

Campus Correspondence

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

TO: Members of the Monday Luncheon Group

FROM: F. Parsons



DATE: June 11, 1984

As we discussed earlier today (June 11), I am sending you a copy of summaries of the alumni questionnaire made by Mr. Hotchkiss and Mr. Hanna.

May 23, 1984

Coeducation Study

Subject: Alumni Survey

Prepared by: Farris Hotchkiss

This paper is an overview prepared to describe the main findings of the alumni survey. Copies of the survey itself have been prepared for every member of the Board of Trustees for detailed study. There is a wealth of information in the survey about alumni attitudes concerning the coeducation question, and a wide range of other information about alumni opinion on institutional characteristics. This summary attempts only to identify main concentrations.

The survey itself was conducted by Southeastern Institute of Research, Inc., of Richmond, Virginia. The company submitted a draft questionnaire for review by Washington and Lee's senior administration before mailing to approximately 16,500 alumni. 40.6% of the 16,500 alumni responded (6,697). Of the 6,697, 78% hold the undergraduate degree; 15% hold the law degree; 13% attended but did not take a degree; 76% were members of a social fraternity at Washington and Lee; 28% identify themselves as having served the University in some volunteer capacity; the median age of all respondents is 43.6 years; 30% have sons living at home; 28% have daughters living at home; 37% are either lawyers or business executives; 68% live in the South and Southwest (Virginia 22%, Texas 8.6%); 19% live in the Northeast.

The report is 172 pages in length including an Executive Summary, Detailed Findings (narrative) and 96 tables. The Executive Summary and the Detailed Findings sections are based on a study of 500 of the 6,697 responses. A test of the reliability of the 500 selected responses, compared to the 6,697 total responses, was found to be 97% accurate.

Before answering direct questions about the coeducation issue, respondents rated the quality of the faculty, the close student-faculty ratio, and the honor system respectively as the top three institutional values among a list of 13 such characteristics, responding to the request to mark all 13 as "more important," "less important," or "not important." An all-male undergraduate enrollment ranked 9th of the 13. But when asked to identify the top three of the "more important" items as "most important," the top three then became: quality of the faculty, the Honor System, and academically selective admissions. All-male undergraduate enrollment then moved up from 9th to 4th on the "most important" list. 86% of the respondents agree that academic excellence is Washington and Lee's top priority.

Looking at the question of coeducation per se, 59.8% of the sample 500, and 58.5% of the total 6,697, indicated that they were opposed to undergraduate coeducation. Of the sample 500, 27.4% indicated they were in favor of undergraduate coeducation, with 28.9% of the total 6,697 respondents indicating they were in favor of coeducation. The remainder in both groups indicated they had no preference.

The questionnaire then shifted to a search for opinion about undergraduate coeducation when viewed within the context of a perceived problem in national demographic patterns as those patterns may affect the number and quality of prospective male applicants. When considered as a possible solution to such a worsening admissions picture, alumni respondents twice voiced majority views indicating a preference that Washington and Lee yet remain all-male on the undergraduate level; e.g. 55.1% said that they thought every reasonable effort should be made to maintain the all-male undergraduate policy; and 52% said that they would be willing to adjust enrollment (size) and programs to remain all-male. However, when the question was asked whether alumni would want to maintain the University's all-male undergraduate policy if that meant a downward adjustment of qualitative admissions standards, the above referenced majority, formerly in the 50% range, changed to a minority of 23% who indicate they still would prefer that Washington and Lee remain all-male on the undergraduate level. In a separate section of the questionnaire, 41% of the respondents identify themselves as believing that the University's all-male undergraduate environment is a tradition to be preserved "at all costs." Therefore, what might be viewed as alumni most strongly in favor of the school's remaining all-male would be a group making up between 23% and 41% of the survey's respondents.

Respondents in the group of classes 1955 to 1964 who, arguably, would presently have the largest number of college-age children are about evenly split on the coeducation question. The group of classes 1965 to 1974 are reasonably similar in opinion. Class Groups before 1955 and after 1975 are more opposed to undergraduate coeducation.

If Washington and Lee becomes coeducational on the undergraduate level, the largest number of respondents (31%) would prefer a slight expansion of the student body to 1,500, with 1,000 men and 500 women. In another section of the questionnaire, respondents (61%) indicated that proper institutional size is more important than the sex of the undergraduate student body.

In the area of student recruitment and attitudes about their own children, 72% of the respondents said that they would encourage their sons, or other boys, to attend Washington and Lee if the school remains all-male. That percentage of respondents fell to 49% on the prospect of the University's becoming coeducational on the undergraduate level. If the school becomes coeducational, 42% of the respondents said that they would encourage their daughters, and other girls, to attend.

