

APPENDIX

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS: A SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS SEPTEMBER, 2011

PREPLANNING AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROCESS

During the 2007–2008 academic year, the College initiated a long-range planning process known as Swarthmore 2020, a process that was never completed, in part due to the Great Recession. That crisis challenged us to identify and work through critical budget adjustments very quickly. The strength of the College going into 2009 and our measured response allowed us to emerge from that crisis without eroding our ability to provide the stellar liberal arts education we have always provided. We did recognize, however, the need to examine the changing landscape of higher education, the evolving financial climate, and other shifts that will affect us moving forward and to develop, as a community, a vision for how Swarthmore will continue its tradition of excellence.

The Board established a preliminary strategic-planning task force consisting of faculty, Board, and staff members and charged the group with exploring a broad range of literature on the emerging trends and factors affecting higher education, examining the sensitivity of our financial model to these factors, and reviewing the initiatives of peer institutions. After reviewing the information produced by the inchoate Swarthmore 2020 effort, the task force researched literature on the trends, issues, cautions, and opportunities that might affect the future of higher education before coming together to devise a structure for the planning process. Those initial conversations yielded the process in which we have been engaged since fall 2010, with the expectation that we will finalize the plan this winter.

Themes and Guiding Principles

After much discussion, the task force members identified four major themes—*globalization; technology; changes in knowledge, teaching, and learning; and sustainability*. They established five essential guiding principles: *increased flexibility; the ability to make difficult choices; courage; the necessity to be value-driven and data-based; and the ability to distinguish between primary and derivative considerations*. And the preplanning task force concluded its work by outlining:

- I. Four foci of conversation and work:
 - A. The evolving mission, values, and goals of Swarthmore in the 21st century
 - B. The future of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is taught and learned
 - C. Admissions, access, and affordability
 - D. Alumni engagement and development
- II. General charges for the process:
 - A. Provide a vision for each area, identifying challenges, financial needs, and opportunities.

- B. Articulate a clear strategy for achieving that vision, identifying potential trade-offs, resource needs, and possible courses of action.
- III. An A) organizational structure and B) timeline:
- A. Four working groups, to reflect the established foci of the work; a planning council; and a steering committee
 - B. Timeline
 - i. October 2010–February 2011: explore the context
 - ii. March 2011–May 2011: determine the recommendations
 - iii. June 2011–September 2011: draft a plan
 - iv. October 2011–Winter 2011: finalize the plan
 - v. Winter 2011/2012: propose the plan to the Board
 - vi. Spring 2012: begin implementation of the plan

EXPLORING THE CONTEXT

Once the planning process was approved by the Board in October 2010, the four working groups were established and charged. We focused our attention first on Swarthmore’s values. In particular, we asked members of the Swarthmore community—faculty, staff, and Board in meetings; alumni through Alumni Council gatherings and presidential events; and students at lunches, fireside chats, and dinners—some variation of the following question: *What are the top two or three most important values that you believe Swarthmore should maintain or strengthen?* This was also the opening exercise of every working group. The responses were remarkably consistent.

Values the Community Affirmed

The values that surfaced were: *excellence*, in all that we do but academic excellence and rigor in particular; *community*, especially an affirmation of our strengths in building a diverse, cohesive, and caring community; *Quaker values*, with serious questions about how we ensure deeper connections to those roots; *civic responsibility*, a commitment to the common good and a need to develop leaders who share in that commitment; and *access*, the hope that no student’s financial circumstances should prevent him or her from pursuing a Swarthmore education.

The process was designed to be inclusive. The working groups as well as the Strategic Planning Council all included members of the faculty, staff, student body, and alumni. A wide array of conversations was organized to solicit input from all these constituencies, and, together, the community explored both the internal and external pressures to which this strategic plan would have to respond. All members of the Swarthmore College community were invited to articulate their concerns and to express their excitement for what they see as the possibilities and opportunities for the future of the College.

Not only did we publish as much of the material as possible on the Web, but we also encouraged community members to share their thoughts via the Web or email at any time during the process. We will continue that model in fall 2011, again holding community wide conversations; smaller meetings among faculty, students, and staff; and fireside chats and lunches.

