

A. PRESCOTT ROWE
[REDACTED]
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23226

November 1, 1983

Dr. John Wilson
President
Washington and Lee University
Lexington, Virginia 24450

Dear Dr. Wilson:

I have read with considerable interest as well as dismay the news regarding the possible admission of women to the undergraduate program at Washington and Lee. While I can appreciate that statistical data may support the admission of women, I believe co-education would diminish significantly the uniqueness of W&L.

As I wrote you last Spring, I was overjoyed that my son, John, was to be a freshman this year. He is indeed there and one of the main reasons he chose W&L was because it was all male. While change is healthy, the overthrow of tradition may not be so.

I would urge that you devote your attention to curtailing the party situation as opposed to coeducation.

I hope you will allow W&L to retain its uniqueness.

Sincerely,

A. Prescott Rowe

November 7, 1983

Mr. A. Prescott Rowe

Richmond, Virginia 23226

Dear Mr. Rowe:

I have your letter and fully appreciate your feelings on the coeducation issue. The papers have simply picked up a note I first articulated at the annual meeting of the Alumni Association last May. That speech was later printed in the Alumni Magazine where you probably first encountered it. The newspapers have converted an intention to study a complicated question into a resolution to admit women. I regret that, but don't quite know how to turn it back.

Anyway we truly must look at it as carefully as we can and the Board is determined that that is what will be done. At stake is the continuing ability of the University to remain selective, to choose its students carefully to represent a wide range of interests and talents and ambitions. If we lose this capacity we will lose much of what has made W&L the distinctive university it has become. I do not refer to Board score averages alone. I refer to a broad range of considerations, geographic, athletic, extra-curricular leadership, artistic, academic. If we are compelled to accept 9 of 10 applicants we will have lost our claim upon the larger society.

Now this does not have to happen in some inevitable way. Perhaps we can enlarge our share of the college-going population by yet further admissions efforts in the face of great declines nationally. To plan upon this is also to assume that there will be a reversal in the number of young men who decline us because they prefer to attend coeducation places of comparable quality.

I don't pretend to know all the answers. I'm trying to sort through what would be lost and what would be gained. I'm trying to figure out how much we should be prepared to sacrifice in order to remain all-male.

I would welcome your further reflections on these thorny questions. I'm enclosing a paper I've shared with the Board and the Faculty and a few others. Kindly read it and let me know how you would work out your own private equation.

I will continue to work on the fraternity/party problems you allude to. They are not unique here, but they have taken on a special flavor here and they are deep and serious problems. I do not entirely separate them from the coeducation question, however. Perhaps I should.

Mr. A. Prescott Rowe
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Do let me hear from you again. And please keep my paper rather close to your own desk.

Most sincerely,

John D. Wilson
President

JDW/bcb

Enclosure