Smith Community Discusses Change

Smith’s campus erupted into a foray of self-examination and collective discussion on topical issues centering on race and injustice. Three disparaging letters, one from an alumna to the student-run newspaper, The Smith College Sophian and two anonymous notes sent to a Smithie in Parsons House have created a climate where students, administration, faculty, and staff are all asking for institutional change. At the all college meeting on April 16, President Carol Christ reaffirmed the purpose of education, taking a line from Dr. Martin Luther King: “I wonder if education is fulfilling its purpose?”

Perhaps change will take a curricular focus, policy revisions, or a more welcoming environment to diverse perspectives, as the faculty teach-ins and student open-mic session recommended. One thing is clear: the college is alive with possibility and opportunity. Earlier in the month, students rallied and marched about the issues, proclaiming “diversity does not equal social justice.” Staff has an important role to play, holding meetings, serving as role models, and working on their own internal disparities.

The Staff Council Chronicle encourages staff and faculty to get involved in the ways they see fit. As the students chanted, “respect existence or expect resistance.”

Staff Recognized by Students

This year’s winners of the Gavel Award were Linda Zeitler from Wilson House and Sharon Fagan from Student Affairs. The Gavel Awards have been administered by the Student Government Association (SGA) since 1985 and are given annually to two staff members (service and administrative) as a token of appreciation for the many ways in which staff members affect the lives of Smith students. The awards were presented at Rally Day.

Augusta Gronquist ’14, vice president of the SGA, writes: “The students from Cushing House were so determined that Linda be recognized, and I completely understand why. In our brief interactions, it was clear to me that Linda is kind, generous, and caring—and every bit as great as her nominations made her out to be.

“Sharon is the office manager of the Student Government Association, but she is also kind of a life coach for many of the cabinet members. She makes sure everything runs smoothly and always goes above and beyond to make our lives easier. The entire cabinet is so grateful for her hard work and her caring nature, and for her great life and fashion advice!”

Congratulations to Linda and Sharon!

NYC Bus Trip, May 5

There are only a few seats left for the New York City May 5 bus trip. Tickets are $39 for a round trip ticket. To reserve your seat on the bus or to get more details, send an email to staffactivities@smith.edu.

All-Employee Picnic, July 11

The All-Employee Picnic will be held on Wednesday, July 11, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Chapin Lawn. This lunch-time gathering will be a nice break in the day to mingle with fellow colleagues and enjoy college catering’s delicious food. More details, including how you can be involved by helping out on the day of the picnic, will be available in early June.
Laurie Fenlason Speaks to the Chronicle

Describe your role at the college.

I have been at Smith 14 years. I started as the media relations director, pitching stories about Smith to reporters and editors and fielding their questions. Now, as the vice president for public affairs, I serve as the chief public affairs officer for the college, a role that encompasses everything from admission marketing to Web and digital communications to special events and alumnae communications. I am blessed with a terrific College Relations staff. They’re talented, experienced, hardworking, creative – and they have a great sense of humor.

Where are you from?
I grew up nearby, in Longmeadow and Springfield, then went to the Philadelphia area for college. My career has taken me to a number of places, including Ann Arbor, Michigan; Washington, D.C.; and upstate New York. I have loved my time in Northampton, and at Smith, and am grateful that my daughter, Isabel, now a freshman in high school, has grown up in this city and on this campus.

What past (professional or personal) experiences have shaped you into the person you are?
I have always appreciated good writing – of all kinds, all genres – and it’s a privilege to work at a place that has so many good stories to tell. My main work-study job in college involved interviewing students and faculty and writing about their accomplishments. Promoting a liberal arts college is really about promoting ideas and the transformative power of ideas; that’s the part of my job that intrigues me the most.

What are your current projects of interest?
Over the course of the last year, I have represented Smith in the creation of the Women in Public Service Project, an initiative of the five sister colleges and the State Department to bring women around the world into elected office and public service. The project arises from the idea that our country’s leading women’s colleges – Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Smith, and Wellesley – have a remarkable legacy of educating women who serve in every cultural and civic capacity, and our networks and convening capacity can be brought to bear in even broader contexts. (In her down time, Laurie enjoys kayaking, playing squash, and gardening.)

Your role on the presidential search committee:
I am honored to be the staff representative on the presidential search committee and have begun working with Staff Council to involve staff in the process. The committee has held a number of listening meetings to understand the qualities and experiences that the Smith community seeks in its next president. If you couldn’t attend but have views you would like to share, the presidential search website offers feedback forms (http://www.smith.edu/newpresident). Your message can be anonymous, and it will go to all members of the search committee.

Ideas for Staff Summer Book Solicited
The Staff Council Diversity Committee is excited to announce it is developing a summer reading program for staff! We would welcome your input. Have book ideas? Our focus this year is on class/rank. Want to help us read suggested titles and select the book? Please send an email to Diversity Committee co-chairs Jessica Usher (jusher@smith.edu) or Joanne Benkley (jbenkley@smith.edu) and get involved!