Dear Sweet Briar Community,

As the new president of our beloved college, I am delighted to join you at the renewed, energized and determined Sweet Briar College. We are open for business, not only for the coming school year but for the next 114 years and beyond. We will build this enduring future on our rich history and legacy while audaciously and courageously dreaming new visions and creating bold new possibilities.

As my administration takes office, there will be a number of transition issues for us to tackle. Whether you are a current student, an accepted freshman, a family member of a student, or an alumna, I ask for your patience as we address critical issues including questions of continued employment, financial aid packages and a host of other matters. I will try to address these and all other issues over the coming days and weeks.

There are, however, some things I can clearly address as I prepare to begin my first day in office:

1. I have asked all faculty members employed by the college as of June 30, 2015 to continue their employment. I will try to provide more complete information in the coming days, but I wanted to reassure faculty that I want them here and consider their presence vital to the successful rebuilding of the college. I look forward to getting personally acquainted with all of our faculty and working with them as we envision an invigorated and forward-looking Sweet Briar College.

2. Except for those senior administrators with whom I am already engaged in conversations about their positions, I have told all members of the college staff as of June 30, 2015, that I wish to rehire them. Together, we will accomplish great things and quickly restore confidence and morale.

3. I will honor the most recent financial aid provided by Sweet Briar College to current students who return to Sweet Briar. For accepted freshmen, my administration will work to expeditiously review financial aid applications in the hope that a quick decision can help facilitate their return to Sweet Briar.

4. The new board of the college and I are committed not only to the permanent continuation of Sweet Briar College, but we commit without qualification to maintaining and protecting, at all levels – board, administrators, faculty, staff, alumnae and students – a diverse, civil, accepting and engaged community. We are committed to diversity. All
members of our community have gifts to offer and we delight in the variety of those gifts. Maintaining diversity is not only an ethical duty; it strengthens the very foundations of the institution. We will insist on civil discourse and relationships; we have just experienced a time of hurt and anger, and passions have been inflamed. Some of you feel injured and mistreated. Sometimes the words may have been sharp. Our community must reflect courtesy, civility and consideration of each other’s views. No matter what our differences, we will be kind to each other. We will -genuinely accept each other and our differences. We will show respect for the dignity of each member of the community, not see others as mere caricatures of our cultural or personal prejudices but as fellow human beings worthy of respect and dignity. As participants in a learning community of teachers and students, we look forward to honest, robust and open engagement with each other and with those from outside the community, ready not only to share our views but also to listen respectfully to the views of others. We celebrate Sweet Briar College, a diverse, accepting, civil and engaged community.

5. We will work with zealous energy to create a model of a vibrant, flourishing, residential liberal arts college for women, not only developing financial and structural security for Sweet Briar College but encouraging peer institutions with our successful endeavors.

6. I am committed to a larger student body, not only larger than the student enrollment for the coming year, diminished by the attempts to close the college, but to numbers larger than we have ever previously experienced. Our beautiful facilities, our talented faculty and staff and wonderful co-curricular programs provide a compelling reason for many more students to attend Sweet Briar, an outcome that is essential to enable us to operate in an economically efficient way. I will personally be actively involved in the efforts to attract additional students and I will ask everyone associated with the college to assist.

7. I expect to be accessible and visible on campus. It is my style to keep my colleagues on the faculty and staff well informed about matters affecting the college and to be in open conversation with all constituents. I expect to maintain an “open door policy.”

8. I want to be clear that there is nothing interim or temporary about my appointment or the efforts of the new board to continue the operations of the college. Keeping the college open for one additional year just to further evaluate our position does not interest anyone, and it is not what the heroic Sweet Briar women successfully fought for. I will strive to maintain a fixed and determined commitment to have all our actions and all resources applied with this thought in mind: that it furthers the transition to a renewed and invigorated Sweet Briar College, which will last for another 114 years and beyond!

9. At an appropriate time, I will be able to more fully and effectively acknowledge the heroic work of Saving Sweet Briar and other friends of the college in successfully achieving what appeared to the rest of the world at the beginning to be impossible. The Sweet Briar alumnae have just been extraordinary, further proof that this special college dare not close. With their time, energy, resources and “Vixen determination,” the alumnae have demonstrated what might be our operative slogan:
AT SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE, THE IMPOSSIBLE IS JUST ANOTHER PROBLEM TO SOLVE.

Sincerely,

Phillip C. Stone