Ginger Hill Worden, Interim President, responds to
“What Every Trustee Should Know”
and
“What Every Trustee Should Know”
and
“20 Reasons Why You Should Change Your Vote”

Introduction

With its vote to adopt the plan entitled “The Future of the College,” The Board of Trustees made
difficult and responsible decisions defining a bold new direction for the College. This strategic
direction enables R-MWC to continue as a college of academic excellence and work toward a
healthy financial future.

Some alumnae and friends have found the Board’s decisions hard to accept, and a group of
individuals is trying to convince the Board to change its vote. The Board recognizes that the new
strategic direction is unpopular with some current students and some alumnae. However, the
Board’s responsibility is to ensure the viability of the College today, as well as for its future
students and alumnae.

I respect those who are having difficulty accepting this transition, and I want to address the
concerns raised and some of the misconceptions presented by Preserve Educational Choice
(PEC) in the two documents they directed to the Board of Trustees and disseminated widely
among R-MWC alumnae, faculty, students, parents, and the media. At the same time, I must also
note that PEC is the group coordinating and funding lawsuits against the College in response to
the Board’s strategic planning decisions.

Response to What Every Trustee Should Know

The Board began its Strategic Planning process over three years ago. The Strategic Planning
Steering Committee appointed by the Board was exhaustive in its efforts to collect and analyze
information. PEC claims to have examined “volumes of information” in one month. The
Committee and the Board spent three years of careful study reviewing available information,
which covered not only data of the kind reviewed by PEC, but also a wealth of data and other
materials from many other resources including peer colleges, both coed and single sex. Of
necessity, some of this information was obtained under pledges of confidentiality. Every outside
consultant questioned by the Board, including lawyers, auditors, marketing and research firms,
and financial analysts, confirmed that the process was thorough. The Board’s decisions are based
on robust, professional market research that was supported by extensive internal research.

1. Tuition Discounting: We agree that tuition discounting is a major problem for the College.
PEC provides several anecdotes as evidence that R-MWC offers unnecessary financial
assistance, but our admissions counselors can respond with many more testimonials about
students who could not or would not have enrolled without attractive scholarships. R-MWC
awards merit scholarships to strong students. The College also has a wonderfully diverse student
body, many of whom can attend R-MWC only with financial assistance. To sustain enrollment at just over 700 students, we have had to use tuition discounting to meet financial need and also to attract students who are strong academically. We have been unwilling to lower academic standards in an attempt to enroll more students. Now, to achieve financial equilibrium, we must increase enrollment and begin lowering our tuition discount. Research shows that we can accomplish this as a coed institution with a new distinctive direction, but not as a single-sex institution.

2. Marketing: PEC asserts that R-MWC has developed marketing strategies and prepared marketing materials without professional assistance. This is not true. The College has used nationally known marketing firms for at least the past 30 years to help promote the College. We have routinely hired outside consultants to advise us in the areas of enrollment, financial aid and discounting, fundraising, and business planning.

For marketing the College, we have used some of the nation’s top firms including North Charles Street Design (many years ago), Hill & Knowlton, Communicorp, Selbert-Perkins, Stamats, and now we have again engaged North Charles Street. We have also used the nationally known Martin Agency to help increase visibility of the College. Contrary to assumptions reported by PEC, we have invested heavily in marketing through the years.

PEC assumes that Sweet Briar’s pink Think marketing campaign has been successful because the “Sweet Briar Trustees didn’t limit A&S’s assistance to merely providing a plan for transitioning the college to coeducation.” It is important to understand that the R-MWC Board hired A&S to conduct market research that would help us determine how to achieve financial stability as an institution of academic excellence for women. A&S did not provide us with a plan, nor did the College limit information to which A&S had access. PEC also assumes that “A&S sent only two people to R-MWC for only two days to evaluate the existing programs before launching their marketing surveys to identify a new strategic plan.” The A&S team made 10 visits to campus and participated in numerous teleconferences with the client committee and strategic planning steering committees during its research. Again, A&S provided research, not a plan. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee developed the plan recommended to the Board.