Respondents identified the most potentially negative effects of undergraduate coeducation to be injury to sister colleges, deterioration of fraternity social life, and a weakening of the intercollegiate athletic program. 68% see no danger to the Honor System were coeducation to be adopted in the undergraduate college. The most potentially positive effects of coeducation are seen as improvement in classroom discussion and learning, extra-curricular activities, and general campus ambience.

Much more can be learned from the survey. I invite your attention to the full report.

Attached are accounts of two similar surveys at other schools: Davidson College and Lafayette College.

DAVIDSON update

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Four Surveys Back Move to Coeducation at Davidson

A majority of the faculty, staff, students and alumni of nearly-all-male Davidson College, responding to a coeducation questionnaire, have said that they "favor increasing the number of women students at Davidson."

The plan receiving the widest favor was, "Davidson admits from three to five hundred women as regular students, while keeping the number of men students at approximately the same level."

But on matters such as how coeducation should be phased in and financed, and what the effects of coeducation might be, there was a wide variety of opinion.

The questionnaires were distributed and tallied by a faculty subcommittee on coeducation chaired by History Professor W. Brown Patterson. Another subcommittee is

studying the financial aspects of coeducation in the light of the recommendations of Patterson's group.

The two subcommittee reports will be considered by the faculty's Educational Policy Committee, which will make a recommendation to the full faculty. The faculty's recommendations will be referred to the president, who will make his recommendations to the college trustees. The trustees are scheduled to consider the matter in May.

Since Davidson's beginnings in 1837, it has been all-male. In the past two years it has participated in an exchange program with seven single-sex colleges in Virginia and with Queens College in Charlotte. Each year about a dozen women in the exchange have lived and studied at Davidson for one year.

At least since September 1968 co-

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(From Page 1)

education has been under discussion at Davidson, and the college's trustees said in 1970 that they would consider a plan for coeducation if it were "economically and educationally feasible."

The questionnaires were distributed to all Davidson constituents. Completed forms were returned by 83.5 per cent of the faculty, 60.3 per cent of the students, 52.7 per cent of the staff, and 27.1 per cent (2,655) of Davidson's nearly 10,000 living alumni.

A total of 13 questions were asked, allowing respondents to express opinions varying from uncertainty to "feel very strongly." Questions requiring a "yes" or "no" answer also allowed a "not sure" answer, and many concerning the future effects of coeducation drew many "not sure" responses.

Other results were as follows:

—Increasing the number of women was favored by 68.6 per cent of the faculty, 75.9 per cent staff, 90.7 per cent students, and 59.3 per cent of alumni.

Lafayette Alumnus News

OCTOBER 1969

College Plans For Coeducation

Lafayette will never be the same. After a year's study, the board of trustees decided last spring that it was time to reverse more than 135 years of tradition by letting the girls in.

While the exact date for the admission of women has not been decided, the board of trustees made three decisions during a September 13 meeting that moved the College closer to the day when girls will walk on the quad as students.

At the meeting, the trustees



In the library



... ah ... ah ... , oh, well

Alumni Questionnaire

Preference of respondents by number of replies

Classes	00-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-68	Total
Favoring all-male	127	286	231	185	446	310	1,585
Favoring admitting women	30	62	111	166	294	445	1,108
No preference	7	20	16	16	39	17	115
% response from decade	25%	24%	18%	17%	18%	20%	20%

57%

Response by occupation

Occupation	Clergy	Educator	Profes- sional	Business	Gov- ern- ment	Engineer- ing & Science	Other
Favor all-male	26%	37%	50%	62%	35%	63%	64%
Favor admitting women	65%	58%	48%	35%	55%	33%	32%
No preference	9%	5%	2%	3%	10%	4%	4%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
No. of responses	46	245	365	866	105	681	481



... and finally in the classroom.

May, 1984

DRAFT

Alumni Magazine Article on Surveys

Three separate surveys conducted this spring to gauge opinion on the many questions associated with the admission of undergraduate women to Washington and Lee discovered that majorities of the alumni and students favor W&L remaining all-male while a majority of faculty favor coeducation for the University.

While the alumni were surveyed through a questionnaire administered by a Richmond research company, a W&L sociology class conducted the surveys of the students and faculty as part of a project in research methods.

Reports on the three questionnaires were presented to the Board of Trustees during its spring meeting May 24-26.

Though the three surveys differed in many respects, all the constituencies -- alumni, students, and faculty -- placed major emphasis on the importance of the University's academic quality.

THE ALUMNI SURVEY: Questionnaires were mailed to approximately 16,500 alumni and were completed by 40.6 percent (6,697).

