

**Shaping the Future of Smith  
Reunion I  
Neilson Library Browsing Room  
May 19, 2006**

Approximately 25 alumnae, parents, and spouses from reunion classes attended this event. President Christ welcomed the group and briefed them on the status of the current strategic planning process, of which Smith has completed about a third. She reminded the group of all that was accomplished with the last comprehensive campaign, This is About Smith, which evolved from the college's last strategic planning effort. President Christ mentioned as accomplishments the Brown Fine Arts Center, the expansion and renovation of the Lyman Plant House, the Olin Fitness Center and the Campus Center. She talked about the new programs added to the curriculum including the Poetry Center, Kahn Institute, Women in Financial Independence, Praxis internships, and the new engineering program, all of which have been transformative to the college.

President Christ told the group that she has had 50 conversations around the country to gather input and ideas from a variety of alumnae, parents, and friends of the college. She said her goal was to end the year by defining eight planning objectives and develop proposals and initiatives to fund those goals.

A class of 1956 alumna commented on the need for a core curriculum and said she thought it was important for students to be exposed to all disciplines. President Christ explained that there is a lot of discussion within the faculty about the pros and cons of distribution requirements, and noted that students receiving Latin honors and engineering students have requirements for study in other disciplines. She said that Smith has found it is more likely that students in the sciences take a range of courses in the arts and humanities than it is for the arts and humanities students to branch out into the science curriculum.

A 1956 alumna asked how Smith planned to teach public speaking skills. Carol said that Smith was prepared to look at a number of different ways to address this issue and discussed the Collaborations program where students present the results of their work with professors. Some Praxis internships will have coaching and public speaking opportunities. The faculty have said they will put public speaking into their curriculum across the board as they do with writing. Currently, all engineering students have senior design projects for which they are required to give public presentations.

An alumna from the Class of 1981 said that she had spent her time at Smith concentrating on the arts and humanities and had not developed quantitative skills. Since there were no core requirements, she did not move out of her comfort zone during her studies at Smith. She said that she wished that she had more structure and encouragement to take some science classes while at Smith. She expressed concern about encouraging students to get more depth and breadth in their studies, and she wondered how to get the message across to potential students that Smith is affordable and has financial aid available. President

Christ mentioned sticker shock at the cost of tuition and continued that it was hard to get the message about aid across, especially with a long tradition of students going to state universities and colleges because of the lower tuition.

President Christ talked about the recent science and engineering weekend which brought back an extraordinary gathering of 70 women in the sciences from the classes of 1950-2005. She said the gathering was inspiring and gave her a sense of the long history of sciences at Smith. She mentioned that Smith has developed a culture of faculty-student research.

Nearly all of those who attended the recent engineering and science conference readily agreed that they would be willing to serve as mentors and provide networking opportunities for students interested in the sciences. President Christ noted that the new director of Smith's Career Development Office was eager to work closely with the Alumnae Association to establish a stronger alumnae network.

A School for Social Work parent asked how time spent on faculty research affected the quality of teaching at Smith. President Christ assured the group that the main focus of Smith's faculty is on teaching, and faculty at Smith conduct research in their fields, but not at the same level as that of faculty at research universities. She noted that faculty at research universities teach a third of the courses that the Smith faculty teaches. In addition, Smith faculty members work closely with students so that students gain the opportunity to learn research techniques. If the faculty is engaged in research, it makes them better teachers, and our faculty does well with balancing the two elements.

President Christ noted widespread agreement that Smith educates and encourages students to make a difference in the world. We want to develop and strengthen that sense of contributing to the world by providing opportunities for social engagement for our students. She added that almost half of our Smith students study abroad, that Smith has a very strong language program, and that we want to help our students become more literate in different cultures.

In the area of life after Smith, President Christ reported that Smith was developing programs for J-term and working with the CDO to enable students to think about the workplace skills they need to develop at Smith. How can we provide students more opportunities to learn about different careers and how to manage the work/life balance? Alumnae from different decades have expressed different concerns. For example, alums in their 20s are concerned about how to get into the workplace, while alums in their 30s and 40s are more concerned with the work/life balance. President Christ said that Smith is considering what the school could offer in the area of continuing education, either post-baccalaureate or pre-baccalaureate program.