3. Admissions: PEC claims that “The student survey of September 2006 concluded that the PER building is not the marketing problem that you have been led to believe.” It is not clear how the survey was conducted, what questions were posed, how many students responded, etc. But what is clear from our admissions staff is that prospective high school students visiting R-MWC often comment that their high school facility is better than our college level facility. We lose good strong students who are also athletes to schools like Bridgewater and Randolph-Macon College because our PER facilities—relatively unchanged in 45 years—are inadequate. Athletic Director Val Cushman provided an example: 13 prospective students who play soccer visited campus in 2004-05, and none matriculated. Many of those students indicated that they had concerns about the facility. We receive e-mails from many prospects indicating that they had a great campus visit, they loved the team and the coach, but the facility was inferior compared to other colleges. Experienced admissions counselor Jim Duffy commented, “The need here goes even beyond
marketing to prospective students. We also have to enhance the experience of our current students with an updated facility, including updated dance facilities and wellness facilities, to adjust to the changing expectations and health needs of students today.”

4. **Global Honors:** PEC reports “a large number of faculty members met in an informal meeting on September 29, 2006. …a number of those present at the informal meeting expressed the view that the concept of ‘global honors’ is meaningless and therefore can’t be implemented.” In response, Bill Coulter, Dean of the College, has observed that the negative comments mentioned came from an unspecified number of faculty members at an informal faculty meeting attended by less than half of the R-MWC faculty. He has also said, “Many faculty members recognize that the Global Honors concept is deeply rooted in the College’s history and strengths and are eager to build upon those strengths in innovative ways. In fact, 50 faculty members volunteered to serve on the Implementation Committees. Members of the Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee are already receiving ideas and suggestions from many of their faculty colleagues.”

5. **Staff Issues:** PEC states that “data show there was a 50 percent staff turnover in 2001,” however, no footnote indicates the source of this “data.” The College’s turnover rate for 2001 was actually 21%. Although this is far lower than PEC claims, this rate is higher than normal for the College. In recent years, the College has lost valued staff members to local employers paying 20%-30% higher than R-MWC. This is an unfortunate side effect of the College’s budget-cutting efforts and another reason we need dramatic change. We need to provide competitive compensation to attract and retain good faculty and staff.

PEC also states that “expert development officers from other colleges” note that R-MWC’s development staff size is “more than twice the staff of other schools.” The experts are not identified, nor are the other schools, but, presumably, this is one area in which PEC thinks we should tighten our belts. They fail to compare our investment in fundraising with peer institutions like Sweet Briar, Agnes Scott, Sewanee, Hampden-Sydney, and Hollins, where development staffing levels are comparable. They also ignore the fact that the institutions with much smaller staff, like Bridgewater College, Ferrum, and Mary Baldwin, routinely raise about half as much money as R-MWC, or even less.

A more appropriate measure of fundraising effectiveness is cost of fundraising. The questions most experts ask are “how much does the College spend to raise each dollar, and is the investment worth the return?” This is information the Board monitors carefully. During the campaign years ending June 30, 2006, the College spent less than 14 cents for each dollar raised. In 2005-06, our fundraising cost was under 12 cents per dollar. Liberal arts institutions average between 15 and 18 cents per dollar for mature programs not in a campaign period.

6. **How the Strategic Plan has Affected the Campus:** Dean of Students Sarah Swager reports that our students are not of one mind or one voice regarding the coeducational decision. While some students came to the College because of its single sex environment, many more came in spite of it. Some young women who initially chose R-MWC for its academic strength and close
community are now among the strongest proponents of single sex education, while others are pleased that we will become coed. Hundreds of students have eloquently expressed themselves throughout the process to trustees, administrators, faculty, and alumnae, and many have e-mailed impassioned and moving letters to the Board. Many students are now actively engaged in developing the strategic plan through their work on Implementation Committees. Students and faculty serving on the Coeducational Environment/Campus Life Committee will travel to other coed colleges that were formerly single sex, including Wheaton and Wells, to learn more about how we might make a successful transition to coeducation.

7. How the College has Been Run: The College operates on a tight budget. Fixed expenses such as technology, health insurance for faculty and staff, and energy costs, have increased substantially while net tuition revenue has remained relatively flat. We cannot keep cutting budgets and expect the College to become stronger. We want the College to be acknowledged and celebrated for the quality of its education.

8. The Strategic Planning Process: There is much inaccurate information in the PEC documents about the College’s strategic planning process. This description of the process will help educate interested alumnae and friends about the process we followed.

Art & Science Group began its research for the College in late summer 2004, reviewing College materials that ranged from academic catalogs, admissions publications, and student survey results to fact books and financial reports. The President appointed a client committee to serve as the principal interface between the College and A&S. PEC claims that alumnae were not represented on the client committee; in fact, the client committee comprised 15 people including the President; 5 faculty; the president of the alumnae association, who was elected by the alumnae population; the alumnae director; the associate dean; trustees; and senior administrators. Five alumnae from classes ranging from ’68 to ’97 were represented on the committee.

