

Letter from Jolley Bruce Christman '69 President, R-MWC Board of Trustees

September 1, 2006

Dear Alumnae, Students, and Friends,

Thank you to all who have taken the time to write to the Board of Trustees with your thoughts on the strategic planning process. I am writing this letter before the Board of Trustees' September 9 vote on the Strategic Plan, although some of you who receive your messages from the College through regular mail may not receive it until after the vote. Some of you though will receive this letter quickly by e-mail and its posting on the R-MWC Web site. I wish that it were possible to communicate with all of you at the same time—and face to face—but that isn't feasible.

I empathize with the dismay at the prospect of admitting men to the College that has been expressed by many of you. I am an alumna; my mother attended R-MWC; one of my daughters attended a women's college; and both of my daughters attended grades 7-12 at a girls' school. Girls' and women's education have been at the center of my personal and professional life.

But as an alumna trustee, and about two-thirds of trustees are alumnae, I am committed to ensuring the healthy future of this College. Randolph-Macon Woman's College has been struggling with enrollment issues for years—since the 1980s. Our hopes, at different points in time, were that young women would change their minds and return to women's colleges (the 1980s), that we could continue the course by growing our endowment fast enough to compensate for the loss of students (the exuberant 1990s), that we could increase the College's visibility through aggressive marketing, and boost its prestige by offering strong financial incentives to prospective students, thus moving to the top tier of women's colleges and earning us a bigger piece of the enrollment pie (the last 10 years). Trustees, not just this group, but trustees going back to the 1980s, have followed declining enrollment trends with increasing alarm as we see so many students choosing large publics and as we see that even our large discount rate won't bring students to campus and keep them there for four years.

It is heartbreaking to hear that many alums and students feel that we are turning our backs on you—not letting you have an opportunity to have a go at these problems. But think of the alumnae who have worked so hard, contributed so generously and so consistently for so many years. It's not as though we haven't had strong support. We have. Could alums do more? Possibly. Would it be incremental, given the enormous challenges in the marketplace? Definitely.

We must make this move now because we are running out of time. Each year that passes puts the College in a more fragile financial position and exponentially so. And we will not go down with flags waving. There will be a decline in morale, and a quieter, more insulated campus as student numbers continue to drop. We will not attract promising young faculty, and many good faculty members will leave, as they see the College failing, as will senior staff. Buildings will fall into greater disrepair, and alums will become disheartened when they return to campus—as I was in the 1980s and saw campus conditions.

Alumnae and students ask to be given a chance to turn things around. You are angry at and disappointed in trustees. But if we postponed the vote, we would only be setting up you and the

College for failure. This is what the trustees have come to understand in our hours and hours of research and deliberations. And this is the thought that none of us can bear because we believe that we would be shirking our responsibility as stewards of the College. It is an incredible responsibility and every one of us feels its weight every day. To leave this decision to another group of trustees who would face it with considerably fewer resources at their disposal has become an unthinkable choice.

I frankly am astonished that I and other trustees are willing to go down this road on our watch, given our own remarkable experiences as students, parents of students, and spouses of students. But we believe that the College has an outstanding future because it is more than a woman's college.

R-MWC is a college with rigorous academic standards, an emphasis on liberal arts, a committed faculty, and a strong, respectful community that takes its moral course from our honor system. We can continue those traditions in a coeducation setting, if that is the Board's vote—and I think that it will be—and expose even more women to them, by pursuing the College's healthy future. They, along with our wonderful human resources—students, alumnae, faculty, and staff—put us in a strong position to face the challenges before us. This College has so much to give to students—male and female—and to the world. We must not let it die.

Trustees and the Strategic Planning Steering Committee have taken great care to read the correspondence that is sent to us personally and to the Web site. And we discuss that input. We are listening. Should the trustees vote to accept the Strategic Plan, we will need your input even more. The Plan calls for six Implementation Teams to take this blueprint for R-MWC and define the details that will shape the College's future. There is more than one place on these teams for alumnae and for students to work and plan side-by-side with faculty, staff, and trustees as we have done in the past, and will continue to do in the future for the College we all love.

With respect and gratitude,

Jolley Bruce Christman '69

President

R-MWC Board of Trustees