

December 11th 1983.

Dear Dr. Wilson:

I was somewhat disturbed to read in a recent copy of the News-Gazette that the matter of Washington and Lee becoming co-ed was once again in question. During correspondence with Bill Washburn I mentioned my reactions, and he has urged me to let you know my point of view.

I still believe the president of Sweet Briar was correct when, during a previous flurry over the matter, she said firmly that there remains a definite place for the single-sex college in this country. There is something about such an institution which creates an atmosphere quite superior to that in places where boys and girls attend college together.

I happened to spend some time on the Princeton campus the first year they were co-ed, and I've been back there at intervals since that time. I could not escape the impression that the girls were there in good part to hitch on to some male, possibly for that reason alone. My hosts had luncheon meetings, so I went to eat in the principal spot just off campus where seemingly most of the co-eds gathered for the noontime repast.

The atmosphere was too like that of a late night hangout, with the girls literally all over the boys.

Friends close to things at Dartmouth tell me the place has gone way down since it turned co-ed. I know the college where I taught for many years has dropped to nothing since it became co-ed - not in numbers, of course, but in general atmosphere. The fact that all of my former colleagues, except one, have departed for other locations may or may not be one of the results.

When I was in Lexington for one of those special Fall conferences a few years ago, I asked everybody in sight their opinions. I found only one person - Betty Munger at the Book Store, who was indeed rabid on the subject, though she did say two Faculty men were in favor, also. I was impressed by the unanimity of the students who were with us throughout the conference. All seemed to agree with the view of one, Sandy Stradtman, who said "We are within 50 miles of five girls' colleges and can get dates any time we want. We don't need girls around all the time."

As a matter of fact, I have taught a number of classes including women of varied ages, and I know without doubt that the level of work is not the same. Even the large course in which I had members of 17 orders of nuns, plus priests, brothers, and assorted lay people was simply not up to standard. I have nothing against mixed groups in grad. work - in fact I suspect the two-sex classes

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at that level are better for the varying points of view.

I noted that there was a question as to whether W&L might lose in numbers of students unless the change to co-ed was made. From the published reports, it does not appear that the college has suffered in number of applications for admission. And judging from the evident good quality of the students I saw and talked with during attendance at the last two May reunions, there is no loss of quality to this point.

I know I belong to a past generation, and I recognize that turning co-ed is the 'thing' at the present time. Yet I truly do not want to see W&L 'fall in line' just to keep up with the current trend. We have something most remarkably unique at W&L, and I do hope we do not take a chance on losing that fine thing.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely,

William D. Hoyt

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B.A. '32, M.A. '33

(over)

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WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY
LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

January 3, 1984

Mr. William D. Hoyt

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Rockport, Massachusetts 01966

Dear Mr. Hoyt:

Thank you very much indeed for writing about the coeducation question. The matter has arisen here yet again, as well you know, probably in no small part because I am just now finishing my first year and began, in that initial period, a whole series of inquiries. The health of our admissions picture, now and in the years to come, was only one focal point, but an important one, in our studies.

We have lost 114 points in average board scores since 1965, twenty of those in the past year. A more troubling sign is the decline in "yield," that is, the decline we have experienced in the number of accepted applicants who finally matriculate. This past fall we had to accept 890 students to enroll 360. This is a very low percentage, as well you know, and we fear we lost more than our share of the best of that group.

Of course we try to find out as much as we can about why these young men decline our invitation and where they go and why they have chosen as they have. Most frequently they tell us they have chosen a coeducational college of similar quality, Duke or Vanderbilt, or Davidson or Sewanee or UVA or William & Mary (to name only our regional rivals). Their school counselors tell us the same thing and tell us, too, that we lose many potential applicants in the first place who will not even consider, as a viable option, an all-male college. They believe it to be an artificial environment and cannot imagine any pedagogical or social advantage. It doesn't help much to tell them that women's colleges abound in the valley, within 50 miles in any given direction.

These are the difficulties we are now required to struggle with and I fear they will only deepen as the high school population drops off sharply in the years ahead. Our problem is to judge, as best we can, what will help us to become stronger in these years facing us. Some honestly believe that our drawing power will be increased by remaining all-male because there will be almost no others like us in this respect. Others fear this will merely make us appear to be a curious eccentricity, clinging to a form that no one, any longer, recognizes as valid.

It is a perplexing problem to sort through. If only we could see the future clearly! At any rate, please know that we are not taking the matter up as part of a trend. The trend is long since past us. It is,

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rather, a matter of determining how to keep Washington and Lee selective in the face of a quite dramatic decline in the number of high school graduates in the decade ahead--and in ways which will preserve all the essential features of our academic life here. Is our all-male character an essential feature? Some would say it is beyond argument. Others (including alumni now on the faculty) claim that our gender is a small and inconsequential part of what is most important about the experience here.

I have heard from 81 members of the faculty thus far. Four of that number argue against coeducation. Five are cautiously neutral. Seventy-two strongly urge the Board to begin at once the process of altering our undergraduate admissions policy. Nine of ten alumni faculty are strongly for the admission of young women. It is enough to give one serious pause, especially because the alumni faculty know the place so well and love it so deeply.

If you have further thoughts to add to your earlier letter, I hope you will not hesitate to write again. I know the Board will welcome your views.

Most sincerely,

John D. Wilson
President

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