A shining example of the incorporation of the community voice into the process is the work of Stu Hain, vice president for facilities and services, who conducted eight one-hour sessions, meeting with small- to medium-sized groups of facilities and services staff. He reported tremendous engagement on the part of his staff, who contributed valuable suggestions and recommendations. A summary of that process and the resulting input to strategic planning conversations appears in A-4.

Following the series of conversations on values, we spent the next phase of the process examining data, as the working groups immersed themselves in their areas of responsibility. Those working on alumni engagement and development investigated which campus departments engage alumni, how they do so, and lessons to be learned from that engagement. Those working on access, aid, and admissions analyzed data on admitted students, national and international student trends, demographic changes, and the admissions selection process for forming a well-balanced and cohesive class.

At this stage, the four faculty members on the steering committee clarified some of the key issues to the rest of the faculty and initiated discussions around a series of questions within their departments and programs, asking, for example, in what ways their disciplines and their students were changing, which habits of mind and which skills students should develop over the course of their four years at Swarthmore, and what promising models faculty members could suggest with regard to issues such as globalization, technology, and the rapid expansion of knowledge. Each department and program summarized the responses they received, after which department and program chairs or other representatives met to discuss the responses. The substantial information we gathered was invaluable in directing us toward the areas on which we need to focus. Such discussions have continued to guide us. A-1 lists the topics discussed at faculty meetings in spring 2011.

During the same period, in fall 2010, extending the exploration beyond the campus, President Rebecca Chopp began a series of dialogue tours that continued throughout the year. In locations that included Greenwich, Hong Kong, London, New York, Philadelphia, Princeton, Seattle, Seoul and Tokyo, she engaged alumni, parents, and friends of the College in conversations about the issues under discussion, including “Reflections on Sustainability,” “Discussions of Technology,” and “Innovation and the Entrepreneurial Spirit.” She held targeted, small-group conversations with selected staff and faculty. This last forum became more common as subgroups of the working groups investigated specific issues requiring more precisely defined conversations—such as the competency subgroup of the “knowledge” working group speaking with the Writing Program’s steering committee about its work; or members of the planning council exchanging ideas with members of the Crum Woods Stewardship and Sustainability Committees.

A number of fireside chats, and other meetings were held with students, including a “Sharples Takeover” late in the spring—over dinner, members of student council, faculty, and staff within various working groups and Dean of Students Liz Braun encouraged students to contribute their ideas on the future of Swarthmore and prompted almost 700 suggestions, summarized in A-3. Further themes that emerged from student conversations included a desire to maintain commitment to access and the expansion of financial aid for international students; a desire to examine the curriculum with the goal of finding ways to include new areas of interest to students; and a wish to increase opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to come together as a community. As with all the conversations, nuances and differences emerged in the students’ statements and

observations, but these themes together with the representations in A-3 give a broad sense of the views we heard from students during this process.

The Alumni Council hosted a series of small group dinners with alumni in two dozen cities, both nationally and abroad; and the 2011 Arts Weekend provided an opportunity to talk with Parents' Council and to hear their ideas. See A-6 and A-7 for feedback from these groups.

Throughout the process, the strategic planning website (www.swarthmore.edu/strategicplanning) has been actively maintained with articles, updates, and questions posed by members of the working groups. The site has received more than 200 comments from alumni, faculty, students, and staff.

DRAFTING, SHARING, AND FINALIZING THE PLAN

As the 2010–2011 academic year drew to a close, the working groups set out to synthesize the many ideas voiced and formulate a vision and set of recommendations responding to the issues—both internal and external—that we will need to address. These recommendations were reviewed during the May 2011 Board meeting and passed on to the steering committee responsible for drafting this report.

Comprehensive Review/Articulating the Details

The steering committee reviewed the preliminary recommendations, rigorously examining them to pinpoint financial and other implications and determining concrete details on issues such as staffing, faculty, curriculum, and size, and began to develop the draft plan described above, around the larger issues including globalization, interdisciplinary and emerging fields, technology, and community.

