

**Shaping the Future of Smith  
San Francisco  
March 24, 2006  
Hosted by Gladys Thacher**

Approximately 35 alumnae attended this conversation with Carol Christ. Gladys Thacher is widely known in the Bay Area Smith Community, and her home was a great venue for the event.

President Christ thanked Gladys for hosting and framed the discussion highlighting Smith's distinctive strengths and asking for input and ideas from alumnae.

One alumna congratulated Smith on the role it has played in Junior Year Abroad study and international study in general. She suggested that the college continue to build on this strength and recruit as many international students as possible.

An alumna commented on the need for Smith to teach students to listen well in addition to teaching public speaking. It is also important for Smith to create opportunities for students to be exposed to cultures other than their own.

Smith needs to speak out about science, the general social debate about intelligent design, and the role that religious thought is having on dampening scientific research. This is a dangerous trend that the academy needs to treat seriously.

One alumna suggested an activist-in-residence idea with Gloria Steinem, which gave President Christ the opportunity to describe the work the Sophia Smith Collection is doing to help activists document their history through filmed interviews.

An alumna spoke eloquently about social responsibility being a proud part of the Smith tradition. She thinks part of Smith's institutional mission is to help women find their voices, be they spiritual, ethical, or philosophical.

Another alumna, who is looking at colleges with her college-aged daughter, spoke on the importance of Smith faculty having a strong dialogue about the openness of the curriculum and lack of requirements. Although she loved the curriculum as a student, now that she is a parent, she feels differently because she has a perspective about what she feels her child needs to learn in college.

Carol explained that the younger faculty are more open to the idea of core requirements. There is agreement among faculty about the need for a distribution, but there is not yet agreement about how to get there.

Some women voiced regret that they don't have a broader science background. Others stated that they learned to stand up for themselves at Smith and to push back and deal with the politics of the workplace.

An alumna commented that she liked the fact resources at Smith weren't handed to her. She felt she had to find them, and, simultaneously, that Smith provided a safe space to fail, which is important both to learning and to creativity.

There was discussion about the importance of quantitative skills, especially as related to statistics, and finances, and knowing the "huge power" of what makes an impact.

One alumna highlighted the value of Smith being diverse and how much she appreciated being able to live and learn with people who were unlike her in background. The housing system at Smith provided an opportunity to learn about others in a very meaningful way.

Another spoke about the important role Smith played in validating her sense of self and knowing that it is okay to be smart and to be a leader. She felt her experience prepared her well to succeed as one of few women at Harvard Business School. It empowered her to say, "I can do this; women have achieved, and I will too."

Alumnae asked about what else Smith can do to better prepare current students for the realities that work and life bring. President Christ talked about the imbalance in the way the media frames and portrays this question, and agreed that the college can do much more to address these questions. She described the Narratives project and the importance of women developing multiple narratives for themselves over a lifetime.

One alumna said that Smith gave her the power to define herself and to be brave in doing this. An alumna urged the president to use her full power as the head of a women's college and said, "The world listens to Smith." She went on to urge President Christ to be "more out there."

Another woman said she missed being around a lot of smart women, and she wished there were more alumnae opportunities to connect, via the web, pod casts, and more activities in general.

President Christ thanked the participants and their host for the ideas and comments.