Community Update
Board Meeting of February 2014

At its recent meeting, the Board of Directors endorsed a proposal from the administration for a renewed planning initiative in which three interrelated projects will be undertaken in the next 15 – 18 months. The three components are market research, renewed strategic planning, and a fundraising/campaign feasibility study.

I am very glad that this proposal was endorsed enthusiastically and supported fully. As we continue to build on the good work and many successes of *The Shape of the Future* and *Sustainable Excellence*, this research and analysis will provide current information and updated perspectives to guide us through what continue to be extraordinarily challenging times for colleges of our type.

Preparations for this work will begin immediately. When a few more specifics have been nailed down, I’ll announce activities that will be taking place through the remainder of this semester and let everyone know how they can participate between now and the spring of 2015. I can tell you now that this spring there will be a campus survey and a visit to campus by consultants who are supporting the research and planning process. (Of course, alumnae and other off-campus constituents will also have a chance to participate.) Look for more information very soon.

The goal of this initiative is to enable the community and Board to review, in the spring and summer of 2015, well-researched answers to these questions: What changes to our programs might have the best chance of attracting larger numbers of talented students? What kinds of program innovations and models do Sweet Briar faculty and staff think are consistent with our educational values, academically inspiring, and feasible? And, to support program development and address campus preservation and maintenance, what might our fundraising aspirations realistically be?

Other actions of the Board included:
- The awarding of promotion and tenure to Professor Padmini Coopamah. I know you all join me in congratulating her!
- The awarding of the status of professor emerita or emeritus to retired professors Jim Alouf, Gerry Berg, Rebecca McCord, and Margaret Stanton.
- The election of a new Director, Rushton Haskell Callaghan ’86. (She joins first-term members Winifred Story Davis and Ann Stuart McKie Kling, elected last year.)
- Approval to explore the feasibility of the construction of a small facility between Guion and the Greenhouse (soon to be the renovated Root Greenhouse) to accommodate the growing needs of the Engineering
program. Whether or not this project goes forward will depend on what we learn in the feasibility stage.

The Educational Programs committee heard a report on the learning goals under discussion in the faculty. Kevin Fabulich and Marcia Thom presented on the work of the ad hoc “think tank” group on retention and student engagement. Jill Granger presented on how our writing assessment process models the way student achievement can be documented. These were very informative presentations—Board members were still talking about things they had learned in that session the next day.

In its meeting with the Executive Committee of the Board, the Faculty Executive Committee discussed the proposed research and planning process. Also noted was the creation of the new Campus Environment Committee and some of the topics it will be taking up. FEC members urged that the importance and value of the residential experience be emphasized in decision-making. FEC members also noted the positive impact of increased student diversity in our classrooms and programs.

In other sessions, Directors continued to express enthusiasm for the way the library project is taking shape and appreciation for the staff members who are providing continuous service throughout the (noisy, messy) construction process. Discussion of how to set priorities among the maintenance projects recommended by the Stone House Group was another topic. By way of Board education, the Finance and Development committees heard an excellent presentation from Scott Shank about the provisions of UPMIFA, the law that governs endowment investment and spending. (This presentation will also be shared with members of the development staff and has already been discussed with the faculty budget representatives.)

Special thanks to all faculty members who came to dinner on Thursday evening! It was a very successful event and a chance for Directors to experience the enthusiasm and creativity of our faculty first hand. Thanks also to the hospitality group and our Aramark colleagues. Recent steps taken to refresh rooms at the Inn were noticed and appreciated, as was the excellence of the meals throughout the weekend.