April 21, 1975

MEMO TO: The Faculty

FROM: Robert W. McAhren

At the request of President Huntley and Deans Watt and Atwood, I have prepared the enclosed summary of faculty comments about the effect coeducation would have on the classroom and campus life. This summary, together with the original letters, has gone to the Select Committee of Trustees which is gathering information about coeducation and will become part of the Select Committee's report to the full Board.

The Select Committee has asked me to invite any faculty member to submit, in writing, his or her comments upon the issues raised in the summary or upon other issues not included in the summary. Those additional comments will become a part of this summary and also will be available in their entirety to the Trustees.

Please note that the enclosed summary has been edited to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. The version which goes to the Trustees will identify the respondents and the authors of the quotations by name, faculty rank, and discipline.

If you decide to submit written statements, please do your best to get them to me by April 30.

[Signature]
Robert W. McAhren
Associate Dean of the College
MEMO TO:  Select Committee of Trustees on Coeducation
FROM:  Robert W. McAhren

Deans Watt and Atwood have asked me to attempt a summary of responses to your request for faculty views as to how coeducation would affect Washington and Lee. On January 8, 1975, a memo to the faculty invited them to submit in writing "their opinions or experiences which touch on the effect coeducation would have" on the classroom or campus life in general. To date, we have received 20 replies. They break down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation for Coeducation at W&amp;L</th>
<th>Recommendation against Coeducation at W&amp;L</th>
<th>No Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 replies</td>
<td>4 replies*</td>
<td>2 replies</td>
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</table>

*While several respondents are heads of departments, they wrote only on their own behalf; one person, however, wrote on behalf of his department.

Any attempt to summarize these views renders me liable to errors of omission and commission. Nevertheless, I shall at least make the attempt.

First, I shall consider the statements listed under "No Recommendation." Two faculty members addressed themselves to the question of how coeducation would affect their departments' education programs without stating a preference for or against coeducation.

The opponents of coeducation have various reasons for their opposition. They are as follows:

Coeducation creates as many problems as it solves. U.Va. has more theft and rape, fewer accidents on road trips.

Coeducation might force the elimination of Rockbridge County Grants.

There is a need for all-male institutions similar to the need for all-female institutions.

As many men come to W&L because it is all-male as do not come because it is not coeducational.
The expense of providing equal opportunities for women in curricular
and extracurricular activities is prohibitive.

There is no need for coeducation so long as "our applications and en-
rollment are not adversely affected."

Some faculty support coeducation because it is "fashionable" and a
decision to become coeducational would be "a contemptible surrender to fad."

Coeducation is a "betrayal" of "serious education."

Coeducation is "typical rather of Soviet Russian and Red Chinese Society."

In "Western countries . . . nothing much is at stake in education for
women beyond high school."

At W&L coeducation means abandoning a social tradition "in whose validity
virtually all men believe (though not all admit it)."

College age women are more prone than men to "dwell on pseudo-philosophical
and . . . moralistic aspects of . . . problems" and are "unwilling to deal with
tangible elements."

Teaching women would be "exceptionally difficult and painful."

Statements in favor of coeducation have two central themes; the first is
that coeducation would attract better qualified applicants to the freshman
class. One faculty member, drawing on his experience at a coeducational
institution, believes coeducation would "get rid of the weak third of the
freshman class." Another declares "in the present freshman class, for example,
the approximately 25% of the class taken from the bottom three quintiles of
their graduating classes might be replaced in part by drawing upon a broader
and larger pool of applicants that will include women." Still another says
"We are in a buyers market and high school students no longer buy the all-male
(or all-female) campus with the eagerness they once did. This is beginning to
show up in the drop-off in ability and the decline in applications." One
proponent believes that current undergraduates are "less well-prepared and
generally dumber to begin with" than ten years ago when he first came to Washington and Lee. He goes on to say, "regardless of what position the Admissions Office might take on the matter" he finds today's students "less capable of being educated" than those of the 1965-70 period. He recognizes that this is partly the result of "broad cultural pressures" and "irresponsible of secondary school administrators" but he believes admission of women "might . . . be a way of reestablishing the potential excellence that we used to be able to approach on a daily basis here." Another proponent states that the quality of entering freshmen keeps "slipping a little each year in spite of . . . increased recruiting efforts." He believes the "crucial figures" are not how many freshmen are admitted but how they measure up in board scores and class rank. He believes faculty members are having to lower "standards" and "the general level of class discussions."

