

December 7, 2005

Coffee in NYC for alumnae in their forties

CTC thanked everyone for coming and opened with remarks about identifying Smith's distinctive strengths.

One alumna thought the college should do a better job showcasing successful Smithies. There are many wonderful Smith women doing great things in the world. Many alumnae are very proud of their alma mater and their peers, and the more positive news we have about them the better. President Christ agreed that historically the college has not used alumnae as significantly as it could. Alumnae are invisible on the website beyond the Notable Women section, and this should change. Overall, the college faces a public relations challenge. The president said that too often the media wants to focus on sex and gender issues when there are many other things at Smith to highlight. Alumnae knowing and sharing a variety of information is a very effective way to expand the college's reach, as media outlets are not interested in day-to-day events and successes.

Diversity as a primary value of the college was discussed. Bill Bowen's new book cites Smith as a leader in providing access and valuing economic diversity. This is a challenge facing all institutions of higher learning.

The question of curricular requirements came up. There were mixed feelings in the group about these. Alumnae shared stories of their advising experiences.

The topic of change in women's lives and in life in general came up. The onus for family care and maintenance still remains with women.

President Christ talked about the choices presented to women being too simplistic. They either mimic the male model of a career or the opt-out mom model, which is too all-or-nothing. Smith needs to provide a broader view and range of choices for students to consider. Work/life balance is a must, and it is important for women to understand that life has multiple goals. There are many ways to put together a successful life.

Alumnae asked which institutions are Smith's competitors for students. President Christ explained that Smith does not lose students to other women's colleges, though that misperception is a strong one. The reality is that Smith exists in a very diffused marketplace, and students have many choices. She explained that the two primary persuaders for applicants are 1) visits to campus 2) personal knowledge of an alumna who inspires.

One alumna offered that she feels Smith invested in her and her ability to grow intellectually, and this is one of the reasons she holds Smith so dear. "There was an investment made in each of us, and we want to give back."

The quality of the faculty and their devotion to teaching was praised. President Christ compared the depth of faculty engagement at Smith to Berkeley, and noted that the difference in her latest experience is extraordinary.