

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

## President Troutt's report

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From: Troutt\_William  
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 2014 4:20 PM  
To: FACSTAFF  
Subject: January Trustee Update

In January of 2011, we hosted three visiting college presidents – Rich Morrill (Richmond), Mike McPherson (Macalester) and Diana Chapman-Walsh (Wellesley) to direct our view toward 2020. One of the outcomes of our work with them is our Rhodes Common Table. Trustee Chairman Bill Michaelcheck recently hosted a trustee retreat in New York City to help deepen our understandings of the steps we need to take to ensure Rhodes thrives in 2020. The aim of this retreat was to build on our understanding of a key Rhodes 2020 planning assumption: We must focus on what students and families value.

We were fortunate to have an all-star lineup of speakers and panelists, but key to our success were everyone's thoughtful questions and full engagement. Here are some personal reflections about what we learned and our follow-up opportunities.

We received a lot of affirmation –

- for who we are as a residential liberal arts college,
- for focusing on what students and families value,
- for having our retreat in New York City, and
- for having a Common Table to work together in supporting positive change.

Two college priorities were reinforced –

Completing Our Campaign for Rhodes. Most of our speakers commented on the fiscal challenges facing both institutions and American families. We were reminded that along with our science facility expansion priority, funds for middle-income students to attend Rhodes are so important. Our speakers and panelists described how liberal arts colleges are losing middle-class students. As Spence Wilson, Chairman of the Campaign for Rhodes, challenged us, “We need to finish our campaign this year with a ‘Dave Wottle Kick.’”

Expanding Our Residence Halls. Our keynote speaker, Rebecca Chopp, President of Swarthmore College, talked about the powerful influence of residential life. We currently have campus housing for about 70% of our students. Most leading liberal arts colleges such as Swarthmore house well over 90% of their students. We are fortunate that purchasing the Evergreen property gives us more options to consider. This year, we need to complete a plan to significantly expand our residence hall capacity.

We also discussed a number of promising approaches for increasing student value that will require more study and deliberation. We have a long list of good ideas developed in a session led by trustee Bill Evans. Here is my list of top follow-up opportunities: The Rhodes Message. Rebecca Chopp shared that all liberal arts colleges need more compelling ways to tell their story. Jeff Selingo, former editor of The Chronicle of Higher Education and author of College (Un)Bound, recommended that we identify the five things we do best, measure them, and message them. We also heard from New York school counselors (Larry Momo of Trinity, Kristi Marshall of Riverdale Country School, and Ted de VillaFranca '83 of Edvise Princeton) about the neeroutt\_Reflections on Board meeting\_2013jan\_001d for a data-driven value message and the importance of “cool points.” To the shrinking market of families who can afford a liberal

arts education, how we further differentiate ourselves from other colleges and universities will continue to be very important.

Rhodes Network Development. Our employer panel (Elizabeth Hurley '84, Deborah M. Sale '70, and Paul Queally, University of Richmond trustee and donor of a new career networking program) emphasized the importance of our alumni, parent, and trustee network - where it begins and how it must be expanded. The importance of internships and access to good job interviews will continue to grow. Over the next few years, further developing and expanding the "Rhodes Network" will be so important for internships, job placement, admission, and financial support.

Middle Income Student Access. We must continue to keep this as a fundraising priority.

Although we remain ahead of many top tier liberal arts colleges in this area, we want to keep this as one of our enduring values. We must build partnerships with others who share this value and can help us achieve this goal. During a guest trustee panel, all three trustees (of Amherst, Wellesley and Denison) emphasized the importance of ensuring middle class students have opportunities for an education in the liberal arts.

Innovation. Both Rebecca Chopp and Jeff Selingo talked about the need to recognize innovation on our campus and to provide support for it. Aligning trustees, faculty, and staff efforts in support of innovative efforts will be so important. Both speakers emphasized how higher education works in silos but students do not think or operate in such a way.

We need to find ways to encourage the very best in innovation. We are entering a new era in American higher education where students learn and behave in very different ways. We have to adapt to the changes in terms of how we support and facilitate more project-based, collaborative approaches to learning.

We were also reminded about how much students learn beyond the classroom via internships, research, and service. We must build upon the excellent beyond-the-classroom learning opportunities we have in Memphis and broaden these experiences both nationally and internationally.

Proving Value. As Jeff Selingo declared, "This will be the decade of proving value." From how we deliver our message to how we manage, using good data and having the right metrics will be very important. We must let the data help tell our story and we must use it for continually improving Rhodes. As Rhodes trustee Chick Hill reminded us, we cannot manage what we cannot measure. Moreover, we live in a society that will not simply believe in our value because we assert it. We must cast a critical eye on our claims, examine our assumptions, measure carefully, and build our value case on data.

Our retreat was important in so many ways, from the ideas shared by experts to what we learned from one another. It also helped in our effort to introduce Rhodes in a relatively new admissions market for us. We want to think about having our next trustee retreat in another city where we can both learn and have an impact. In addition to the trustee retreat, trustees visited four area schools, and 70 area alumni and parents attended a social gathering, helping to further our advancement goals.

Over the course of the next few weeks, we will be announcing the formation of Trustee Ad Hoc Committees and Common Table groups to focus on the areas listed above.

My thanks to faculty trustees Loretta Jackson-Hayes, Scott Newstok, and David McCarthy for their participation in this meeting. In addition, thank you to Gordon Bigelow, Carole Blankenship, and Darlene Loprete for attending as members of the Common Table.