On the specific question about coeducation, 58.5 percent of the 6,697 indicated that they were opposed to undergraduate coeducation while 28.9 percent favored it. The remaining 10.6 percent indicated they had no preference.

The possible adoption of coeducation was then placed in the context of demographic projections showing a *substantial* decline in the college-age population during the next 10 years. In light of those projections, 55.1 percent of the alumni said they thought every reasonable effort ought to be made to maintain the all-male undergraduate policy while 52 percent said they would prefer adjusting the size of the University and its programs in order to remain all-male.

Asked whether the all-male undergraduate policy should be maintained if that meant a lowering of admissions standards, 77 percent of the alumni expressed a preference for coeducation.

One section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to rate a series of characteristics of the University as to their relative importance. Alumni rated the quality of the faculty, the close student-faculty ratio, and the honor system as the top three institutional values in that order. In that section 86 percent of the respondents agreed that academic excellence is Washington and Lee's top priority.

Respondents identified the most potentially positive effects of undergraduate coeducation to be improvement in classroom discussion and learning, extra-curricular activities, and general campus ambience. The most potentially negative effects were seen as damage to the surrounding women's colleges, deterioration of fraternity social life, and a weakening of the intercollegiate athletic program.

FACULTY SURVEY. The sociology class distributed questionnaires to all members of the undergraduate faculty and received responses from 120 of 141 of 85 percent.

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Asked whether they believe Washington and Lee "should become a coeducational institution," 65.5 percent of the faculty responded they "strongly believe it should" become coed while another 16.8 percent indicated they "somewhat believe it should." There were 3.4 percent with no opinion, 6.7 percent said they "somewhat believe it should not" and 7.6 percent "strongly believe it should not."

Asked whether they thought coeducation "would be in the best interests of W&L with regard to attracting academically qualified students," 72.9 percent of the faculty strongly believe it would, 11.9 percent "somewhat" believe it would, 11 percent believe there would be no change, 3.4 percent "somewhat" believe it would not, and 0.8 percent strongly believe it would not.

The survey asked faculty to list in order of importance both the advantages and disadvantages they feel coeducation would have on the university. Faculty cited "better students" as the No. 1 advantage and potential cost as the primary disadvantage.

Meantime, 83.3 percent indicated they think the academic environment would be "greatly" or "somewhat" enhanced by coeducation.

According to David Novack, associate professor of sociology who directed the student survey, the faculty is more strongly in favor of coeducation now than it was in 1981 when 76.9 percent favored coeducation in a similar survey.

STUDENT SURVEY. Administered during registration for spring term classes, the student survey was completed by 1,297 undergraduates, or 84 percent, of the undergraduate student body. In addition a telephone survey on non-respondents was conducted to validate the findings of the broader study.

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In the student survey, 22.3 percent said they "strongly believe" W&L should become coeducational with 20.1 percent saying they "somewhat believe it should." There were 4.7 percent with no opinion while 33.9 percent said they "strongly believe W&L should not" become coeducational and another 19 percent indicating they "somewhat believe it should not."

Meantime, 62.1 percent of the students said coeducation would be in the university's best interests with 32.1 percent choosing "strongly" and 30 percent choosing somewhat. There were 13 percent indicating there would be no change, 11.5 percent said they "somewhat believe" it would not be in the university's best interests, and 13.4 "strongly believe" it would not.

Asked how they felt coeducation would affect the academic environment at W&L, 56.1 percent of the students indicated that it would be either "greatly" or "somewhat" enhanced by coeducation.

Students listed "loss of tradition" most often as the primary disadvantage with "increased academic standards" the primary advantage.

More than 80 percent of the students felt coeducation would harm the fraternity system at W&L either greatly (32.3 percent) or somewhat (49 percent). More than half (50.4 percent) the students said the presence of women in the classroom would not be a distraction to them while 44.8 percent said it would present "somewhat" of a distraction.

Comparatively, a majority of students (50.2 percent) in a 1980 survey of the students favored coeducation as opposed to the current survey in which a majority are opposed.

Examining the recent survey in light of previous surveys on the issue, Novack said one of the most noteworthy trends the sociology students had found is "that both students and faculty are becoming

increasingly concerned about academic standards. That becomes apparent when you consider that a majority of both students and faculty perceive coeducation as worth adopting to maintain or improve W&L's academic standards. Also, the primary advantage of coeducation listed by both faculty and students was improved academic quality."

Disagreements between students and faculty concern potential problems for the students as a consequence of attending an all-male school, noted Novack.

"With the changing role and place of women in our society, two-thirds of the faculty believe that our students might experience problems when they encounter women in graduate programs or in the work place while only 18 percent of the students share that concern," he said.