

The Briar Wire

THE SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE ALUMNAE NEWSLETTER

Dear Alumnae and friends of Sweet Briar,

I am now two weeks into my job at your beloved college. This is perhaps the most challenging, and certainly most rewarding, of the positions I have taken in my career. The days have proven long but infinitely interesting. I am getting to know the students, staff and faculty – and slowly but surely, the indomitable alumnae of Sweet Briar. I am learning about where they grew up, about their families, their passion, what they like to do in their free time (and in the case of our Human Resources Department, what they like to bake on Tuesdays for the staff and faculty who drop by!) I am also learning about their hopes and aspirations – their assessment of where we are and where we need to go.

In the past two weeks, we have formed task forces for important envisioning of the future. The first task force will work on re-imagining our curriculum, to position Sweet Briar among the most innovative of the liberal arts colleges in America. The general charge is to make broad stroke decisions and recommendations on several fronts, including the creation of three or four innovative research and teaching clusters that focus on fostering the habits of the mind that “problem solve.” They will be student-focused, project-oriented, hands-on, and individually-designed. The clusters can be formed into “centers” or “initiatives.” I have seen some suggestions on the table, ranging from “sustainability,” “data science,” “design thinking,” “innovation and entrepreneurship,” “next media” and creativity that centers on collaboration with the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA). The task force will also review the wisdom of our current academic calendar, and seek ways to introduce flexibility to enable the alumnae and others (policy makers, artists) to come and join the joyful business of learning and knowledge sharing.



Other task forces will include one that examines our current business model, including tuition policy and multiyear plan; and another is called One Sweet Briar, designed to develop deep understanding of the talent and capability on campus, so we can better utilize our treasured human resources. We will be sure to include and update you in this effort as details emerge.

I look very much forward to our collaboration in the days ahead. As Mary Pope is fond of saying, onward!

Warmly,

Meredith Woo

President of Sweet Briar College

**Board of Directors
of Sweet Briar College**

*The Honorable Teresa Pike
Tomlinson '87, Chair*
*Dr. Meredith Woo
President of the College*
Andrew C. Benjamin
Jacquelyne “Jax” Bullett '15
Leah Solivan Busque '01
Alice Dixon '82
William B. Drake, Jr.
Marianne “Mimi” C. Fahs '71
Kelley Manderson Fitzpatrick '85
Carol McMurtry Fowler '57
Charlene “Sunny” Monk
Bernie Niemeier
James “Rocky” Query
Frank W. Roach
Mason Bennett Rummel '83
Caville Stanbury-Woolery '06
Allison “Allie” Stemmons Simon '63
Marcia Thom-Kaley
Georgene M. Vairo '72, Vice Chair
CeCelia E. Valentine '95
Elinor “El” H. Warner '85, Secretary
Marshalyn Yeargin-Allsopp, MD '68

Alumnae House Staff

Mary Pope M. Hutson '83
*Vice President for Alumnae Relations
and Development*
Priscilla Newton Carroll '87
Director of Alumnae Relations
Donna Dodd '15 and PA '01
*Assistant Director of Alumnae
Relations*
Paula Eanes
Advancement Services Coordinator
Claire Dennison Griffith '80
*Director of Major and
Planned Gifts*
Sarah Lewis
Stewardship Manager
Julia Paris '99
Director of Advancement Services
Rachel Pietsch
*Executive Assistant and Office
Manager*
Bonnie L. Seitz '01
*Assistant Director of Advancement
Services*

Clélie D. D. Steckel
*Assistant Director of the Sweet Briar
Fund and Editor of The Briar Wire*

Wanda Vest
Data Entry Manager

*We have a position open in our office.
Visit [sbc.edu/human-resources/
faculty-staff-job-openings/](http://sbc.edu/human-resources/faculty-staff-job-openings/) to find out
more.*

*For more information about Alumnae
Relations and Development staff, please
visit [sbc.edu/alumnae-development/
staff/](http://sbc.edu/alumnae-development/staff/).*

(800) 381-6131

*PO Box 1057
Sweet Briar, VA 24595*

*Special thanks to Maggy O'Donnell '18 for
her help with this issue of The BriarWire.*

Meet Some of Our Newest Alumnae



Biology major **Noell Cosby '17** has loved animals as long as she can remember — when she was little, she bandaged the limbs of her stuffed animals. So it’s no surprise that she is headed to vet school in the fall. She has been accepted at University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine. Noell is excited to work in the on-campus clinic where she’ll improve the lives of local pets and train at the wildlife medical clinic by helping injured, sick and orphaned songbirds, reptiles, mammals and birds of prey. Working in a clinic is nothing new; she has been helping animals at a Lynchburg practice since her sophomore year.



