

**Shaping the Future of Smith
Palm Beach, Florida
February 8, 2006**

Fifteen alumnae and President Christ engaged in a free-flowing conversation focused on those capacities the alumnae feel Smith graduates should possess.

Writing was mentioned immediately. President Christ spoke of the writing requirement and the likelihood that the faculty will adopt a requirement in quantitative reasoning. Several alumnae mentioned financial skills and expressed appreciation for the Women and Financial Independence program. Alumnae agreed that communication skills, including public speaking, were of paramount importance.

Civil discourse provided the basis for much of the conversation. Examples given included understanding religious diversity; while people may understand it in concept, it is particularly hard to attach it to individuals. Civil discourse must be modeled by faculty among themselves and in their classrooms. Students must practice multiple ways of expression, including writing and speaking.

Alumnae asked what is the best way to develop the capacity for thinking about ethical issues?

Students must be “global thinkers.” There is a crisis in leadership in our country. Globalization is happening amidst American ignorance of the rest of the world and even of our own country. Determine a way that those who return from junior year abroad can share their experiences so that everyone benefits from their international experience.

Students have to learn to value diversity in society. They should know how to listen and how to confer, how to discuss fear and violence or anything else, just to have the experience of sharing ideas and opinions. Give people the opportunity to discuss controversial or difficult issues in comfort.

Students and others must reach into themselves and define their own value structures: What are the choices before me—what do I value? What does it mean to be a human being?

Explore issues with practical applications to how you function in the world. This requires more than skills and information. How are you fed spiritually?

After four years at Smith, graduates should emerge with a strong sense of self-esteem. They should be healthy physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

President Christ shared news of athletics, the new fitness center, and wellness initiatives through the Chapel and Health Services.

The group discussed the need to develop the capacity for social engagement and urged the college to increase opportunities for community service; incorporate service learning into courses or in volunteer positions; teach responsibility to the whole, not just your class or religion; and encourage participation in the big issues of our time.

In considering how the curriculum could be structured to support such goals, the group suggested that:

- You can't focus only on science, technology and math. Fine and performing arts provide a means of communication.
- Students should develop a better sense of history and its impact on today
- Students must appreciate different cultures, starting with the different religious beliefs of this nation.

Alumnae also suggested that leadership and teamwork go hand-in-hand and are developed together. The Lewis Leadership Program is wonderful; could it expand to include alumnae? Might a post-grad program cover business skill development? Is there a way to incorporate newly retired folks with management and leadership training into work with students? Experienced people can demonstrate the abilities needed to handle the complexity of the world today.

In closing, President Christ thanked the host and alumnae for their participation and ideas.