

*Letter from the President*

*Remarks from the Provost*

Office of the President  
Bryn Mawr College  
101 N. Merion Avenue  
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010-2899  
(610)-526-5156

# B R Y N M A W R

April 14, 1995

Friends,

With the publication of this document we bring to a close an important stage in the College's on-going planning endeavors. We began this process over a year and a half ago under the leadership of Judith Shapiro and a steering committee composed of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, and the Provost of Haverford. They organized nine separate task force teams composed of representatives from all campus-based constituencies and including the President of the Alumnae Association. Those teams then began a campus-wide conversation about planning for the future of the College. Unlike recent planning efforts that focused on the College's financial situation or on its fund-raising needs and goals, this initiative was designed to explore and evaluate nearly all aspects of the College's identity and functions. In a difficult time for higher education, perhaps particularly for the selective, high-cost, independent liberal arts college, it seemed wise to attempt an assessment of the current state of the College and to engage the community in the development of a plan or plans to move the College strongly into a next century, hence, *The Agenda for the Future*.

Robert Dostal, who took over the planning when he succeeded Judith Shapiro as Provost, describes the process and comments on the work of the Steering Committee and the Task Forces in the first document included in this packet. Bob concludes that the work of the past year and a half does not so much set an agenda for the future of Bryn Mawr as it calls for a renewal, a strengthening of what Bryn Mawr is and is about. In that spirit the Task Force teams produced a large number of very useful suggestions and recommendations, which I have grouped together in the final section of this document. As you will see, some of the recommendations are already being addressed, while others can be attended to fairly quickly. Several other recommendations, however, need longer and more complex considerations, and in that final section I suggest how we might proceed to address these concerns and proposals.

The second set of documents in this packet collects summaries of the Task Force reports. Full copies of the reports have been available to the College community, but because not all members have had an opportunity to review the collected full reports, I include the summaries here. Apparent in each of the reports is the deep commitment of the faculty, staff, administrators, and students to the sort of educational institution that Bryn Mawr is and should attempt to remain: a college with a special commitment to the education of able undergraduate women and to graduate men and women in the College's two graduate schools; a college composed of a faculty devoted to fine teaching and first-rate scholarship; a college composed of staff members and administrators whose desire for professional growth contributes to the enhancement of the College's educational enterprise. Apparent too in the reports is the commitment of faculty, staff, administrators, and students to strengthen the sense of community within the College and to act on their responsibilities to the wider community beyond the College. These are essential ingredients for the continued success of our educational mission as a small liberal arts college.

While the reports reaffirm the College's historic mission and call us to perform better our essential tasks, they stop short of providing a framework or road map or agenda to take the College forward. I do not believe that it is a matter for disappointment that our planning process became a review process instead. It may have been too ambitious to step over just such a review stage, and this effort as it stands does the College a signal service. There are good working bodies in the College who have as their special concern issues such as undergraduate education and the role of technology, and there are offices and services concerned with the needs of various of the College's constituencies. Very few of these individual offices and services within the College are not engaged in some consideration of how the College should go forward in the most effective fashion. In fact, some are engaged at the moment in major planning efforts. So this process, while not providing us with an Agenda for the Future or an actual plan for the years ahead, did do us the special service of reviewing all aspects of the College. In my view, the work of these Task Forces individually and collectively must be seen as supplying important building blocks for the longer range efforts to support the planning processes that are either already underway or should be undertaken as the result of various conclusions that came out of this process.

A careful examination of the reports also reveals that the Task Forces devoted relatively little attention to three overarching areas of their individual charges: the particular shape and nature of the College's commitment to the education of women in the 21st century; inter-institutional arrangements with Haverford, Swarthmore, and the University of Pennsylvania; and the progress

the College has made in diversifying the student body, staff, administration, and faculty. Comments made at the general open meetings in which the Task Force reports were discussed, however, demonstrated that the community fully accepts that it is very much the College's mission to provide a particularly important educational service for young women who have not yet taken their roles in the wider society, that our institutional arrangements should continue to enrich individual institutional offerings and extend the opportunities for all students and faculty members, and that the College should continue its progress in its efforts to reflect in its student bodies, administration, staff, and faculty the growing diversity of our country.

Throughout the reports there is a yearning for a kind of community that existed more easily when the College was a smaller, less complex institution. And there is also a recognition running through many of the Task Force reports that we—faculty, staff, administrators, and students—are among the privileged few in our increasingly distressed society. There is an acknowledgment that with the privileges of our positions and our education there should be a more articulated sense of service to those in less fortunate circumstances in society. These are among the newer notes struck, and we need to pay attention to them because they so clearly speak to our time and place.

