

Good planning: wise choices must preserve our distinctive character

There is much in this issue that sets one to thinking. If life is what happens while planning one's life, then Barbara Horlbeck's story (page 18) is more than an account of the experiences of several alumnae with international adoption. It is a story of hope and disappointment, of frustration and fulfillment, and of the value of children and family.

In a very different context, I also have been hearing about life and planning from alumnae/i and parents around the country. Several dozen men and women have accepted my invitation to comment on strategic planning and Wheaton's future. In each case, she or he shared a formative Wheaton experience while expressing hopes and fears for alma mater.

My correspondents so far seem to be optimists, quite fond of Wheaton but clear-eyed, not at all teary with nostalgia. Some cite improvements that I myself find are needed and that we either are addressing or are preparing to address: more student rooms to enhance the residential experience; a fitness center that is inviting and challenging; modern, extensive facilities for teaching and learning science; an outdoor track; and, last, but certainly not least, a better—and more popular—dining program. Fortunately, they uniformly and wholeheartedly agree on another point—that the young people at Wheaton today are as fortunate to live and learn here as they themselves were.

Craftily angling for more cards, letters and e-mail from you, I want to share excerpts from a few of the

messages I have received so far.

"My years at Wheaton also gave me a new confidence in my own intelligence and helped me overcome a certain shyness," wrote Ann Mitchell '62 of New York City. "I believe that confidence came about mostly as a result of the single-sex environment. I am not, however, one of those alumnae who vehemently opposed coeducation. I recognized the necessity for the change, but I hope the current campus environment continues to give women the sense of empowerment that my classmates and I experienced."

Mary Lavrakas Merrill '68 of Bar Harbor, Maine, is a former math major who also studied physics. She wrote about improving our science facilities and the status of past planning for that purpose: "The importance of science and math education to our country, particularly given the many news reports of how poorly U.S. students have fared versus students from other countries, strongly suggests to me that Wheaton should place a major emphasis on improving this area. I believe it will be critical to her reputation in the near and later future."

In her e-mail, Helen Condon Powell '65 of Boston commented, "Wheaton's sense of community is its strength. Graduates often seem to go into community service, local politics, volunteer work, to make a difference without being aggressively political about it. I think Wheaton grads are tolerant but also committed. One way of leveraging this

strength is to use alums to make a connection with students and get them involved in their communities and volunteer work ... lots can be done with the Internet and e-mail."

For Clara Myrick Green '67 of Bethesda, Md., it is important for me to know that "the idea that Wheaton should not become too elite was echoed by a group of Washington Wheaton '67 alums that met at my house a few weeks ago. ... Like this group, I would like to see our alma mater's reputation grow, but I hope that it does not become a school whose mission is to serve those who already have found their way. It is a difficult task, being excellent while seeking out and serving those who have yet to achieve excellence, yet this is what I would like Wheaton to take on as a goal."


In responding to these and other thoughtful messages, I have stressed two things: good planning demands that we make best use of our resources and that means making wise choices; and that we strive for

preeminence without losing our distinctive character. Without question, we will retain our small size and close student/faculty relationships. We can become better known and will work at that by remaining true to our core values. After all, it was the intentional decision to retain our core values, traditions and character, along with our gender-balanced curriculum, that has contributed to the success of coeducation at Wheaton.

I am grateful for the encouragement so many of you gave me. Again, Clara Myrick Green:

"Certainly Wheaton is heading in the right direction, and I am pleased to support the school as it makes its way in this difficult era in which we live. You have my belated congratulations on your appointment, my best wishes on the beginning of your tenure as president, and my thanks for this opportunity to express my thoughts on Wheaton's future."

Neither Wheaton nor I could ask for better support than that.

Keep those cards and letters—and e-mails—coming! 



President Crutcher meets with alumnae/i leaders Chris McAllister '94 and Nancy Usui Hoffman '60 during Homecoming weekend.