The planning council revised a draft update, which is now being shared with the Board and with the broader community for comment and further refinement. We will schedule numerous opportunities during fall 2011 for the community to discuss and refine the draft of the plan presented here. We hope that the plan successfully affirms the strengths, practices, and values that make us distinct and captures the principles that define a bold direction for the College. We look forward to hearing again from community members to ensure that they agree. Over the course of the winter, we anticipate the completion of a definitive strategic plan that maps out the future we aspire to for Swarthmore, followed by the start of its being put into action in spring 2012.

A-1: FACULTY DISCUSSIONS (SPRING 2011)

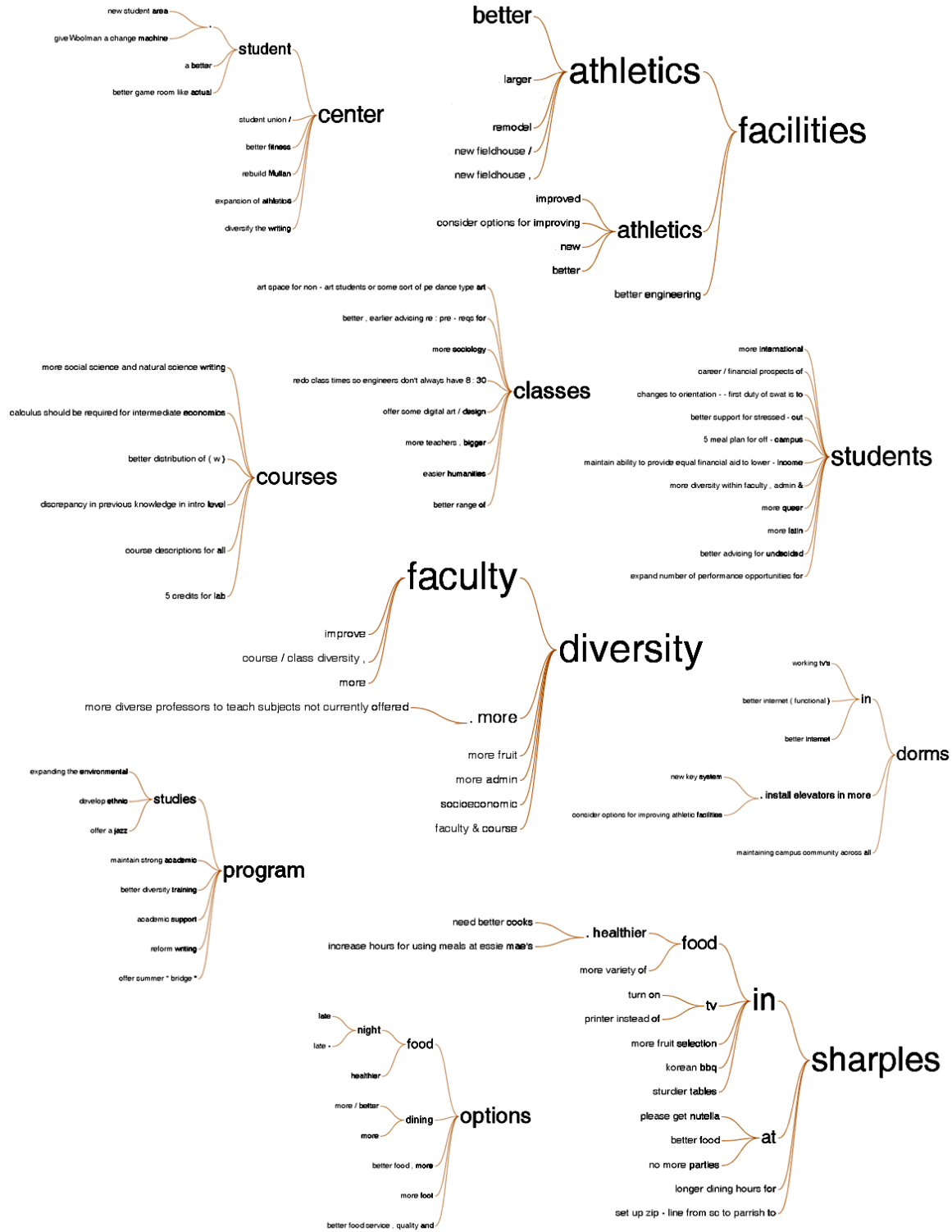
- **How we teach and what support we need to teach effectively**
 - Are there promising newer teaching strategies with which faculty members are experimenting or which they have found successful? e.g., problem-based learning, community-based learning? What resources are needed to be effective?
 - Are there tried-and-true practices that should be continued, or adapted? e.g., lecturing? Why? Again, what resources are needed for effective teaching?
 - Do you have suggestions or ideas we should be exploring?
- **The place of student research in our academic program**
 - What do we mean by “student research”—what kinds of experiences do we have in mind?
 - Why is student research important? How do students benefit from it?
 - What models are you aware of, from your work or others, that have worked well (or not)?
 - Where/When might such research experiences occur: summers; outside class; part of a class?
 - Should resources be dedicated to making such experiences possible for more students?
- **The intellectual life of the faculty and how the College supports it**
 - How much of your intellectual life is specifically invested in a program of research or artistic production? What aspects of your intellectual or scholarly life are invested in something other than your own research or artistic production?
 - In what ways, if at all, has your intellectual life changed in the past 10 years?
 - What are the factors that limit your intellectual life? How might the College help alleviate those limitations?
 - How could the College support emerging areas of inquiry and possibilities for innovation in scholarship?
 - Have alumni played a critical role or do you see such a role for them in your intellectual life?
- **Teaching diversely prepared students**
 - In what specific ways are students' preparations different from what you might have expected? e.g., in areas of knowledge, ways of thinking, or particular skills that you expect students to have and they do not? How rare or universal is this among students?
 - What new steps are you taking—either in the design of your courses to incorporate support structures or other means—to respond to these differences? What are the effects of those changes?
 - Are you able to capitalize on the differences that students exhibit to produce a positive effect on the learning experience for those students? If so, how? Similarly, are there issues that these differences impose that seem particularly problematic and difficult to resolve?
 - What should the College be doing with respect to this issue to support your efforts and our students' ability to thrive at Swarthmore?
- **The Honors Program**
 - In your experience, what are the positive and negative aspects of the Honors Program?
 - What resources are necessary to make Honors viable in your department or program?
 - How does Honors affect interdisciplinary possibilities?
- **Global dimensions of our current curriculum**
 - How does the content of courses you teach provide students with global perspectives?
 - How do activities in which your students engage further a global perspective?
 - What kinds of support would enable you to act on other ideas you may have?