In September 2004 A&S representatives came to campus for an intensive two-day strategic assessment in which they met with the client committee; admissions, development, alumnae, and student services staffs; faculty, student, and alumnae groups; senior administrators; and the President. The following month A&S returned to campus to present the strategic assessment findings to the client committee and to the Board of Trustees, inviting exchange about their findings in order to move forward with a clear understanding of the College’s core characteristics.

A&S undertook their research in steps, gathering data from alumnae, current and withdrawn students, inquirers during the application period, and admitted applicants during the decision period. Each survey was developed in collaboration with the client committee, and survey progress was reported regularly while the survey was in the field. After analyzing results from each survey, the A&S team discussed its findings with the client committee, the strategic planning steering committee, and frequently with faculty, staff, and trustee audiences. All presentations invited dialogue about the findings. The A&S team made 10 visits to campus and
participated in numerous teleconferences with the client committee and strategic planning steering committees during its research.

A&S presented its final report of strategic implications and marketing recommendations to the client and strategic planning steering committees, trustees, faculty, and staff in November 2005. The report, which included several scenarios, identified an Honors College emphasis as having the strongest market appeal for women, but even with the honors emphasis fully implemented and made known, projections of possible levels of enrollment fell far short of the levels identified by the College as needed to ensure financial sustainability in the long run. The data indicated, however, that admitting men would likely have a powerfully positive impact on the women in the College’s pool.

As President of the Board Jolley Bruce Christman ’69 explained in a letter mailed to students, alumnae, and friends of the College on November 10, 2005, the Board commissioned A&S to undertake a second phase of research to explore the feasibility of the College’s going coed with a distinctive identity. If the College were to go coed, could females and males be expected to enroll in sufficient numbers to achieve financial sustainability and make such a significant change worth undertaking? The College also commissioned a qualitative study of major donors to assess their responses to the strategic options under consideration.

As with the first phase of research, A&S interacted frequently with the College’s client committee and strategic planning steering committee. A&S presented their findings to the committees and to faculty, staff, trustees, and trustees emeritae in June 2006 and their recommendations to the same groups in July 2006. In addition, they presented their findings at regional meetings of trustees and emeritae in Washington and Atlanta. A&S concluded from its major donor and prospective student research that the College’s best hope for remaining a strong institution and becoming an even stronger one in the future was to adopt a global honors orientation, emphasizing hands-on learning and educating women alongside men, as today’s college-bound women strongly prefer.

The A&S report also noted that the College has been wise to maintain its high academic standards and to nurture and expand its global orientation over the years, as these elements of R-MWC’s culture provide a strong basis for building a new position for the College, are appealing to prospective students, and are valued by current students and alumnae. The report closed with the consultants’ assertion that R-MWC has a powerful and exciting option before it, and that the College can build upon its strong academics, personal faculty attention, and global perspective and complement them with the addition of new opportunities for hands-on learning and service for both men and women.

9. Financial Modeling: PEC claims that the financial model has not been adequately reviewed. This is not true. The model was initially developed in 2000 by Christopher Burnley, Vice President for Finance and Administration. Faculty members were invited to review the model, and a number of them have done so. It has been revised and refined to incorporate input of trustees, senior staff, and faculty. The model has also been reviewed by the College’s
independent auditors (Brown, Edwards & Company) as well as Dr. Lucie Lapovsky, a nationally recognized expert in the areas of higher education finance and tuition discounting.

Response to 20 Reasons Why You Should Change Your Vote

1. PEC states “There are enough women who want to attend women’s colleges.” The fact is that there are not enough women who want to attend R-MWC to maintain a financially viable and academically strong R-MWC.

Most of the women’s colleges that existed in the 1960’s have closed, merged, or become coed. But eliminating the competition from other women’s colleges has not resulted in substantial enrollment increases at the 50+ women’s colleges that remain—in fact, most of these colleges, including Hollins, Sweet Briar, and Agnes Scott, have space available every year, as does R-MWC.

To correct one of the points made by PEC, students taking the SAT have the option of indicating whether or not they are willing to consider a single sex college, not whether or not they would prefer a single sex institution. The small percentage of female SAT takers who respond positively varies slightly from year to year, but the trend has been a downward one. Current statistics show that in any given year no more than 3% to 5% of SAT takers are even willing to consider a woman’s college.