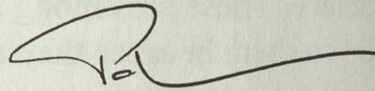
Finding ways to promote more harmonious interaction among the various constituencies of the College should take a higher priority for all of us. And the appropriate representative bodies need to initiate a careful evaluation of whether service activities within the wider community should receive higher institutional recognition—be it credit for student work or some part of the assessment of faculty, staff, and administrators' service.

Out of one of the last major planning efforts of the College, the initiative to secure financial equilibrium, came an important recommendation to involve faculty members more formally in the setting of academic priorities. Out of the current planning effort, I think there is a recognition that our decision-making and communication could be further strengthened by formalizing the ways in which students, faculty, staff, and administrators who carry special responsibilities within the College come together to inform each other and to think about the College's next best steps. To that end I would suggest that we rethink the membership of an existing body, the Bryn Mawr Council, and re-establish it based on membership *ex officio*—from the faculty, representatives from several of the major standing committees (for example, from the Appointments Committee, CAP, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the Graduate Council of Arts and Sciences, and the Policy Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Research); from the staff, officers of their association; from the students, representatives from

their respective student government associations; from the administration, the senior officers of the College. It is to this Council that we might look for a review of the sometimes competing needs of the College, and this Council might serve as a body to monitor the progress towards completion of the work proposed in this document.

In sum then, I believe that it has been good for the community to have undertaken this timely and useful review. I am grateful to those of you who spent so much of your time, energy, and creativity on this process. I want especially to thank Judith Shapiro for her leadership throughout most of the endeavor, Robert Dostal for the thoughtful way in which he has brought the process to its conclusion, and the members of the Steering Committee for their continued efforts to bring the College together and to focus these community-wide conversations. Whatever the specific outcomes of this process, I believe that the College has been strengthened by our mutual consideration of its mission and operations.

My thanks,



Mary Patterson McPherson  
President of the College

## **Setting the Agenda for the Future: The Task Forces and the College-Wide Discussion**

Robert J. Dostal, Provost and Chair of the Steering Committee

In September 1993, President McPherson, with the full support of the Board of Trustees, called upon all members of the College community to join in a collaborative two-year planning process which will set Bryn Mawr's "Agenda for the Future." This planning exercise of the 90s follows important planning exercises of the 70s and 80s: the so-called "Healy Report" of 1978 and the Cambridge Report of 1986 from which came the Plan for Achieving Financial Equilibrium (PAFE 1987-92). The previous planning procedures were focused primarily on fiscal matters. They helped reshape the institution, meet many identified needs, and place the College on a firmer financial foundation. While the question of resources and prudential fiscal management are critically important to the current planning exercise, the scope of this exercise has been much broader both by way of topic and participants. In short, nearly every aspect of the institution has come under consideration and all members of the College community--students, faculty, and staff--have been urged to participate.

I need not remind the community of the importance of careful planning in today's difficult environment. For years, experts have predicted the demise of the liberal arts college, not to mention the single-sex institution. Some liberal arts colleges have closed their doors in the last 20 years and among them have been many women's colleges. It is difficult to see how we and our peer institutions can continue to increase tuition and fees above inflation rates. Raising the fees places pressure on financial aid and the institution's commitment to be accessible to all. Yet the competition for students has required ever more investment in the recruitment process as well as in the level of student services offered. The requirements for academic support, library materials, and especially the new technologies of communication, computing, and imaging are rising dramatically. As the costs of teaching, recruitment, student services and academic support keep rising, the question of the long-term fiscal viability of the small liberal arts college presents itself.

To find our way about in this environment we have to have a sure sense of who we are and who we want to become. We are fortunate indeed to have, as an institution, a long history and relatively large endowment--both of which provide resources for this institutional sense of identity. But these resources do not substitute for leadership, planning, and the individual

contribution by faculty, students, administrators and staff in helping the institution grow and develop. The current planning procedure has promoted conversation among all the constituencies of the College about our largest goals as well as the everyday procedures of our academic enterprise.

The Board of Trustees helped provide the context for this planning conversation by setting three parameters for the process. The College is to remain an institution primarily for women, i.e., the Undergraduate College will continue to admit only women. The College needs to enroll at least 1,200 undergraduate students to sustain financial equilibrium. And, finally, the College is to continue to conduct graduate programs in some departments in the School of Arts and Sciences as well as in the School of Social Work and Social Research.

