

C O P Y

Burroughs Corporation

November 18, 1983

Dear President Wilson,

Over the past three weeks I have written you six letters, and each time I ended up throwing them away. Discretion may be the better part of valor-- I only hope my efforts here will be of some merit.

I attended the reception held in your honor held at the Congressional Country Club near Washington, D.C., and I must say that I walked away from there with many mixed emotions. You seemed to have a great deal of knowledge about Washington and Lee's history, and at the same time you talked about abandoning one of the University's biggest institutions.

Right from the start, I will tell you that I am not in favor of W&L's going coed. I must admit that your arguments and population statistics were somewhat convincing. However, when I heard you speak of Brown's acceptance/application percentage and Davidson's acceptance/application ratio, I almost got the impression that you felt W&L needed to go coed so that it did not have to accept such a high percentage of its applicants to fill the classrooms. Even though the acceptance/application ratio may be higher now than when I applied, W&L is harder to get into. Hopefully, you can see that the quality of the student at W&L has not deteriorated despite this higher acceptance/application ratio.

To me the quality of the student body at W&L should be the center of this whole debate, and not what the sexual composition of the student body is. I do not think that W&L has to have 1300 or so undergraduate students to survive through the end of this century, and maintain its high standards at the same time. You cannot judge every student by their SAT scores and sex.

Maybe the Admissions Office need to continue to branch out to even more sections of the country. Maybe there needs to be some kind of coordinated marketing effort between W&L and the other schools surrounding it. What Washington & Lee has to offer is almost unique in today's world, and the solution to preserving W&L does not lie in changing it to a coed school.

I also have some questions which I hope you will set me straight on. I gather from talking to other alumni that you have been lobbying former trustees, current trustees, newly-appointed trustees, and large donors to the University ever since you became president of the University. Is this true? Many alumni feel you will have won this battle before the war ever gets started. W&L's alumni should be upset that they had to learn about your plans in a newspaper, and rightfully so! I wonder whether or not the article in an upcoming issue of the Alumni Magazine addressing the coeducation issue would have ever been printed?

Along these same lines, the people in the Admissions Office are reputedly publicizing the fact that W&L will be coed sometime in the next few years. I believe this kind of publicizing to be somewhat premature-- or does Bill Hartog and his staff know more than the rest of us? Without getting into the subject now, I will also say I am rather upset and disappointed with your impressions of W&L's fraternity system. I imagine this subject will be your next battle, and can be addressed at a later date.

What really is at stake in this coeducation debate is Washington and Lee's tradition. In the past, the University has survived a number of times when the classrooms were not overflowing, and the school has come back to flourish time and again. I am sure the alumni would give generously to provide money enough to deal with shortfalls created by a lack of tuition funds. For my money, once you say good-bye to the all male student body, the next assault will be on the Honor System. The University of Virginia is a prime example of this. The Honor System there means almost nothing to the students in Charlottesville now. More than anything else a Washington and Lee student takes with him when he leaves is the importance of that Honor System.

Coeducation is the easiest way out of any numbers problem. It should also be the last solution you and the Trustees seek to implement. I would appreciate a reply from you addressing the "other benefits" of coeducation, if any, and also the other topics I mentioned here. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

/S/ Gerrald A. Giblin Jr. '81A

C O P Y

December 20, 1983

Mr. Gerrald A. Giblin, Jr.  
Burroughs Corporation  
Business Machines Group  
[REDACTED]  
McLean, Virginia 22102

Dear Mr. Giblin:

Do forgive me for replying so tardily to your thoughtful letter. It arrived at Thanksgiving time and since then I've been trying to keep up with my correspondence while engaged in several trips. I've fallen well behind.

I cannot deal fully with all the matters you raised in a single response. I do hope I can persuade you of one thing: that the coeducation question has by no means been decided. The rumor mill has made it seem so, I'm sure. But I am very anxious to insure that a wide sampling of thoughtful views is brought before the Board before such a decision is made. I fully expect that, in addition to many letters received from alumni and from the Alumni Board, we will also want to prepare a questionnaire, or something comparable, to send to all alumni.

My assumption all along was that it was still too premature for such an approach. I truly wanted a patch of time in which to explore the matter quietly with members of the Board and with the Faculty. In this way I thought I could be made to learn much more about Washington and Lee than I've managed to learn in the past eighteen months. But an unfortunate news story, one that led to many irresponsible variations, forced the issue into a larger arena well ahead of my intention to place it there.

In the current Alumni Magazine you will find an article I wrote in late October which attempts to summarize the views I have had expressed to me by various alumni and faculty of the University. I have tried to keep my own opinions out of it, for I truly want to remain open to various points of view. In any event, you will find in that article some of the arguments people have advanced in favor of admitting young women to baccalaureate degree status. There are, no doubt, others, even as there are very cogent arguments for trying to sustain the status quo.

I would ask you to consider that Washington and Lee's character may not be fixed by its gender--not entirely. The great people who have put their stamp upon this place will not disappear from our history should women be admitted on this side of the ravine. I think it will be Washington and Lee still, though clearly some things, even important things, can be expected to change.

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We have witnessed enormous changes here in the past twenty years. The Jewish "quota" was buried some time ago; black students were admitted in the late sixties; women were admitted to Law School in the early seventies; fraternities became places for social events, and not homes for members, in the seventies; and so on and on. You know many of these things firsthand. There are some who believe the University lost its distinction when the dress code was changed. I do not share that view but some serious people do.

Do write to me again when you have read the paper. I do value your impressions and would welcome hearing from you again.

Sincerely,

John D. Wilson  
President

JDW/bcb