

The Surveys

Majority of Alumni, Students Oppose Coeducation; Faculty in Favor

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 firm, 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 on May 24, 25 and 26.

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

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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, 64 percent of the alumni thought the policy should not be maintained, 23 percent thought it should be maintained, and 13 percent were undecided.

One section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to rate a series of 13 characteristics of the Universities as to their relative importance. First, the respondents were to mark all 13 as "more important," "less important," or "not important." In that rating, the top three values were found to be the quality of the faculty, the close student-faculty ratio, and the Honor System.

Then the respondents were asked to identify the top three of the values they had indicated as "more important" in another category of "most important." In that listing, the top three values were quality of the faculty, the Honor

System, and academically selective admissions. Eighty-six percent of the respondents agreed that academic excellence is Washington and Lee's top priority.

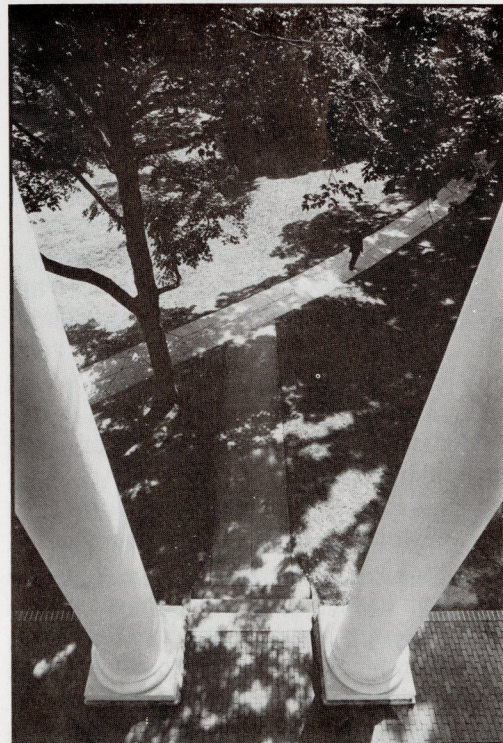
Respondents identified the most potentially positive effects of undergraduate coeducation to be improvement in classroom discussion and learning, extra-curricular activities, and general campus ambiance. The most potentially negative effects were seen as damage to the surrounding women's colleges, deterioration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

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

Asked whether they believe Washington and Lee "should become a coeducational institution," 65.5 percent of the faculty responded that 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



Charles Mason photo