PEC states that Director of Admissions Pat LeDonne said, “We have sufficient applications, we just need to become people’s number one choice.” Pat responds: I remember this conversation well. This comment is taken completely out of context. We were talking about our two years of record applications and our disappointing yield. I pointed out that we do a great job of getting into the student’s top three choices but can’t move R-MWC to their #1 choice. Why? A coed environment is preferable to many of our applicants. The case for women’s college benefits is not resonating any more with high school women because of the positive high school experiences they have had. They don’t see leadership, high academics, athletic opportunities, and “outcomes” opportunities lacking in a coed environment based on their own coed high school experience. Therefore, the benefits of a women’s college education appear outdated to many of our applicants. I explained that so many of our applicants indicate that they “love us (the community) and love the admissions staff,” but they want a coed college.

2. PEC states that R-MWC’s enrollment has not been in decline for years. The fact is that is has.

Since the mid-1960s when almost 900 students attended R-MWC, enrollment has declined.

We experienced an uptick in 1985 when we enrolled 244 first-time, first-year students, and enrollment peaked at 800 at that point. But our numbers since then have been considerably lower. In fact, enrollment of first-time, first-year students has reached as high as 200 only eight times in the past 21 years.
Our research has indicated that we need to increase enrollment to 1000 – 1100 students to attain financial equilibrium. It is clear from our market research that we cannot accomplish this with enhanced marketing as a single-sex college. We seek to preserve the academic excellence that has long characterized R-MWC and to capitalize on the rich geographic and ethnic diversity of our students.

3. **PEC states that R-MWC does not have to use tuition discounting to stay a woman’s college. The fact is that tuition discounting is necessary, and going coed will provide the best chance of being able to reduce it.**

Almost all private colleges use tuition discounting, but R-MWC has been more dependent on discounting than most colleges in order to overcome the trend toward coed institutions and also maintain the academic profile and diversity of our student body.

The assertion made by PEC that we use a phonathon strategy to promote scholarships is not accurate. Student callers do not promote scholarships or discuss financial aid unless the prospective student asks a specific question. Callers are trained to describe our scholarship options but defer all financial aid questions to staff.

PEC offers an anonymous anecdote from a listserv as evidence that the College has awarded many merit scholarships in cases when the aid was unnecessary. Most merit scholarships are awarded *before* the student files for financial aid. Merit scholarships are based on high school record (SAT and GPA) and not family income, and need-based aid is reduced by the amount of merit aid the student has already been awarded. If a student qualifies for a scholarship, we are fair and consistent in awarding that scholarship. We do not deny scholarships to qualified students because we “think” the family can afford to pay.

Many of our accepted applicants indicate that R-MWC is their second or third choice college due to single sex, cost, our location, or reputation. Our use of merit scholarships has helped move us to the first-choice position. Evidence from other colleges supports the Board of Trustees’ expectation that by admitting men, we will increase the size of our applicant pool (for both women and men), enabling us to lower the discount rate over time.

4. **PEC states that other women’s colleges are financially viable. The fact is that most have failed, and many of those that have not are continuing to struggle.**

PEC repeatedly makes references to the enrollment success at Sweet Briar College, noting that the first-year class has increased in size by 36% since 2003. They neglect to point out that Sweet Briar’s first-year enrollment had dropped precipitously, and their “large gain” returns them to levels more competitive with ours. Furthermore, in our internal research of women’s colleges that have remained single sex, we learned that the five colleges we studied have implemented numerous market-driven initiatives within the past ten years to stay single sex, but not one of them has experienced significant enrollment growth during that time.
In featuring Sweet Briar’s success, PEC also does not call attention to the fact that Sweet Briar has just celebrated a capital campaign that raised $110 Million for the college. Even with this impressive support, Sweet Briar’s endowment remains below $100 Million, little changed from its value at the beginning of the campaign.

5. PEC claims that the College can use marketing to solve its problems. The fact is that while marketing has been and will continue to be critical to the College, it is not enough.

External research conducted during the past two years informed us, unequivocally, that we cannot market our way out of the challenges facing us. Contrary to claims made by PEC that R-MWC has never done proper marketing in the past, for at least the last 30 years the Admissions Office has used nationally known marketing firms to help promote the College.

We have used some of the nation’s top firms including North Charles Street Design, Hill & Knowlton, Communicorp, Selbert-Perkins, and Stamats. We have also used the nationally known Martin Agency to help increase visibility of the College. Contrary to assumptions reported by PEC, we have invested heavily in marketing through the years. Like many small colleges, we do not have professional marketing staff. Instead, we hire outside firms to work with our staff which gives us the resources of a much larger department than the College can afford.