A parent of a Class of 2006 Picker engineering remarked that her daughter had definitely gained confidence in her quantitative reasoning but was questioning her choices for life after grad school and how she would ever be able to balance family and work life. President Christ stated that there will be a new J-term class called Narratives of Life with

examples of work/life balance. Laura Nash will be speaking about her new book entitled *Just Enough*, which addresses that question. We all have multiple goals trying to juggle family, work, and social needs; we want to address those questions for our students.

A gentleman in the audience asked how we prepared students to learn relationship skills that would be needed in the workforce. President Christ noted that one Smith's strengths is the self-governing house system whereby students develop relationship skills as they govern themselves and resolve the conflicts that arise when groups live together. Smith's student government association is very strong and provides students with various leadership and negotiation skills as they work in campus groups, clubs and student-run organizations.

An alumna asked how Smith planned to involve alumnae more directly as mentors to current students. President Christ spoke about the recent conference for alums in the media which included a tea to which students interested in that field were invited. Next spring, Smith will host a conference on women in the law and will provide opportunities for students to learn about legal careers and network.

An alumna questioned the sustainability, upkeep, and maintenance of current campus buildings while continuing to build new buildings. President Christ explained that Smith has tended to build for the centuries and questioned whether we might consider a different building model of less expensive and less enduring structures. As an example, she pointed to the out-dated science center that could not be renovated to meet current code standards in order to be eligible for federal grants. President Christ said that a careful review of the last two year's operating budgets revealed that Smith had not been putting enough money into building maintenance. Smith's inventory of new buildings is an area that makes us more competitive in attracting students and faculty.

An alumna from the Class of 1956 said that she had once attended and enjoyed a Smith Spectrum program and asked whether the college would re-institute a similar program in the future as a way to connect alumnae to the college. The alumna noted that during that weekend the treasurer gave a report which compared the cost of a Smith tuition with the cost of a mid-sized Chevrolet and wondered what type of car would be the comparison today. President Christ compared a Smith education with a luxury item and said that the issue of tuition cost was one of our biggest challenges. She noted that a family earning a combined income of \$100,000 was now considered for financial aid.

Another Class of 1956 alumna questioned whether our Admission Office takes into consideration a potential student's ability to pay when considering admission. President Christ acknowledged that Smith is need-sensitive and not need-blind (She noted that in about five percent of admission decisions, the ability to pay tuition is taken into consideration). She also noted that Smith still has more students on financial aid than many other comparable colleges.

A class of 1981 alumna remarked on the news of Smith's reaching a \$1 billion endowment level and questioned the need for more fundraising. President Christ said that

the wonderful growth in our endowment enables Smith to offer financial aid to 60% of the student body and that we spend \$40 million per year of our annual operations budget on financial aid. We have a 10:1 student/faculty ratio, and we are careful guardians of the endowment. Smith spends its money very carefully for the benefit of its students and provides the kinds of access and range of choices that make Smith attractive to current and future students.

A class of 1982 alumna questioned whether a gift to the Alumnae Fund contributed to the annual operating budget. President Christ responded with a big yes and remarked on how a significant amount of the annual operating budget was earmarked for financial aid as well.

An School for Social Work (SSW) alumna and Smith graduate asked what kinds of financial support Smith offers to the SSW for financial aid to its students. President Christ noted that Smith provides all the central administrative support for the school, and that all the SSW expenses for faculty salaries and financial aid are paid by the school.

A 1956 alumna asked how Smith educates its students about the importance of cross-cultural experiences, understanding the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and understanding Muslim cultures. Students have expressed an interest in learning more about class awareness and ways of thinking about class in America. President Christ said that Smith will be developing opportunities for more community volunteerism. She noted that Smith is one of the few colleges to have a paid Muslim chaplain. In addition, Smith has opened a kosher dining room, which many students have declared to be one of the best food options on campus.

President Christ said that the next steps in the strategic planning process would be to develop initiatives and proposals to meet the goals of the strategic planning process, with the expectation of having a completed plan in place by Spring 2007.

President Christ thanked the group for coming and concluded the meeting at noon.