A-2: SELECT STUDENT CONVERSATIONS

- **APRIL 2011**
 - *Open Lunch Session with President Chopp and Dean Braun*
 - *Fireside Chat co-hosted with Student Council: What are the competencies, skills, and habits of mind with which Swarthmore students need to graduate?*
- **MARCH 2011**
 - *Open Lunch Session with President Chopp and Dean Braun*
 - *President Chopp and Dean Braun Host Sharples Lunchtime Conversation*
 - *Fireside Chat co-hosted with Student Council: On faculty and course diversity*
 - *Sharples Takeover co-hosted by Dean Braun, Student Council and the students on the various strategic planning working group: On Ideas for Planning (See A-3 for a representation of suggestions offered.)*
- **FEBRUARY 2011**
 - *Open Lunch Session with President Chopp and Dean Braun*
 - *Fireside Chat co-hosted with Student Council: On admissions, access and affordability*
 - *Lunch with Board of Managers: Students discussed with Board members their answers to questions such as:*
 - Which teaching and learning styles/modes/experiences have you found to be the most effective and in what circumstances?
 - What do you hope we will investigate further as we think about the future of teaching, learning, and academic support at Swarthmore?
 - What role has technology played or should it play in your courses and your learning? When has technology been used very effectively, didn't work so well, or when was the absence of technology critical?
 - What have you valued most about your intellectual experience here?
- **JANUARY, 2011**
 - *Fireside Chat co-hosted with Student Council: On admissions, access, and affordability*
- **DECEMBER, 2010**
 - *Lunch with Board of Managers: discussion of the following questions:*
 - What does it mean to have a global perspective or to be a global citizen?
 - In what ways has Swarthmore helped or missed in helping you develop that perspective? What else could we be doing?
- **OCTOBER, 2010**
 - *Fireside Chat co-hosted with Student Council: On the key values, opportunities, and challenges*
 - *Lunch with Board of Managers: discussion of the following questions:*
 - What are the greatest opportunities for Swarthmore?
 - What areas and issues do you see needing to be addressed?

