

**Shaping the Future of Smith
Pasadena, CA
March 21, 2006
Host: Marilyn Brumder '60**

Approximately 20 alumnae from a wide range of classes attended this event. Marilyn welcomed the alumnae and Carol, adding that she was honored to have had hosted four Smith presidents in her home. Pasadena Smith Club President, Sarah Mangold '91, introduced Carol.

Carol thanked Marilyn and Sarah and briefed alumnae about the strategic planning process, reminding them of all that was accomplished in the This is About Smith Campaign, which was the outcome of the college's last strategic planning effort.

An alumna from the '70's mentioned Swarthmore's student news group, who had initiated correspondence with people in Iraq, and asked what kind of entrepreneurial projects are taking place at Smith. Carol described the Smith World Affairs Council conference, as well as the WFI student group's SmithThrift project.

Alumnae were most interested in curricular initiatives. A graduate alumna from the '60's, who majored in fine arts, expressed interest in understanding what the college was doing to provide exposure to the new media technology. Carol explained her goal of bringing together art, science, and technology, and her plan to hire a media technology director to work toward creating a major in this field.

In response to a question about how student needs inform course development, Carol answered that we have lots of information about Smith students' skills and needs, both upon entering and leaving. There is evidence that they need enhanced quantitative reasoning skills, and, interestingly, students seem more interested than faculty in making this a requirement. Independent study is another area students would like to see developed. Carol reiterated her comment that more forceful advising might provide the guidance students are seeking, including recommending courses for competencies in certain areas. Many faculty are interested in the idea of a "capstone" experience for students. Carol noted that the courses least taken are math and foreign languages.

In response to a question about the Five College Consortium, Carol mentioned the curricular cooperation which takes advantage of the strengths of the member colleges, e.g. filmmaking is located at Hampshire College. She also cited the consortium as an important aspect of social life, citing the spring break trip that Five College students were making to help with the Katrina rebuilding effort.

Another alumna praised the listening skills she developed in the classroom at Smith, in addition to writing and speaking. Carol agreed that good listening skills are key to her objective for civil discourse on campus and described programs such as the Hot Seat, where a panel comprised of several faculty and students are given a "hot topic" to debate.

An alumnae from the '70's expressed her high regard for the Junior Year Abroad programs and suggested that Smith invite students from other countries to come to Smith while our students are abroad to give students on campus broader exposure to other cultures. Carol talked about the Women's College Conference that began at Mt. Holyoke and Smith several summers ago, which included presidents and senior staff from women's colleges around the globe. This January the second meeting took place in Dubai, and several students from Mt. Holyoke College spent time at a women's college in that country at the same time. The next step is creating an international students conference for women from colleges around the world. Further questions arose regarding international students, and Carol responded that 8% of Smith's student body is international. Admission for these candidates is extremely competitive; typically, there are ten applications for each opening, and this group is traditionally financially needy. Carol told the group that Smith welcomed its first student from Afghanistan this year.

Several alumnae mentioned the importance of retaining good faculty and inquired about the plans for ongoing faculty recruitment and development. Carol agreed whole-heartedly and replied that opportunities for faculty development are available at many different levels. New course work requires faculty development. She pointed to Patrick Coby's re-enacting history course that he developed based on a model first used at Barnard, which has met with great success at Smith. Carol mentioned that more than a third of Smith's faculty may retire within this decade, so faculty recruitment and development is an especially important topic.

More questions ensued about the relevance of women's colleges. One alumna asked if this issue was a component of the strategic plan. Carol affirmed that it was, but that it was a complex one because so many students come to Smith despite the fact that it is a women's college but leave as advocates of women's education.

Questions also arose about student life. Carol affirmed the importance of the house system and explained the revitalized plan for consistent renovation of the residence houses. Maureen Mahoney, dean of the college, added that her staff has worked diligently over the last ten years to heighten the awareness of the importance of residential life in the overall Smith experience and to find ways to integrate classroom and residence life. Carol also spoke to the need for students to find ways to balance their lives with social and physical outlets. She cited the Campus Center and the Olin Fitness Center as great advantages in this area. She also touched on the Narratives of Success project, recently funded by an alumna, which will address how one develops a well-rounded life.

In response to questions about financial aid, Carol explained that 61% of our students receive aid, a figure of which we are very proud. Carol added that statistics show only 10% of the U.S. population can afford the full cost of tuition, making accessibility a critical issue. When asked about the financial implications for the college of such a generous financial aid policy, Carol explained that the college had developed a financial equilibrium plan that took this factor into consideration and made the aid levels possible.

Further questions were asked about demographics and their potential impact on admitting the very best students. Carol replied that statistics indicate students are favoring big, urban schools, and that the population is moving southwest. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Smith to make the case for small, liberal arts colleges, emphasizing our strengths such as Praxis, Stride, and excellence in the sciences and engineering. In addition, a judicious use of financial aid will be paramount. Alumnae awareness of programs and comfort in speaking about the college to others are extremely important.

Georgie Erskine offered the suggestion that everyone attend reunion. It is the very best way to re-connect with friends and the college and to know Smith today.

Carol ended the session with thanks to the host and those who attended.