

Shaping the Future of Smith College
November 10, 2005
New York City

This event was focused on women in Finance.

CTC presented her overview about the dialogues, her view of Smith's distinctive strengths, the view of the faculty, the curriculum review underway and the strategic planning process that will soon begin.

Comments were as follows:

The climate on Wall Street is inhospitable for women. Often diversity is limited to the back office and Human Resources Departments. An alumna explained that she is among the top 200 employees in her firm. Of that top group, there are six women and one African American man. This is very painful for her.

She feels that Smith needs to teach women to think in a linear fashion. Statistics and knowing about to look at problems statistically is a crucial and necessary skill. It is especially important for salary negotiations!

Opinion about what the CDO could offer in the way of career preparation was offered. Specifically, salary negotiations, how to navigate work cultures, who to promote yourself in your career. There was agreement that women in general do not know how to do this. Smith should help prepare graduates to do so.

It was suggested that Interterm offer time management and work/life balance courses or colloquia.

A woman who works in her company's Human Resources department told a story about the different ways gendered behavior is perceived and received. In her experience, when women offer balanced assessments of a situation (e.g., opportunities and challenges,) she can be received as being negative and is labeled as such. If men offer a more "everything is fine" perspective, they are received as being team players and positive. This leads to issues of gender remaining unaddressed in the work place. Smith could examine this trend.

Carol shared information about the program being developed that will explore women's life narratives. The supposition for this is that women cannot develop a vision for themselves without one. "How do women make a life for themselves" is the question. The issues women face change decade to decade. The goal is to gather data on this and capture the knowledge.

One alumna asked Carol to assure her that Smith is not contemplating going coed. Carol explained that this question is explicitly off the table.

One alumna offered that Smith is right to offer students quantitative skills and public speaking. There was consensus that women do not speak up enough. There was conversation about women being catty and destructive with one another in the work place. One alumna observed that as a graduate of Smith, she feels better prepared to respect the talents of other women and that women who attended women's colleges relate better to other women than those who did not.

There was discussion about the curriculum, the question of requirements. Carol explained that 75% of Smith students take Latin honors.

One alumna asked about the impact of the dining system changes on student's ability to develop community, and the sense of intimacy the dining system generated that she valued so highly. Carol explained that there has been a shift from creating housing community to campus community.

One alumna offered that she was formerly very opposed to the changes in the dining system but that now she realizes she was holding onto the past. Dining was a part of her unique Smith experience, but that doesn't mean there aren't other experiences that are equally valid and meaningful.