6. PEC claims that the College’s financial model uses the wrong assumptions. The fact is the model was run with a broad range of different assumptions.

The College’s financial model was run with a full range of assumptions in the College’s quest for a single-sex solution.

PEC claims that A&S projected as much as 85% growth in enrollment for coed after the first study, but this is inaccurate. A&S did not make any conclusions or predictions regarding coed enrollment following the first study. They did conclude that the maximum increase in applications we could expect as a single-sex institution, with significant curricular changes and enhanced marketing, was 40%. At the end of the second study, they confirmed this expectation for a single-sex R-MWC, and they concluded that a coed R-MWC could expect a maximum increase in applications of 186% (100% increase in applications from women and as many as 500 to 600 applications from men).

Our projections compare a best case scenario for single-sex enrollment to a middle-case assumption for coed enrollment. Applying historical acceptance and matriculation rates produces best-case first-year enrollment of 236 students for R-MWC as a single-sex institution and 426 for a coed institution. Worst-case predictions based on the assumption that applications would increase by one-half the level A&S predicted resulted in 204 first-year students as a women’s college and 275 first-year students as a coed college. In all cases, it is assumed that the enrollment levels cited above are achieved in the fifth year after implementing the strategic plan.
In summary, a first-year class of 350 represents a middle-case scenario for coeducation, whereas a first-year class of 236 represents the best case as single-sex. These assumptions result in a residential student population of 1100 students in 2014-15 for a coed institution, and 741 students in 2014-15 for a single-sex institution.

The PEC document infers that the cost of capital improvements is not represented in the financial model, but the annual debt service is included in the financial model for all capital improvements.

While only three modeling outcomes have been presented publicly, the Board studied numerous additional scenarios in depth, including:

- Continuing in our current situation
- Remaining single sex with better market positioning (best case scenario)
- Remaining single sex with better market positioning (worst case scenario)
- Going coed with better market positioning (best case scenario)
- Going coed with better market positioning (middle case scenario)
- Going coed with better market positioning (worst case scenario)
- Merging with another women’s college

None of the single-sex scenarios provided the strong enrollment needed to support financial sustainability. We also considered merging with another women’s college as a means of preserving single-sex education at all cost. But in order to gain any true economies of scale, the R-MWC campus would likely need to be closed and essentially all of the College’s assets sold, with the proceeds being added to the endowment of another college. While this would make the surviving institution much stronger, it would likely result in a net decline in the number of students educated and would likely result in the loss of our identity.

In summary, any scenario we considered in which we remained single sex presented the College with a bleak future. The three coed scenarios have a promising yet very challenging future.

7. PEC claims that endowment income combined with additional “belt-tightening” could sustain R-MWC as a women’s college. The fact is that the endowment is being strained and the belt is already tight.

PEC maintains that the College’s endowment is sufficient to cover its annual deficits. However, the PEC document misinterprets figures from the College’s external financial statements, which include the income earned or value lost on endowment. Confirming projections made through our use of the financial model, the College’s investment consultants (Cambridge and Associates) and auditors (Brown, Edwards & Company) recently delivered presentations concluding that we would deplete our expendable endowment within 10 to 12 years if we do not make dramatic changes to our operations.

PEC states that it is likely that “belt-tightening and a careful evaluation of all budgetary expenditures may yet be used to cure R-MWC’s deficit spending issues.” The College has
reduced its general expenses by $1.4 million in the past five years, at a time when increases were needed to keep current with inflation (see 2005 President’s Report). In addition, the College has been providing only modest annual salary increases to its faculty and staff and has had a hiring freeze in place for several years. As a result of these actions, our total annual expenditures were $4 million less in 2004-05 than our nearest peer institution. Additionally, the College’s average faculty salaries have declined by 13%, relative to the average faculty salaries of our peer institutions. Historically, our faculty salaries have ranked above the 60th percentile nationwide. With the latest decline, our salaries have now moved below the 60th percentile.

While additional short-term belt-tightening may be possible, it is not a solution to our financial problems as a small, single-sex institution. In fact, the annual belt-tightening we have engaged in for many years has helped mask the problems that became much clearer when the Strategic Planning Steering Committee began to look at long-term viability.

8. **PEC claims that alumnae giving will suffer to a great degree. The fact is that we may lose the financial support of some alumnae, but we will keep and may gain the support of others.**

We acknowledge that some alumnae will discontinue their giving; there are also alumnae who have come forward to increase their giving in support of the College’s new direction.