### **The Process**

In the fall of 1993 under the direction of the Provost, Judith Shapiro, a Steering Committee and nine task forces were formed. Students, administrators, staff, and faculty were represented on the Steering Committee and each Task Force. A small outside grant was secured and the consulting service of an outside experienced academic planner was contracted. The Task Forces addressed the following areas:

- 1) A Faculty of Teacher-Scholars;
- 2) The Undergraduate Experience;
- 3) The Graduate Education;
- 4) Staff Development;
- 5) Recruitment and Retention;
- 6) Bryn Mawr in Dispersion;
- 7) The College as a Community;
- 8) Bryn Mawr and the Philadelphia Region;
- 9) Facilities, Technology, and the Organization of Work.

In the spring semester of 1994 the Task Forces carried out their charge. They met, held open meetings, conducted surveys, sought data, interviewed faculty and staff, and consulted generally with the entire College community. They each drafted a report and submitted it in May to the Steering Committee, which responded to each with a set of questions for further study and/or elaboration.

Judith Shapiro left the College at the end of June to assume the presidency of Barnard College, and, at the end of July, I became provost with responsibility for overseeing the completion of the planning process. Over the summer some of the Task Forces continued their work. A few Task Forces submitted revised Task Force reports at the end of the summer. The

others resumed their work with the beginning of the new academic year. I met with the chairs of each of the Task Forces, and they submitted revised drafts in October. At this time the Task Force reports were made available to the College community--students, faculty, and staff.

In the late fall I set a series of meetings for a community-wide discussion of the Task Force reports. Four open meetings were held as well as ad hoc meetings of the faculty and the staff. I met with administrative groups such as the Senior Administrative Staff and the Administrative Office Heads. I called a special meeting of the Staff Association and met with their officers. Meetings of almost every standing committee of the faculty were devoted to a consideration of the reports inasmuch as they were relevant to domain of the committee: Curriculum Committee, Graduate Council, Committee on Faculty Awards and Grants, Appointments Committee, Committee on Academic Priorities, the Policy Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Research, the Council of the Division of Special Studies, and Department Chairs. I also met with the Student Government Association for a discussion of the reports. The Alumnae Council invited me to speak to them about the agenda in their October meeting. Needless to say, the Task Force reports were the subject of as much informal discussion as the formal discussion just indicated. As will become apparent below, the Task Force reports have helped set the specific agendas for several of the committees in the current academic year. In December I reported to the Steering Committee on the response of the community to the various Task Force reports and took their advice on how the reports might best be understood and implemented.

### **The Reports of the Task Forces**

Though the Task Forces were asked to address different aspects and functions of the institution, two common themes and concerns run through the reports like threads that bind the many voices, concerns, and suggestions into a loose-knit unity: community and outreach.

Throughout the reports and the discussions surrounding them I find a deep concern for "community"--an aspiration that this be a more welcoming and inclusive place. This community concern is, of course, a reflection of our often fragmented and somewhat fractious personal lives which this institution cannot make whole. Yet the Task Force reports make a number of helpful and challenging suggestions in this regard. One dimension of this aspiration toward community concerns the way the various constituencies of the College interact--students, faculty, and staff. In particular, students would like more interaction outside class with the faculty. And staff would like to see better



recognized their contribution to the central enterprise of the institution, teaching and learning. More appropriate places and occasions in which we come together are sought. Another dimension of this communal aspiration concerns the relationship of the families of Bryn Mawr students, faculty, and staff to the institution.

The other common theme, "outreach," presents a number of aspects. The Task Forces recommend that the College's curriculum provide more opportunities for service learning and fieldwork. The theory of the classroom should better connect with the world of practical experience. This need may be felt the strongest in the social sciences where important efforts are being made in this regard. The reports similarly recommend that the College community, students, faculty, administrators and staff, seek and find more opportunities for extracurricular service to the surrounding communities. Another area of outreach concerns connecting students with the post-graduate world through advising, internships, externships. And, finally, in this regard the reports suggest that the institution could do better staying connected to its alumnae/i. The alumnae/i might both better serve the institution and the current students, and the College might better be of service to the alumnae/i.

