

Carol T. Christ

10th President of Smith College



In 2002, Carol Tecla Christ became the 10th president of Smith College.

Born in New York City in 1944, Christ attended public schools in northern New Jersey. In 1966 she graduated with high honors from Douglass College and went on to Yale University, where she received the Ph.D. in English.

In 1970 Christ joined the English faculty at the University of California, Berkeley. As chair of her department from 1985 to 1988, she built and maintained one of the top-ranked English departments in the country. She entered the university's administration in 1988, serving first as dean of humanities and later as provost and dean of the College of Letters and Sciences. In 1994 Christ was appointed vice chancellor and provost (and later became executive vice chancellor). During her six years as Berkeley's top academic officer, she was credited with sharpening the institution's intellectual focus and building top-rated departments in the humanities and sciences. In addition, she helped shape Berkeley's campus policy in response to Proposition 209, the 1996 California law barring the consideration of race in college admissions.

Christ, who was the highest-ranking female administrator at Berkeley until she returned to full-time teaching in 2000, has a well-established reputation as a champion of women's issues and diversity. Her first administrative position was as assistant to the chancellor on issues involving the status of women. She describes her undergraduate education at Douglass, the women's college of Rutgers University, as formative and has, in the words of a colleague, "an intellectual and emotional commitment to women's education."

At Smith, Christ has led an energetic and wide-ranging strategic planning process to identify the distinctive intellectual traditions of the Smith curriculum and foster initiatives to further develop students' essential capacities. *The Smith Design for Learning: A Plan to Reimagine a Liberal Arts Education* builds upon Smith's history of pedagogical innovation, identifying priority areas—among them, international studies, environmental sustainability, and community engagement—for significant investment over the coming decade. The product of two years of intensive work and the engagement of thousands of alumnae, faculty, staff and students, *The Smith Design* advances Smith's mission to "educate women of promise for lives of distinction."

In the area of capital planning, a number of major building projects have come to fruition during Christ's tenure: the renovation of and addition to the Brown Fine Arts Center; a dramatic new campus center; a renovated Lyman Conservatory; the impressive Olin Fitness Center; new homes for the Poetry Center and the Mwangi Cultural Center; the renovation of Lilly Hall, home of the college's School for Social Work; and the construction of Conway House, an apartment building for Ada Comstock Scholars with children. Construction is under way for Ford Hall, a state-of-the-art, sustainably designed classroom and laboratory facility named in recognition of its lead donor, the Ford Motor Company Fund. When opened in fall 2009, Ford Hall will be home to the college's pioneering Picker Engineering Program as well as the departments of molecular biology, chemistry, biochemistry and computer science. Under Christ's leadership, Smith has made significant commitments to environmental sustainability in its curriculum and campus operations, including the construction of a co-generation facility for power and heat and the dedication of the MacLeish Field Station, a 200-acre woodland tract in Whately, Mass., for environmental education and research.

In various forums, including the American Chemical Society, the Chautauqua Institute and the Council for the Advancement of Education, Christ has addressed such issues as women's careers, civil discourse and the expectations and demands of accountability in the academy. Her op-ed articles have appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In 2004 Christ and Mount Holyoke College President Joanne Creighton co-hosted an international conference on issues and challenges in women's education, which also examined women's study of science. The resulting organization, Women's Education Worldwide, comprises 50 colleges on five continents and is committed to developing collaborative strategies to increase access to high-quality education for girls and women. Under Christ's leadership, Smith has made significant commitments to international and intercultural studies and to global outreach and recruitment. Thirteen percent of the class entering in fall 2009 are citizens of countries other than the United States. Environmental sustainability has emerged as a central theme in Smith's curriculum and campus operations, as reflected in the construction of a co-generation facility for power and heat and the dedication of the MacLeish Field Station, a 200-acre woodland tract for environmental education and research.

While developing Smith's ties across the country and around the world, Christ is equally committed to strengthening relations between the college and its local community. She is a member of the board of directors of the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, Clarke School for the Deaf and Northampton's renowned Academy of Music. In addition, she has established a community advisory board to address such issues as affordable housing and Smith's support for Northampton's public schools. She serves on the board of the Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE), is a science education adviser to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and is a trustee of Sarah Lawrence College.

Throughout her administrative career, Christ has maintained an active program of teaching and research. She has published two books: *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetic of Particularity in Victorian Poetry* and *Victorian and Modern Poetics*. She also edited a Norton Critical Edition of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and co-edited the *Norton Anthology of English Literature and Victorian Literature* and *The Victorian Visual Imagination*. She is professor of English at Smith and continues to teach, offering seminars on science and literature and on the arts. In 2004 she was named a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in recognition of her contributions as a leader in higher education. In 2007 Yale University Graduate School presented Christ with its highest honor, the Wilbur Lucius Cross Medal, in recognition of her distinguished achievements in scholarship, teaching, academic administration and public service.

Christ has an avid interest in music. She has studied the piano since childhood and learned to play the viola as an adult.

Her son Jonathan is a graduate of New York University and lives in New York. Her daughter Elizabeth is a Mount Holyoke College alumna and is pursuing graduate studies.

Christ resides on campus with her husband, Paul Alpers, a scholar of the literature of the English Renaissance. He holds the title of Class of 1942 Professor of English Emeritus at Berkeley and is professor in residence at Smith.