The second general theme of the proponents of coeducation is that it would improve the quality of academic work performed once the student applies, enters, and is on campus. One professor, drawing on his 15 years experience on co-educational campuses, declares that women are "more likely" than men to prepare for class on a "day-to-day basis." This facilitates classroom discussion since the daily presence of well prepared students "reduces the tendency of the remainder to attempt to 'wing it'" without advance preparation. Another teacher, comparing Washington and Lee with his experience at another institution during its transition to coeducation, believes his Washington and Lee men would be more "teachable" with women on campus. His male students spend "a good half of some weeks chasing skirts all over the Eastern seaboard." His freshmen enter even his Thursday morning classes "groggy" after their very late return from Sweet Briar. One faculty member, relying on his experience at two coeducational insitituions, declares that the "quality" of "day-to-day classroom experience" at the coeducational colleges was "higher." He goes on,
"the best classes at Washington and Lee do not measure up the best classes" at the coeducational institutions. "Invariably the women excelled," he says, and he believes it is because women were admitted that the level of academic work was higher at the two coeducational schools than it is here. Another professor is convinced that "class discussions and other aspects of the educational experience will be enhanced by including women."

Some faculty believe that teaching their disciplines will benefit from women in the classroom. One comments that his women exchange students were "among the best students" and speculates that in language and literature courses women would "perform well, probably (but not certainly) above the level of men." In his courses which discuss literature in translation, he thinks women would "lend an additional dimension to the discussions." Another professor offers a particularly interesting and vivid description of his difficulties in teaching certain kinds of literature to all-male Washington and Lee classes. His account is well worth reading in its entirety but, put briefly, he has had to drop women authors from his courses because his male students "find the emotions and motives of the major characters incomprehensible." Not only does he encounter difficulties teaching female authors, he also has trouble teaching such male authors as Shakespeare. In an advanced seminar, his students "misread passage after passage" because they thought Shakespeare was satirizing or condemning the heroine. In a later year, he taught the same course with the same experience until a female exchange student "leaped into the fray, arguing eloquently that they [male Washington and Lee students] totally misunderstood what a woman seeks from a man." He says his "usually shy and silent Exchange student" convinced the Washington and Lee students. He declares he encounters "similar problems" teaching Euripedes' Hippolytus, Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer and The Turn of the Screw. In trying to teach works by male authors which "deal with sex but do not introduce
major female characters" he encounters other problems. His all-male classes
"swallow Hemingway's machismo uncritically" and "lap up Donne's most raunchy
and offensive attacks on women" or suppress any criticism for fear of appearing
"unmasculine." He believes this tendency is "downright unhealthy" and thinks
even one female student would offer a counterpoise.

In the area of creative arts, one professor, while not urging coeducation,
reminds that his female exchange students "have been consistently excellent in
creative courses and consistently poor in [other kinds of] courses." He be-
lieves that coeducation would bring a "greater demand" for certain courses in
his field but would also bring greater participation in extracurricular activi-
ties. Another professor, also not urging coeducation, remarks that his ex-
perience at coeducational institutions revealed that "a large number of the
brighter women students followed a career in the arts." He anticipates that
coeducation would pose "immediate problems" for the Fine Arts because the
"anticipated rise in enrollment" would require "more space and added faculty." He estimates that coeducation would "double" studio space needs but thinks they
could make do with existing space if there were additions to the faculty which
would permit more effective utilization of space.

