don't have "women's" in their name, the students will at least open a catalog or brochure and read a few pages before automatically deciding that the school is not for them based on the name alone. I couldn't help but contrast this with Catholic University of America, where I went for a prospectives'

orientation a few years ago. One of their admissions crew said basically (and I paraphrase), "We put it out there. Catholic, University, of America. It's right there in our name. We don't hide who we are." And finally, there was the mention of advice given by (I think) one of the marketing researchers, who said that we shouldn't try to compete with the big schools by being something we're not, so we need to reach down and find the most authentic core of who we are, and market that. Ummm, so apparently academic excellence is part of our authentic core, and being global is part of our authentic core, but being a woman's college isn't?

Ginger also said that she thought women's colleges were still important and good things to have, but there was a subtext of "...but we won't be doing it here."

I wish I hadn't used up my question so soon, because there were others I wanted to ask, such as: If RMWC currently receives approximately 900 applications a year (by their own website), and enrolls approximately 200 new students per year (rounded up, also from their website), how can they have an 87% acceptance rate (from listserv)? 87% of 900 students is 783. Where are the other 583 students going?

Or this one: The college told us that RMWC was in good financial shape, and we believed them. They told us the V.A. Campaign would help assure women's college education into the next century and we believed them. They told us that the college was not currently planning to admit men, and we believed them. Now they tell us that this Global Honors/ co-ed plan is going to save the school. Why should we believe them?

And where do they propose to put that new Lacrosse field anyway? In the Dell? (Meant to be sarcastic, please don't assign it too much credence!)

Interestingly, Ginger admitted that since this had all begun, she had discovered that her statements were "loaded" in a way that she never expected-- and I was in the sort of mood to want to take aim at every loophole. I didn't. I can only hope that someone addressed these after I left.

I was exhausted, disheartened, and outraged, but I got a cool carrot pin (thanks Jen!) and some yummy sage-flavored green cheese out of it, so I guess the evening wasn't a total waste.