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December 1, 1983

(20)

John D. Wilson, President
Washington and Lee University
Lexington, Virginia 24450

Re: Undergraduate Coeducation

Dear President Wilson:

I have read and re-read the numerous issues of the Ring-tum Phi discussing coeducation at Washington and Lee as well as your paper, "Reflections on the Question of Undergraduate Coeducation at Washington and Lee." Clearly, the issue is being analyzed thoroughly.

I doubt very much, however, that many people in our country view coeducation at a university as being a controversial subject. It is quite obvious, however, that undergraduate coeducation at Washington and Lee is not just an issue, but a controversy. I would think there are other matters to concern our students, faculty and alumni that are more important than the issue of co-education. I must admit, however, that my conclusion regarding the importance of coeducation is colored because I feel there is only one meritorious position on the issue of coeducation. Washington and Lee should be coeducational.

That Washington and Lee should now be coed is not to say that it should have been coed years ago. I enjoyed tremendously my time in Lexington and valued the opportunity to live and attend a college without the concern or effort of interacting with women on a nonsocial basis. It is that very void that can no longer be justified at a quality institution preparing people to become leaders in business, politics and professions.

Women are very much a part of our American business, political and professional hierarchy. I have no doubt that every Washington and Lee graduate will, at some point in his life, interact with women who are his superiors and will interact regularly for the rest of his life with women who are his

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peers. That is a fact that may have been doubted so late as five or ten years ago, but there is no reason to doubt that fact today.

That being the case, people must be able to interact with women on a professional peer basis. Washington and Lee, or any college, does not simply teach academics to its students. It also offers a special environment in which a student matures. The four years at college are, for most students, four of the most important years in the maturing process -- they are the first years away from home, they are the first years of interacting with women on a regular unchaperoned basis, they are the years when a boy becomes a man, etc. To live those four years in a protected environment is a special, unique privilege. To live those four years in an environment that has no or very little relation to the real world makes no sense.

Your comments regarding how coeducation will affect the academic and social environments at Washington and Lee support coeducation. The improvement in the academic and social environments will come as a result of men dealing with women as professional peers. Certainly, no one can reasonably object to the presence of competent and intelligent women in the classroom nor to interacting with the same people as friends and equals.

The arguments against coeducation are facetious. I comment on these reasons not to add any substance to the discussion but to make clear one alumni's feelings.

The idea that Washington and Lee existed to present a "clear choice" in the admissions marketplace borders on being ridiculous. Certainly, it is not my understanding for why Washington and Lee was single sexed. Women were not part of our business, political or professional environments. Most colleges were single sexed. Certainly, Washington and Lee did not exist as a choice for a small minority of men who wanted to attend a single sex school.

Why admission of women will damage the fraternity system is not altogether clear. However, there are numerous small colleges and universities that have sound and successful fraternity systems as well as sorority systems, which complement the fraternity system.

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I am not able to judge whether the admission of women will distort enrollment by course and curriculum. However, the curriculum offered at Washington and Lee will, in many ways, dictate what people select Washington and Lee as a college. And, as you noted, as women assume an equal position in society with men, more and more women will be entering the science, mathematics, engineering curriculum, etc.

I am not as concerned about damaging our sister schools as I am concerned about improving Washington and Lee.

I am concerned about increasing the size of Washington and Lee's student body. However, I do not think a student body of 1500 or 2000 students, with the appropriate increase in the number of faculty, will destroy the intimacy of education provided.

I would venture that more than 90% of the men who apply to Washington and Lee attended high school with women. All of the people who graduate from Washington and Lee will interact with women on a professional peer basis. More than anything else, college is four formative years in a person's life. Washington and Lee must make every effort to be sure that those four years form its graduates into professionals who will interact successfully in whatever venture they choose.

Sincerely yours,

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