A-3: STUDENT IDEAS

The following is a representation of the ideas students shared during the March Sharples Takeover. Words are grouped with size (roughly) representing frequency and lines representing succession in a phrase. So, for example, “faculty diversity” appeared most often, with “athletics facilities” close behind; in particular “better athletics facilities” appeared fairly frequently relative to other things mentioned.



A-4: FACILITIES AND SERVICES STAFF DISCUSSIONS (2010–2011)

Stu Hain met with all the facilities and services staff: EVS, the management team, maintenance, Arboretum staff, dining services, and grounds—well over 100 people in eight sessions. In preparation for the session, each employee was asked to take a look at the strategic planning website, and then, at the meeting, they were asked to read one “history of the future” and discuss ideas they might have for their own. Each session also conducted an:

1. *Opening Exercise:* In your personal opinion, what are:
 - the five most commonly held values here at Swarthmore?
 - three or four things that make Swarthmore strong?
 - two or three areas of concern about the future for the College?

The image below is a representation of answers to the first of these questions by about six of the groups of staff. It is intended to provide a general sense of the responses. In the image, size of the word reflects frequency of occurrence.



2. *Discussion of process, issues, and concerns:* Sentiments that emerged included:
 - appreciation for the importance of and need for the faculty, administration, and Board to be the central actors in setting the direction of the College
 - pride in the way in which their work supports the work and lives of the students and faculty and how critical that is to the College
 - pride in how their work contributes to the beauty of the College and a joy for what they do here more generally
 - acknowledgment that they set an example by how they do what they do
 - that they have a unique view of and connection to faculty and students and appreciate it
 - a desire to know more about how to recognize students at risk and then how to respond in those instances.

3. *Ending Exercise:* At each gathering, staff members responded to the following and discussed: *As you imagine the world in 20 years and think about your own children and perhaps grandchildren, what skills do you think will be important for them?*

Below are a few of the responses we received in this final exercise:

- Social Skills (5)
- Communication (3)
- Computer literacy (3)
- Multilingual (3)
- Technology (3)
- Trades (3)
- Adaptability (2)
- Education (2)
- Emotional intelligence (2)
- Farming (2)
- Open-mindedness (2)
- Problem-solving (2)
- Stress management (2)
- Access to opportunity
- Adversity
- Balance
- Book smarts
- Common sense
- Comprehension
- Environmental knowledge
- Eye contact
- Fall-back skills
- Imagination
- Investing
- Leadership skills
- Life skills
- Mathematics
- Multitasking
- Networking
- Observation
- Organization
- Presentation skills
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Self-confidence
- Self-knowledge
- Self-sufficiency
- Street-smarts
- Time management
- Tolerance
- Willingness to accept help
- Writing

A-5: CALENDAR OF SELECT MEETINGS (2010–2011)

