

May 22, 2020

Dear [first name preferred],

I hope this message finds you well wherever you are today – and that despite the challenges of life under quarantine, you have found a sense of connection and community that offers comfort. Here at Sweet Briar, we have just celebrated the graduation of 102 seniors who are now launching off into the world and prospective students are excited about this fall. I am pleased to share that our admissions deposits are tracking 14% percent ahead of last fall. Currently, we are also the only independent college in Virginia trending above 10%. Buoyed by this news, I also write as a follow up to President Meredith Woo’s video message regarding the financial impacts from COVID-19 on the College. You have no doubt heard commentary predicting the demise of small colleges across America.

The impacts, however, are very real, and include a loss of revenue from room, board and auxiliary enterprises; a decline in endowment value; as well as an anticipated decline in contributed support. Simultaneously, creating a safe environment for our students and campus community means we must invest in technology as well as enhanced healthcare services and facilities that will support healthy living and learning. All together, we believe the financial impact will be up to \$10 million.

Each day on campus, I have the opportunity to engage with our president, staff and faculty as we plan to safely reopen in the fall with in-person instruction. We will offer all students single rooms, on-campus health services, practical guidelines for healthy living and fresh food grown in our greenhouse. We are taking responsibility to ensure a safe campus – and are among the very few colleges that can deliver on such a promise.

As we look to the new academic year, we have developed a preliminary 2021 institutional budget, with a focus on cost efficiency and flexibility to enable the College to adapt to this changing world. We have applied for and received some funding from the U.S. Department of Education and Small Business Administration. These funds are helpful but cannot address the overall potential injury to our institution. For the current fiscal year – in the next 45 days – we must still raise \$1.3 million to meet our budgeted goals, which does not include the financial impacts of COVID-19.

It has been five years since I reached out to you with a call to action of this magnitude – and COVID-19 is a crisis none of us could have anticipated. I am truly aware that you are also feeling the very real pressures of the pandemic and hope that things will improve soon. If you are able, I respectfully request that you consider making an additional gift to the Sweet Briar Fund by June 30, 2020. There are many unknowns in front of us, but if 2015 revealed anything, it is the boundless power and determination of our alumnae community and friends.

Please know how much your commitment to this college and its renewal means to every young woman who passes through our gates. They each deserve the extraordinary education and signature experience of four unforgettable years on our beloved campus. Please join me in making a gift today.

They’re counting on us.

With gratitude,

Mary Pope M. Hutson '83
Vice President for Alumnae Relations, Development and Communications