

**East Bay SFS event
Hosted by Carolyn Dundes '57
Berkeley, CA
March 25, 2006**

The Smith club president, Lynne Withey '70, introduced Carol, who welcomed everyone and thanked Carolyn Dundes '57 for hosting.

She laid the groundwork for the conversation by talking about the profound impact a serious strategic planning process can have. She illustrated this point by describing the accomplishments of "This is About Smith" and the changes it helped usher in at Smith.

She explained that one of the most valuable elements of her conversations with alumnae is that rather than describe subjects Smith should offer, the dialogues are focusing on the most important capacities Smith should seek to develop in its students. The primary question to answer is, "What should the next ten years at Smith look like?"

Her goal is for the strategic planning process is to define, in precise terms, 6-8 issues for the decade ahead. These initiatives will be identified and taken out on the road in the next campaign. (40 Shaping the Future of Smith events have taken place thus far. 18 of those have been on campus.)

She opened the discussion by asking those gathered to reflect on their experiences since Smith and offer ideas and insight.

One alumna raised questions about computer science offerings, which led Carol to explain that she wants computer science to be integrated into the curriculum. A major that combines computer science with arts and technology is being proposed.

The macro issue at play here is the intersection of the internet and technology in every field. An alumna then raised the issue of the importance of personal safety related to computer use and the question of ergonomics. Carol synthesized this issue as computer fitness in general for all Smith students.

The conversation turned to what participants felt they gained from their Smith education. One said that the best skills she learned at Smith were those she learned outside of the classroom. Another offered that as a woman jazz saxophonist in a field dominated by men, she faced lots of discrimination. At Smith, she developed great self-confidence with her peers. When she moved into the real world, she realized that she needed to learn networking skills.

Carol broadened the topic to say that in her conversations with the Smith community in California, interesting questions have emerged as to the Smith "bubble." What is the extent to which it enables growth and empowerment, and what is the extent to which it does not prepare alumnae for competition in male-dominated fields. So, the question becomes, how do women learn to push ourselves forward?

The issue of the "opt out" generation came up. Carol shared her view that the piece in *the New York Times* was poorly researched, and that she learned after the fact that a number of staff at the *Times* did not want to publish the piece. She also said that the piece focused mostly on affluent women, so there was an overall absence of a reality check to the article.

Carol feels that work-life issues for women is a huge topic and that women's colleges have not done enough to address it. She thinks it is troubling because the way the issue is framed implies a foreshortened idea of what women's lives can be. Work lives can last for 50 years. It sells all women's potential short to look only at education and children as all defining. What are the other models that work that we can highlight as viable and worthy?

She believes it is problematic that as a society, we are not challenging the work place to change to more actively incorporate the various ways of looking at women's work lives. She feels it is unhealthy to work 80 hours a week, and that this is a macho idea. Time put in does not necessarily measure worth. She thinks that the impact of the corporate culture has led many women to start their own businesses in order to have work life balance. One alumna pointed out that life balance is important for men and women and that families should be able to find a way to lead balanced lives.

Alumnae voiced the need for more sophisticated career counseling using both the CDO and alumnae in various fields who can speak honestly and from their own experience for reality checks and strategies about how to navigate and succeed.

The conversation turned to how Smith might play more of a national role in strategic thinking about education and to influence the conversation in ways large and small. Carol spoke about her desire for Smith to punch more than its weight. She said that because of Smith's size and strength, the college is uniquely positioned to grow in key ways, and that coming from her experience at Berkeley, she realizes what a luxury and gift this is. She feels that the national moment is coming where many educators are going to be asking the questions Smith is asking. Smith can be a laboratory for learning how to motivate women. What works well, and what can be extrapolated and shared. She emphasized that because Smith is so well endowed, the institution has the luxury of envisioning a future in innovative ways.

The issue of a student leaving because she was so uncomfortable with the presence of gay students emerged. Carol said that the campus and senior administration in particular is struggling in a positive way with how to make space for every student. She described both the Hot Seat and the At Odds programs. These are examples of tools being employed to educate students about the need to be able to argue one's case and agree and disagree in civil fashion. She went on to describe 2 studies; 1) the Dean of Student Life has hired an anthropologist to interview students in depth about this issue so that Smith is not arguing by anecdote.

Real data is needed to know what the issues are vs. the perception of the issues. 2) OID Common Ground looks at the kinds of communities that exist within the campus community. Groups have multiple identities. One of the findings that came back is an interest in greater political diversity. Carol went on to say that as a country we have lost the ability to talk to each other. This is troubling and must change.