In the social sciences, one professor remarks that women would make
possible more effective teaching in courses which touch on certain "perennial
issues" such as "women's liberation, public education, peace and war, welfare,
abortion, and crime." He compares the advantages of coeducation to the ad-
vantages of integration; Blacks in the classroom bring to bear a valuable
and distinctive viewpoint on certain issues. Another professor has some
concern about the impact of coeducation upon enrollments in the Commerce
School; for that reason he favors an increase in the size of the student
body by about 200. A different faculty member, however, emphatically opposes
any increase in size, referring to the study made a few years ago by a com-
mittee of which he was a member. One teacher, in commenting on the question of increasing the size of the student body, believes Washington and Lee has already passed a "critical size boundary" and has already "lost some of the characteristics of a 'small' school" when the student body increased beyond 900. He does not, therefore, think that the increase which, he says, "should accompany" coeducation "would alter the character of the school very much."

In the natural sciences, a professor believes his programs "would not be adversely affected" by coeducation. Another department head does not expect "significant changes in the science departments." He anticipates other departments would experience a gain or loss in enrollments necessitating an adjustment of faculty size, but he believes this problem would be "manageable."

A third major theme of the proponents is that coeducation would improve the quality of student life outside the classroom and provide a more realistic basis for male-female relationships. Most who argue this point believe the status quo gives rise to unhealthy and singularly exploitative male attitudes toward women. One states that it is impossible for a college age male to develop in a "normal, healthy" way in an all-male environment and cites current psychological research as the basis of his view. Another comments that "too many" Washington and Lee men have a "distorted, narrow and nearly immoral view of women" which comes from experiencing females solely as "weekend dates or road-trip targets." As a result, our students acquire a "grossly inflated view of their own importance" when seen in the light of current social trends away from "male hegemony." He believes that "working and learning alongside women is a better preparation for a rich and mutually satisfying life-relationship." Another says the Washington and Lee situation encourages a man to view women "as a sexual object, isolated in some distant town, not as a real human being capable of intellectual activity."

One faculty member expressed concern about the status of Washington and
Lee within the academic community as one of the last all-male institutions. He remarks that his professional colleagues from the West and Midwest often confuse us with Washington and Jefferson and William and Mary and then regard him with a "disconcerting" blend of "amusement and amazement" when they learn that Washington and Lee is all-male. He comments he would not "like" us to become an "interesting anachronism on the American scene." He goes on to elaborate a variation on this theme. He says a visiting speaker asked him if there was much homosexuality on our campus. This faculty member "worries" that all-male institutions will eventually "become associated--either in the public perception or in reality--with homosexuality."

Related to the concern for the University's increasing minority status as an all-male institution is a concern about institutional philosophy and goals. Some faculty believe it inappropriate for an educational institution to take the position that it will serve only men. One remarks that Washington and Lee's goal should be "the development of the whole person," and this is impossible without the on-campus presence of women. Another person believes the "goals and values of a humane liberal arts education are at odds" with sex discrimination "no matter how benevolent its intent." Yet another admits that "at one time it made sense" to educate only men but in today's world women seek "intellectual stimulus and training" and it may be Washington and Lee's "duty" to offer its opportunities to women.

Some proponents express reservations about their support of coeducation because of its anticipated expense. One is concerned about the pattern of giving exhibited by women graduates. Another thinks the justification for the expense must depend on the "overall strength" of the "resulting" University. One professor, however, remarks that in view of the "persistent fact that women control more than half the nation's wealth" we ought "to tap this source of survivability, or at least not to offend it."
Aside from the question of size of the student body, several proponents have strong beliefs as to how to accomplish coeducation. Most who comment on "models" of becoming coeducational vigorously oppose holding women to a minority of the student body. One believes Washington and Lee should "make every effort to educate, not just to tolerate" women and to meet their special needs in curriculum, staff, and housing. He advocates some form of consolidation with a neighboring woman's college. Another professor also opposes giving women only a minority status. One faculty member, drawing on his knowledge of the experience at another institution which became coeducational, delineates some of the problems that coeducation brings as well as relieves.

Finally, a number of the proponents would agree with one when, casting aside "pedagogical and philosophical arguments," he remarks that "candor compels" him to admit "I like having pretty girls (persons) around."