- **MAY 2011**
 - *Faculty Meeting*: Update and summary of the year's planning work
 - *Board Meeting*: Faculty panel and small group discussions on traditional practices, changes, and innovations in teaching
- **APRIL 2011**
 - *An Evening with the President*: Boston and Philadelphia
 - *Parent's Council Meeting*: Update on the process and ideas for Swarthmore
- **MARCH 2011**
 - *All Staff Meeting*: Update on the process and ideas for Swarthmore
 - *An Evening with the President*: Washington, D.C. and San Francisco
- **FEBRUARY 2011**
 - *An Evening with the President*: Durham and New York
 - *Board Meeting*: Faculty panel and small group discussions with faculty on traditional practices, changes, and innovations in teaching
- **JANUARY 2011**
 - *An Evening with the President*: Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong and New York
- **DECEMBER 2010**
 - *An Evening with the President*: Princeton
 - *Board Meeting*: On the global connectedness of Swarthmore
- **NOVEMBER 2010**
 - *An Evening with the President*: Greenwich
 - *Faculty Discussion*: Meeting of department and program chairs on shifts in disciplines; evolution of student learning and preparation; skills students will need and how liberal arts can best develop them; promising models and innovative examples of how major issues are being addressed; and other forces affecting all that Swarthmore does and hopes to do
- **OCTOBER 2010**
 - *All-Staff Meeting*: On the key values, opportunities, and challenges, and the critical role that staff play in supporting our educational mission
 - *Faculty Meeting*: On the changing landscape of teaching, learning, and research
 - *An Evening with the President*: Seattle
 - *Board Meeting*: On the key values, opportunities, and challenges

Note: Although some faculty meetings are noted here, most faculty discussions took place in the conversations outlined in A-1. Similarly, Alumni Council discussions are summarized in A-6.

A-6: SUMMARY OF ALUMNI COUNCIL DISCUSSIONS

Below is a condensed and paraphrased version of a summary prepared by Julie Brill '85, Carl Church Holm-Hansen '76, Delvin Dinkins '93, David Jenemann '93, and Richard Wilson '73 of the 24 gatherings of alumni held around the world between November 2010 and April 2011. One hundred and seventy-one alumni from the classes of 1945–2010 participated, whose opinions were widely varied and whose levels of prior engagement with the College were equally so.

- **VALUES**

There was general agreement concerning Swarthmore values, despite some differences of expression and interpretation. For example, some values were deemed “Quaker” in some gatherings, while in others these same values were said to express the core of a liberal education.

The majority of alumni participants believe that liberal arts are the foundation of Swarthmore’s identity. This form of education is the key to attracting students, and participants said that “learning how to learn” was the most important skill nurtured at Swarthmore.

Quaker influence and ideals and “academic rigor” were by far the most noted values mentioned. Other frequently mentioned values were diversity, social responsibility and political activity; liberal arts; respect, acceptance, tolerance of all people; community; professors and interaction with professors; listening; integrity; the Honors Program; need-blind admissions; small size; and equality among students.

A sizable number of gatherings felt that some of the ideals and values were more prominent in theory than in practice. There were comments (in 5 of 24 events) about “acceptance/tolerance” stating that there seemed to be an exception to this ideal for political conservatives, who were often not accepted. This comment came from members of classes from the 1960s through the 2000s.

- **ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT**

Comments about how to engage alumni ran the gamut, often with one comment contradicting another. Some alumni are in close contact with the College, and others rarely have contact. More than one person commented that most communications from the College have a subtext of “send money.” Although some alumni believed that using social media (*e.g.*, Facebook) was important, a significant number said they would not use these methods for staying in touch with the College; one host reported, “*All of the participants admitted to disliking certain aspects of social media*”; “*many do not use social networking media.*”

The one area with consistent comments was the *Swarthmore College Bulletin*. Almost all alumni like the *Bulletin* “as is,” and virtually all want the current print format to continue: “*The alumni magazine is very important to have on paper*”; “*Everyone in this group read the alumni magazine routinely.... Several people stated a strong preference for the magazine over email.*”

Comments regarding email and other electronic communications ranged from “*I like getting an every-few-months email about what's going on at the College*” to “*emails that come from the College are approaching spam.*” Some suggestions about what the

College could offer indicate that most alumni do not know what is available electronically or how to access it: *"The alums didn't know Swarthmore currently has podcasts of some lectures."* There is also a negative perception about the College's website and the ease of using electronic communications with the College: *"The Swarthmore website was difficult to maneuver."* Local gatherings (such as Connection events) received a mix of positive and negative comments. Some alumni would like more unstructured gatherings, while some want the gatherings to be more structured. Other alumni would like any sort of gathering in a local area in contrast to some who simply do not care about gatherings.

