



# Carol T. Christ

## Perspectives on Key Issues

### On liberal arts education

“Many would advise a young person beginning her education, ‘As soon as you can, specialize. Study, first and most of all, to be a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, an architect, a banker.’ As sensible as this advice seems, I am not sure that it is the best advice for a world that is changing as fast as ours is. I believe that a liberal arts education is particularly suited to preparing students for the complex world of the twenty-first century. The young men and women entering today’s workforce must also be prepared to tackle multifaceted problems that require more than a single discipline for their solution—urbanization, climate change, large-scale human migration.”

“Elite liberal arts colleges have maintained a strong position in the higher education landscape because, in addition to their prestige, they offer a distinctive set of assets: a low student/faculty ratio, undiluted by extensive use of graduate student teaching assistants or adjuncts; a predominant focus on undergraduate education without the competing pull of doctoral programs; residential life on closely-bound campuses that constitutes a major part of the undergraduate experience; a rich mix of extracurricular programming; and extensive, closely-tied alumni networks.”

“Comparative research on outcomes has shown that the graduates of selective liberal arts colleges earn proportionately more graduate and professional degrees, ascend to more leadership positions in their careers, and have higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience.”

### On educating for global leadership

“As talented young women are increasingly recognized as the hope of their nations, organizations, and families, we need to educate our students to understand the perspective of another country, and to develop in them a commitment to international understanding and institutions. Increasingly, high-achieving women are coming to the United States—and to Smith, specifically—from Asia, India, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, spurred by a desire for a challenging, engaging, global education and by a shortage of spaces in competitive universities in rapidly expanding economies and developing countries.”

“Educating women from around the world speaks directly to a compelling societal need. It answers the question ‘why a women’s college’ in a powerful way. Acclaimed journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, authors of *Half the Sky*, argue that women’s rights are the defining cause of our time. They point to the growing recognition on the part of government, NGOs, and business that focusing on women and girls is the most powerful way to fight poverty and extremism.

“Making progress in addressing this gender gap requires well-educated women from many nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds, globally educated and prepared to lead.”

### On environmental sustainability

“A sustainable future is both a moral imperative and a powerful organizing principle for liberal arts education. As we grapple institutionally with the unfolding knowledge about climate change, we are giving students the experience of shaping and observing the evolution of their college as it addresses the major issue of this century. In educating the next generation of society’s leaders, we can do no less.”

### **On women in science and engineering**

“Science is the last frontier for women. Women are 45 percent of the work force but hold only 12 percent of the jobs in science and engineering. That figure is only 9 percent in engineering. The lack of parity between male and female students in these fields has major consequences in the professions.”

“Science and technology increasingly shape our lives. The expanding power of medicine; environmental sustainability and remediation; the supply of energy; information technology—these issues and many more will shape life on this planet. Women’s voices and creativity must play an important role in their exploration.”

“Women’s colleges have played and continue to play a critical role in the education of women scientists. Women major in the sciences in significantly larger percentages at women’s colleges than they do at co-ed colleges, and they go on to graduate degrees in higher proportions.”

### **On educating women for leadership**

“Women’s colleges give their students a powerful sense of agency in their community that becomes a foundation for effective action and leadership. The World Economic Forum defines leadership in the following way: ‘True leadership is exemplified by those who are able to energize individuals and teams; empower, fertilize and build communities; and recognize and form the talent around them. They are the coaches, learners, teachers and mentors who demonstrate the discipline it takes to make changes to other people’s lives and to our world.’ That vision of leadership is a vision of agency in community; it is one Smith offers.”

*Carol T. Christ is president of Smith College.*