

Subject: R-MWC Announcement  
From: Heather Garnett <hgarnett@rmwc.edu>  
Date: 9/16/05 6:10 p.m.

The following e-mail was sent Tuesday 9/13 to R-MWC alumnae who attended Reading University their junior year. It was sent to all R-MWC alumnae last night for whom we have personal e-mail addresses. Apparently, we experienced a technical glitch. We are resending this e-mail in the event you did not receive the original message. We apologize for any duplication.

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President Kathleen Gill Bowman has requested that we send the following two letters to all alumnae for whom we have e-mail addresses.

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September 12, 2005

Dear Alumnae:

With great regret, I write to inform you that the Board of Trustees voted in a special meeting on September 8 to close R-MWC's study abroad program at Reading as of July 2006.

The Reading program has been challenged over the past decade by a number of national trends in study abroad, including students' preference for semester-long or shorter study abroad programs and a widening of students' interests in sites in addition to England. It has been increasingly difficult to recruit the requisite number of students to fill the Reading program, despite the creative efforts of Campus Coordinator Paul Irwin and other College staff. Changes at the University of Reading have also had financial implications for the program.

All of these factors, in combination with the program's high fixed costs and reduced enrollment have led to operating deficits between \$350,000 and \$550,000 for the past five years. A year-long study convened by the Dean of the College was undertaken to explore alternative scenarios for the program's structure and funding. Proposals examined included developing a semester-long option, placing students in University residence halls, creating an endowment for Reading, and employing a part-time director, but it was concluded that none of the changes would provide sufficient financial impact to sustain the program, and that some changes would threaten the quality and character of the Reading experience.

While acknowledging the high academic quality of the Reading program, the Board decided that the program's recurring deficits were an unacceptable drain on the College's operating resources. The disposition of assets from the sale of the Reading property will be determined by the Board in the context of the priorities of the strategic plan, whose goal is to assure the continuing health of the College's finances.

In light of the Board's decision, the administration will make every effort to retain Randolph and Judy Ivy, whose dedicated service to the Reading program has been integral to its quality since 1978; one of the options is to have them bring their many talents to the Lynchburg campus. Tina

Johnson, International Programs Adviser, will work with students to place them in other strong programs in England and, where appropriate, other countries.

This decision will surely come as a disappointment to those who have experienced the richness of the Reading program and who know students whose lives were transformed by it. The Board made its decision in full awareness of the quality of the program, but with the rationale that it needed to focus its attention on new demands being placed on the College by the marketplace.

Kathleen G. Bowman

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September 13, 2005

Dear Members of the R-MWC Community:

In her announcement of the Board of Trustees' decision, to close the Reading study abroad program as of the end of this academic year, Kathleen clearly presented the Trustees' rationale of the factual issues surrounding the Reading program. The program's year-long format has been challenged by a national change in student preferences for semester-long or shorter study abroad programs. Enrollment continues to fall behind the program's capacity and its high fixed costs, off-set by the College's annual subsidy of approximately \$500,000 a year, causes a serious financial drain on the operating budget of the College.

A primary role of the Board of Trustees is to uphold its fiduciary responsibilities and to protect the financial health of the College. In trying to address the Reading issues, the Board asked that an in-depth study of the program be conducted. The year-long study by administrative staff and faculty was completed in August. Alternatives to the current format were identified. However, in the Trustees judgment, none of the alternatives captured the essence of the Reading experience and were any less financially challenging. On September 8, the Board made the decision to close the Reading program.

That being said, it must also be said, there is no good time to close a program-to end a tradition. The entire Board understands the gravity of the decision we made. There are several women on this Board of Trustees who participated in the Reading experience and who know the impact it has had on their lives.

To close this program in no way reflects on the excellent work and dedication of Randolph and Judy Ivy, whose commitment to R-MWC Reading students and the program have enhanced and maintained the quality of the program. Nor does it negate the noble efforts of Campus Coordinator Paul Irwin and other College staff, particularly in the Admissions Office, to recruit new students.

And finally, in closing this program, we acknowledge the disappointment of our students and our alumnae. It was, first and foremost, a financial decision. It is a difficult emotional decision. It is a decision we felt had to be made and a decision that, in our judgment, would be least disruptive to students planning to study abroad.

As Trustees, we realize we are at a moment in the College's history when we need to steward our resources in preparation for the strategic plan currently being developed. At the same time, we believe some programmatic decisions cannot wait for the plan to be completed. The closing of the Reading program and the creation of two new Master's degrees were two such decisions.

The Board's next meeting is November 3-5, 2005 on the R-MWC campus. We will be available to meet and talk with those on campus at that time. Between now and November 3, several members of the Board are in the process of making arrangements to be on campus to talk with students, faculty, alumnae, and the administrative staff. Please feel free to contact any of us with your concerns or questions.

Sincerely,

Jolley Bruce Christman '69  
President,  
Board of Trustees  
Randolph-Macon Woman's College

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