

**SFS Event Notes**  
**Sarasota, Florida**  
**February 10, 2006**

**Host:** Peggy Keller Townsend '50

President Christ began by outlining the topics of conversation and the strategic planning process as it is unfolding at Smith.

Following her description of the planning context, alumnae posed the following comments and questions.

**Members of Classes of the Forties**

How does President Christ feel about the government designing our education curriculum? The president responded that colleges have a good sense of what education should be, and one size doesn't fit all. It's important to measure results.

An alumna noted that her granddaughter chose not to attend Smith because of perceived lesbianism on campus. President Christ responded that what is often perceived as a "problem" is a common misconception among people unconnected to campus. Lesbian students on campus are not an issue at Smith itself; there is a PR issue off campus.

Are we training for disasters? The president noted that we have taken a hard look at our procedures after Katrina and have revamped disaster policies.

**Members of Classes of the Fifties**

One alumna thought Smith could have offered some courses that would have been more applicable to the real world such as creative writing for journalism, or constitutional law for law school. She mentioned making "connections" to life after Smith. If Smith had shown her different choices, she might have made different decisions. President Christ mentioned Praxis and WFI as Smith programs that helped students make those broader connections and transition into the world by introducing core workplace skills.

Another alumna remembered from her freshman yearbook that each student was required to give a certain number of hours of community service because of a staff shortage due to WWII. She wanted to know if students have lost their sense of giving back to the larger community. Several alumnae lamented how young alumnae have not learned how to give back; they feel that younger generations haven't learned this at home and that just teaching them about philanthropy may not work. President Christ mentioned student groups going to Mississippi over breaks to help with Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. She noted that equipment from closed Smith kitchens was donated so that a soup kitchen could be re-equipped in that area. She also mentioned that Smith staff could take a week off with pay to work in the affected hurricane areas, and that all employees can take one day with pay to volunteer in the community. Students remain organizers and leaders in community service efforts.

An alumna asked whether Smith will have another campaign in the near future. President Christ mentioned the work being done in association with Smith's decennial re-accreditation and explained how institutional priorities will emerge from that work.

One alumna said she believes that Smith alumnae don't give because of what Smith is becoming, referring to the lesbianism issue. They are happy with what Smith used to be. Another alumna felt people won't give because of a loss of dining services in some of the houses.

An alumna asked what role Ada Comstock Scholars play at Smith. President Christ noted that they make up about 8% of the student body and range in age from 24 to 87. One professor left a bequest intention to challenge faculty to support the ACS program.

### **Members of Classes of the Sixties**

An alumna asked whether all students should have some financial responsibility for their education. Would it be more valuable if all students were required to give something even if their families could pay the full tuition? This prompted a discussion about community service and giving back. High schools require community service. How can we help young people to carry on this tradition at the college age? Alumnae asked whether Smith still has SOS? (Service Organizations of Smith), to which the answer is a definite yes; SOS is active at Smith today.

### **Members of Classes of the Eighties**

An alumna noted that Smith gave me a sense of belonging and confidence. "Although I didn't have the chance to meet many alumnae who went before me," she said, "I have a sense of who they were from Smith traditions. Why am I a teacher? Because I was lucky enough to have good teachers in high school and at Smith. My professors were great role models, and I became a math teacher."

Other alumnae suggested that we should hold women's college fairs to show that single-sex women's education is still relevant.

### **Members of Classes of the Nineties**

Alumnae noted that public speaking is an important part of life. Being able to do this well is a byproduct of the confidence Smith instills. In Florida, there is a push to get everyone ready to work, which raises the question of the future of education for the sake of learning. An alumna noted that she would hire liberal arts graduates because of their broad backgrounds.

Another alumna noted that part of our strength is in finding good women role models. Are students able to make connections with people in various professions? President Christ described the alumnae in media event last spring on campus as a specific effort in that area and that Praxis internships are also a way to "try out" a career.

One alumna helps her club with student recruitment, and financial aid is a big subject. She described a school of thought that says if you're middle class, you can't afford

Smith. People wonder, is it really worth spending \$100,000 more to go to Smith than to go to a state school? President Christ responded that Smith limits the amount of loan from Smith a student can have to \$17,000 over her four years. While the debt is significant, it is feasible for middle-class families.

An alumna asked whether the WFI (Women and Financial Independence) program builds in the notion of giving back, of philanthropy? She was dismayed that philanthropy doesn't seem to be an issue with young alumnae. She thinks of her Smith education as a gift and feels many students graduate with no sense of giving back.

Another alumna noted that there seems to be a conflict between coming out of Smith thinking that "you are #1, you can do anything you want" and then having to take an administrative job, which makes young alumnae feel like they haven't achieved.

An alumna was concerned that there is a perception that Smith doesn't need any more money with reports of our endowment reaching the \$1 billion mark.

Another alumna suggested that we should always talk about the CDO as one of our assets. It offers lifelong engagement for alumnae. The graduate programs are also an asset, especially the School for Social Work, which is very prestigious.

President Christ thanked the hostess and the alumnae for their time and thoughts.