There seems to be a desire for more interaction with faculty members; many alumni regard the faculty as an integral part of Swarthmore so that little contact with faculty members means little contact with the College. Suggestions were made that faculty members could give lectures and/or be guests at connections around the country. Others suggested using faculty members in online seminars and short online lecture series.

Several groups included comments about using the talents of alumni more effectively and involving more of them more directly with the College. Suggestions included inviting alumni as presenters at workshops, symposia, and lectures and finding more ways for alumni to share their wisdom and experience with students.

Many alumni expressed an interest in helping the College but felt they were not asked and/or did not know how they could be of help.

Although most alumni attendees feel positive and passionate about the College, not all think that Swarthmore is the greatest place on earth. There was at least one comment about a "snobbish" attitude of being better than others. The decision to drop football came up at five of 24 gatherings, usually with negative feelings, and many alumni are still upset by the decision or how it was made.

- **TEACHING**

The most prominent ideas included staying academically challenging, maintaining the liberal arts focus, and limiting class sizes such that professors do the teaching.

On the other hand, there were many suggestions that Swarthmore needs to better prepare students for the real world, not just academia. Several alumni said they felt there was a presumption that all students at Swarthmore would all go to graduate school and not out into the "real world." Suggestions included exposing students to more career paths, promoting collaboration, and strengthening communication skills.

Some perceived a need for exposure to other cultures/countries, either via study abroad or at least a foreign language requirement. Most gatherings felt that additional foreign language study and/or study abroad should be either much more strongly encouraged or required. The exception was one group from Europe, which felt that such knowledge could not be acquired in just a few months of study abroad.

- **CONCLUSION**

Alumni participants were pleased to be asked for their opinions, and we received some excellent feedback and suggestions. Their shared appreciation of the College's

values was clear, as was their affection for the College (with a few exceptions). One member of the Alumni Council noted that “we criticize best what we care about the most, and Swarthmore teaches critical thinking skills well.”

A-7: SUMMARY OF PARENTS COUNCIL DISCUSSION OF IDEAS

What follows below is a summary of what Parent's Council shared during their spring 2011 meeting in response to being asked to participate in an "ideas for Swarthmore" exercise. Members of the Council were asked write one or two ideas that they thought the College should consider and one or two skills that a Swarthmore graduate should have. They were then asked to discuss what they wrote in small groups and to decide which two or three they thought were most compelling, and to share those with the entire group. Our discussion mostly focused on the ideas, rather than the skills. The summary below was provided by Danielle Shepherd, Director of Parents Programs.

- Establish leadership in liberal arts and increase Swarthmore's visibility so that others are more aware of its distinctiveness and value;
- Help students connect the liberal arts and what goes on here to more than just academics; help them to think creatively about the possibilities and then get to those possibilities;
- Help students secure and take advantage of the opportunities that make them able to be successful in what comes after Swarthmore—job (and life). Better utilize the resources that are available—going beyond the alumni. Parents can offer places for students to spend holiday breaks or internship/externship experiences.
- More Career Services support is necessary and even the faculty should be involved, using every possible contact. Greater visibility is needed to market the College and enhance the number of internships and externships.
- Suggest Career Services do more to link the academic to the practical world. Some of the areas are leadership skills and presentation skills. As the cost of a liberal arts education gets more expensive, what, for example, will an art history major do after graduation?
- Do more with wellness, thinking beyond athletics to achieve balance;
- What options are available to the student who does not want to study abroad?
- What is the long-term financial viability of the liberal arts college model? Implications for the future?
- We should affirm the things that make Swarthmore special, its key values, such as focus on civic and social responsibility, and we need to be careful not to erode these things;
- A desire for global awareness and high level of diversity, but are all students experiencing this or just surrounded by it?
- Be sure to address emerging ideas and areas that should be a part of a liberal arts education;
- Perhaps a new "student union" (building) would help with a sense of community.