The common threads of "community" and "outreach" tend in opposing directions--inner and outer directed. Clearly we have to find a place of balance sustained by the pull in the two directions. The reports are replete with similar tensions, contradictory tendencies and varying perceptions of the institution from faculty, students, and staff. This is indicative of the strengths and weakness of this planning process as we have structured it. The reports provide more evaluation and diagnosis than they do a plan. What we have been conducting has been more a conversation about what we are about and how we are carrying out the task than it has been a planning effort. The broad representation and participation invited complaint and constructive criticism. It also exhibited the enormous good will of faculty, students, and staff and has revealed some of the great characteristics and strengths of the institution: that we perceive ourselves as a community and not simply as a workplace, that the constituencies wish to be more involved with one another, and that all are vitally concerned with the short- and long-term future of the institution. The planning process addressed the breadth and complexity of the institution but it has not been able to address sufficiently the depth of many of the most important issues. Nonetheless a number of important issues have been "moved along" by the process. Importantly, a wider and more appropriate context for coming to terms with the issues has been established. It must also be said that the reports provide us with an impressive list of suggestions and recommendations--many of which have already become mandates of various College committees and offices.

These mandates are either specific recommendations that can be implemented directly or, more often, more general recommendations that certain aspects or functions of the institution be more carefully scrutinized and reshaped. In most cases, these recommendations have an appropriate administrative office or faculty or staff committee (or both) to which this task can be passed. In short, the planning initiative needs to continue but needs to return to bodies--offices, committees, or groups--who have the authority and responsibility under the plan of government to carry out the requisite tasks. For example, the Curriculum Committee is addressing the central question of the revision of the undergraduate college curriculum. An ad hoc committee appointed by the President is considering merit pay and the evaluation process as it concerns staff. The Admissions Office is undergoing reorganization and is implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on recruitment and retention.

To continue this planning in an ordinary way and not the extraordinary mode of this two-year mobilization of the community, one particular change in our organization is required. The College should establish a small representative planning body which could advise the President with respect to broad institutional priorities such as facilities, academic support, fund-raising goals, and so forth. Rather than constitute yet another committee, perhaps it would be best to appoint this group in virtue of their role as head of important groups: Appointments Committee, Committee on Academic Priorities, Staff Association, and student government associations, for example. This group might replace the Bryn Mawr Council.

### **Conclusion**

My discussions with the community--faculty, students, and staff--in the aftermath of the publication of the reports this fall found almost uniform support of the reports. Interestingly enough, the constituency that engaged the most in the post-report discussions was the staff. Many among the various constituencies were disappointed that the reports did not settle any number of important issues, but the community affirms the direction toward which reports point. This direction is not so much a redefinition of the institution but a renewal. We need to do better what we are doing.

The institution's identity is, of course, a complex and manifold one. We do many things; most importantly, we maintain two graduate schools and an undergraduate college. But at the core of this enterprise is the undergraduate liberal arts college. And though we have two graduate schools, we should not understand ourselves as a mini-university. Teaching must have a very high priority here. And the faculty must continue to find a

way that the tension between their teaching and their research be a fruitful one. We will continue to have a higher teaching load than research universities. And we will continue not to rely on graduate students for teachers. If this is to work well for faculty and students, we need a faculty that does not stay exclusively within their individual research specialties or even the department. The conversation with colleagues and students in and out of the classroom requires a broader view and, needless to say, a deep love of learning. It goes without saying that we need to continue to attract a student body prepared for and interested in a liberal arts education.

My conversations with faculty, students, and staff have reconfirmed the importance of and institutional consensus on the central defining feature of the undergraduate college: that Bryn Mawr is a college for women. This premise of the planning procedure has found consistent and repeated reaffirmation. Furthermore, I have found the planning conversations, formal and informal, renewing the College's long-time commitment to maintaining and supporting a diverse student body, faculty, and staff. Similarly reaffirmed has been the international character of our student body and curriculum.

This commitment to an excellent liberal arts education for women which is diverse and international provided the background for the planning and self-evaluative process. The conversations and reports continue to grapple with the many ambitions of the College--the great number of departments and programs, undergraduate and graduate. A persisting difficult question asks whether our reach exceeds our grasp. Here I should note the fundamental significance of our close relationship with Haverford College which in many quite different ways helps us define what we do and who we are. It not only complements and supplements what we do but provides institutional and individual conversational partnership for the ongoing task of self-definition. Our planning procedure suggests that Swarthmore College should become a greater participant in our joint enterprise.

Inasmuch as the institution's identity is complex, manifold, and historical, it is ineluctably contestable. The institution, like the liberally educated and self-reflective individual we trust we graduate, must continue the discussion with itself about itself. The various planning initiatives inaugurated by this planning for an agenda must now be followed up.