The PEC document cites the Alumnae Association (AA) survey results to posit that “60 percent of alumnae would cease all contributions to a coeducational R-MWC under a different name and an additional 15 percent would decrease their annual contributions.” Additionally, PEC notes that the AA opinion poll garnered more respondents than the Art & Science survey. This fact is irrelevant, since the AA opinion poll respondents constitute a convenience sample. One cannot legitimately make inferences from the findings in a convenience sample to a broader population. (For example, instead of the quoted statement above, the appropriate conclusion to be drawn by PEC would be only that “60 percent of those who completed the survey said that…”)

Those alumnae who chose to respond to the survey may be quite different—in numerous ways—from those who did not respond. Also, 2280 of about 13,000 alumnae completed the poll—a 17.5% response rate. Even in a survey using a probability sample, a response rate that low would cast serious doubt on whether the respondents and responses were representative of the larger population from which the sample was selected. The professional research conducted by A&S used a statistically significant representative sample.

Undoubtedly, some alumnae who have never given will continue not to give; some who have been donors will withdraw their support; some who have repeatedly questioned the viability of women’s colleges may resume or increase their giving; and some alumnae who support the new direction have already increased their giving. As difficult as it is to lose financial support from alumnae, the threat of lost support cannot be the primary basis for critical decisions about the College’s long-term future. Cohorts at coed colleges that were once women’s colleges tell us that one of the regrets they have now is that they did not move to coeducation sooner. They allowed fear of alumnae response to guide their decisions. It is unfortunate that, as a result of our decision to move to coeducation, we now must face lawsuits financed by a group opposing the decision.
Our admissions counselors on the road and our students on campus have been harassed by a few alumnae, and we have learned from professional colleagues that R-MWC alumnae have contacted a foundation officer, accrediting agency, and academic honor society attempting to damage the College. We hope that the fervor with which some alumnae are fighting change today may someday be channeled as interest and energy that will help the College be successful in the future.

9. **PEC claims that the strategic planning process was not thorough. The fact is we disagree.**

The Board has consulted with numerous experts throughout this process, and all have concluded that the Strategic Planning process was rigorous and thorough. Details about the process are included in #8, in the first section of this document.

10. **PEC claims that research conducted by A&S did not investigate how to make R-MWC a stronger women’s college. The fact is A&S investigated that first, and its findings show that the College is not viable in the long term as a women’s college.**

Again, PEC information is inaccurate. In the original charge given to A&S, the Board of Trustees requested research on how to maintain R-MWC as a financially sustainable institution of academic excellence for the education of women. Information about this initial research, except for the proprietary methodology, is publicly available on the College’s website. Many of the suggestions made by PEC are efforts that the College has explored already in attempting to increase enrollment and lower our discount rate.

11. **PEC claims that a global emphasis is not the answer to R-MWC’s problems. The fact is that the global honors emphasis is not a cure-all, but it is one element of a plan that gives the College its best chance to succeed.**

We agree that this is not the only answer. Emphasizing a Global Honors distinction is but one of the strategic changes needed to move the College forward. PEC also states that by focusing on Global Honors, we are playing on R-MWC’s current strengths. Again, we agree. The various platforms tested by A&S in both phases of their research emerged from discussions among faculty. The College does not need to reinvent itself completely. But we must continue to develop our strengths and promote effectively the distinctive qualities of our College to attract the students we need.

12. **PEC questions the statement made by the Board of Trustees that admitting men will allow R-MWC to educate more women than we do now. The fact is that we can educate more women by admitting men.**
By creating a healthy institution and one that has a promising future, we will educate more women than if we do not make dramatic changes. Our goal is to enroll 1100 students (headcount) by 2014-15. We anticipate that men will not comprise more than 30% of the student body. If we enroll 1100 x 70% = 770 women, we will exceed the headcount of women at R-MWC for each year of the past twenty years.

13. PEC claims that the education R-MWC will provide women in a coeducational environment will not be as good as the education women at R-MWC receive today. The fact is that we hope to provide an even better education.

The faculty, staff and administration of R-MWC are committed to maintaining the features of this College that make R-MWC distinctive. A&S research indicates that the top five reasons students give for applying to R-MWC are its academic offerings, friendly atmosphere and sense of community, the academic reputation, small size, and individual attention from faculty.

The College received very high ratings in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for providing educational experiences characterized by challenging intellectual and creative work, a supportive campus environment, and meaningful student-faculty interactions. None of these recognized strengths is dependent upon the absence of men. We are determined and committed to retaining the distinctive qualities that we have always cherished.

Many faculty members are excited about the prospect of change. One of these is psychology professor Dennis Goff, who commented in a recent letter to students, “This transition will allow us to maintain our campus, faculty, curriculum, staff, honor system, community, individualized education, and dedication to education of women (though admittedly in a different form). We will be able to maintain our traditions, though they will certainly evolve to fit a new student body as they have over the past 115 years.”

A number of faculty members are developing proposals for curricular and extra-curricular programs that will maintain and strengthen the importance of women at the College. One proposal envisions a Center for Women and Gender Studies. This proposal includes faculty development workshops and seminars to assure that our classrooms are free of gender bias; programming for students and faculty presenting “hot” issues and current scholarship in Women’s and Gender Studies; funds for faculty/student research projects; and community outreach projects. Through such a Center, we would be able to infuse the campus and the local community with an awareness of gender issues, both locally and globally.

The young men drawn to this College will be those for whom the historic values of the institution resonate deeply. Vassar and Wheaton Colleges report that their male students have embraced the full range of educational and community experiences, including a deep commitment to the arts and humanities. Because of the strength of our commitment, we have the opportunity to be in the vanguard of higher education, creating a new model for “conscious coeducation.” The distinctive elements of our current educational model will be the basis for the future. We will be building on our strengths, providing an inclusive and individual educational experience for all of our students.
PEC quotes a study that describes an unfriendly culture for women at Duke University, suggesting that this kind of pressure on women is what we can expect at a coed R-MWC. The Board is looking instead at institutions like The University of the South, Davidson, Wheaton, and Washington & Lee as models where there are healthy, supportive, close-knit communities in a coed environment.

14. **PEC claims that not all students want urban campuses and public universities. The fact is that the Board agrees.**

15. **PEC states that by admitting men, R-MWC will not keep its high academic standards. The fact is that we are admitting men to avoid having to lower our academic standards.**

Men will be admitted using the same academic standards that we use for women. It is a common misconception that standards will be lowered with the recruitment of men. Faculty members establish the academic standards for admission of candidates—whether the candidates are male or female, and whether they are athletes or not.

We have been collecting GPA information on athletes for the past seven years. During this time, varsity athletes have maintained a higher GPA each year than students who were not athletes. According to our coaches, male athletes at the Division 3 level in general have high academic standards. Male students will fit in well academically with our current student body.

When R-MWC was founded, the College endeavored to educate women with the same intellectual rigor that men were receiving at the finest colleges in the country. As a coed college, we will continue to fulfill that mission.

16. **PEC states that the Honor Code will collapse and traditions will be lost. The fact is that the Honor Code will continue, many traditions will remain, and many more will be created.**

The Honor Code will continue to be an essential part of student life, the community will be more vibrant, and cherished traditions will continue to evolve as they have throughout the College’s history.

PEC claims that Hood has been struggling with its academic honor code since coeducation, implying that coeducation is the cause of concern. Some of the objections offered by PEC are from anecdotal and unreliable sources. Our interviews with faculty and senior administration at Hood revealed that the honor code at Hood was a source of contention long before the decision to go coed.

Wheaton College was also noted in the PEC document as having an honor code that students on social networking sites claim to be a “joke.” Our conversations with cohorts at Wheaton confirmed that they have experienced more social violations (vandalism and alcohol policy violations), but there were not notable differences in academic honor violations after the coed
decision. In the first year of coeducation some men challenged the notion of dual responsibility, but no men have refused to sign the pledge in all the intervening years. At R-MWC, there are always some students who contend that the Honor Code is a “joke,” and that will likely always be the case for a minority of students regardless of how much we educate students on that topic.

All of the now coed institutions R-MWC studied experienced some changes in their traditions, which is not unusual even in single sex institutions. Our traditions have changed substantially as students’ interests have changed throughout our history.

For example, Tacky Party has existed as an important tradition for less than three decades, and seniors have worn funny hats and covered their robes with buttons only in recent history. May Day and Sophomore Play, fondly remembered by many alumnae, are unknown events to students today. The Greek Play was a lost tradition until Professor Amy Cohen re-instated the biennial pageant in the late 1990's. Popular new traditions have emerged very recently including MacDoodle Day (a surprise day off from classes), Declaration Day (when sophomores officially declare their majors and join their new academic departments), and Holiday on Main Street (campus-wide open house and goodie give-away at the end of first semester). Traditions that have remained important rituals through many generations include Pumpkin Parade, Daisy Chain, Bury the Hatchet, Ring Week/Ring Night, Senior Reception, and the quadrennial Faculty Show. But even these enduring traditions have changed in some aspects to reflect societal changes and student preferences.

We are committed to working closely with students to assure that the rituals that resonate for them remain. Some traditions may continue with men joining in, and others may continue for women only as a tribute to our proud history as a woman's college. Students will largely decide which traditions change and which stay the same.

17. PEC claims that residential men are not the solution to R-MWC’s social life issues. The fact is we agree.

On this point PEC is absolutely correct. There is no one solution to the social life issues on campus. However, faculty and staff at the institutions R-MWC studied that had recently gone coed cited dramatic improvements in the social vibrancy of the campus after residential men were admitted. The colleges did, indeed, experience more vandalism and alcohol-related problems, which is understandable given that students often pair alcohol with social activity. R-MWC educates students about alcohol use and abuse, and we have policies to deal with those who are irresponsible. We are fully committed to continuing our educational programs after men are enrolled, and we will address violations as they occur.

PEC makes good suggestions on how to improve social life on campus, and the College will continue seeking new and innovative ideas to improve student life. However, most of the PEC suggestions are currently in place, and these initiatives have not made a significant impact on the satisfaction with current social life on campus nor helped with the retention of current students.
PEC recommends that the College allow students to live off-campus as a way to increase students’ social life. We require students to live on campus for philosophical, practical and financial reasons. Philosophically, we believe the experience of living in a community environment is extremely valuable to students’ development of social and interpersonal skills and appreciation of differences. We know that upperclass students would like more autonomy in their living spaces, and we are already exploring feasible options.

Practically speaking, we have very old buildings that were designed as traditional dormitories. While it is technically possible to retrofit some of the spaces into suites and apartments, that project would be extremely costly—more so than building new housing of that configuration. Until we increase enrollment, we cannot justify building new housing.

Every student occupying an on-campus bed represents revenue to the College, and we are well below our capacity in the residences. The campus that accommodated almost 900 students 40 years ago is now occupied by fewer than 600 women. The Reading properties with total capacity of 35 students currently house only 27. It would be financially ill-advised to forfeit any revenue that can be kept at the College. When our enrollment increases, we are prepared to expand the housing options for students, including allowing some off-campus living and possibly building new facilities.

18. PEC states that the College has not done everything possible to stay single sex. The fact is that we have attempted to find an all-female solution, but we cannot choose the all-female option when our research indicated it is unlikely to succeed.

After three years of struggling to design a plan that would allow R-MWC to be a financially sustainable woman’s college of academic excellence, the Board made the decision that it was not possible to remain an academically excellent institution and remain all female. To remain a women’s college would require us to manage an institution in decline. This is an important point. Many other women’s colleges have made incremental changes, tweaking their programs and enhancing their marketing to achieve only modest enrollment increases. We need substantial increases in enrollment to reach financial equilibrium and maintain our reputation for academic excellence.

19. PEC claims that the College is not in “crisis” and the Board is acting too hastily. The fact is that the College is at a decision point, and we have decided to protect the College’s future while we still can.

If “crisis” is interpreted to mean that the College is ready to close its doors, then we are not in crisis. However, we are at a crucial turning point.

At $140 million (as of June 30, 2006), the College’s endowment is one of the largest among private colleges in Virginia. Income from the endowment allows us to weather short-term financial challenges, but it will not support a long-term leveling off or decline in our primary revenue stream—net tuition. Until we are able to increase enrollment and then gradually reduce
the discount rate, endowment spending will sap the College’s viability. Our financial model demonstrates that we would deplete our *expendable* endowment within 10 to 12 years, leaving only the restricted endowment funds currently valued at approximately $55 million. This projection has been corroborated by Cambridge Associates, the country’s largest investment consultant specializing in higher education. With a relatively large endowment, we are financially strong now, but we must make changes that will enable the institution to achieve long-term financial equilibrium.

**20. PEC asks trustees to change their vote.**

We are convinced that the Board and the Strategic Planning Committee exercised due diligence and met all fiduciary obligations in thoroughly exploring the available options. We are certain about the College’s need for immediate change, and we are confident that the College can successfully reposition itself with a new strategic direction. We invite all constituencies in the R-MWC family—alumnae, students, friends, faculty, staff, and parents—to join us in moving forward with the vision of a healthy, long-term future for the College.