Less than 24 hours after graduating from Sweet Briar, **Emelie Wurster '17** started her professional life in theater. Em, who came to Sweet Briar from Nevada with plans to act as a career, fell in love with lighting design and accepted a job as an electrician with Mountainside Theatre in Cherokee, N.C. The outdoor theater company has been producing its legendary show “Unto These Hills” about the Trail of Tears since the 1950s. Em is thrilled to be part of it for the summer, and then she heads to Los Angeles where she’ll work in tech or acting. Graduate school may be in her future, but her experience has proved that even in the competitive theater field, she is more than prepared to succeed. “Unto These Hills” was only one of her options; over the spring she had three invitations to work in lighting, and one to audition.



Engineering major **Des'rae Davis '17** had nothing but options in her final semester at Sweet Briar. Fielding two job offers and acceptance into a master's program at Duke, Des'rae chose to join In-Depth Engineering in Columbia, Md., as a systems engineer. Starting in June, she will become only the second woman engineer at the rapidly growing firm. In-Depth's four offices partner with the U.S. Department of Defense to support naval systems. Des'rae will spend her days modeling and simulating submarine radar. She's not planning to check out her work, though — the self-described city girl is very claustrophobic.



Even as a child in Norfolk, history major **Kim Uglum '17** was pulled to old buildings, examining and analyzing them from every angle. So it makes perfect sense that she is headed to the University of Virginia this fall to earn her master's degree in architectural history and a certificate in historic preservation. Over the next two years, she may study and work in Europe or Asia. That's fitting because if Kim had a former life, it was in Renaissance Italy. When she graduates from UVa, she will be one of those lucky people who makes a living doing what she loves — saving, restoring and adding to old buildings as an architect.



A Pannell Scholar, Hubbard Scholar, and Honors Summer Research Program Scholar, **Holly Rueger '17** packed myriad experiences into her four years at Sweet Briar. A double major in Spanish and Psychology, Holly traveled to Burkina Faso her sophomore year for a two-week trip funded by her Pannell Scholarship and in her junior year, to Spain with the College's Junior Year Abroad program. Holly says that Sweet Briar encouraged her adventurous side, helping her develop confidence in herself and her independence to travel on her own. On her way back from Burkina Faso, Holly's interest in the Peace Corps was sparked by a fellow traveler and member of the Corps. Holly kept in touch, and this fall, will join the Peace Corps and will travel to Guatemala where she'll work to educate young adults and address issues like malnutrition through starting community gardens.

Anna "Chips" Chao Pai honors Sweet Briar, husband with scholarship

Chips Pai, recipient of the College's Distinguished Alumna Award in 1994 and former professor of biology, recently established the David and Anna Chao Pai Scholarship to be awarded to students from China and/or Chinese American women. Compelled by her own positive experience as a student at Sweet Briar, Pai also wanted to honor her late husband, David H. Pai. "The small classes, the tradition of the closeness between faculty and students are all attributes of the Sweet Briar experience that students from a country whose focus on education is still intense will find helpful in assimilating into American culture," wrote Pai.



Impressed by the campus and its students when she visited in 1953, Pai chose to come to Sweet Briar because of the scholarships she received and the promise of a paying job on campus that would ease the financial burden for her parents. "Little did I know that this small liberal arts college for women would open doors to further studies and a career in science. I hope this scholarship will do the same for these deserving students."

Keep an eye out for Chips Pai's forthcoming autobiography, [From Manchurian Princess to the American Dream](#).



Sweet Briar's New Computer Science Program Receives SACSCOC Approval

by Jennifer McManamay

Last October, Sweet Briar College announced it was launching a new computer science major “pending approval” from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Now, in plenty of time for the start of the 2017-2018 academic year, SACSCOC — as the regional accrediting body for higher education institutions in the South is known — has notified the College’s administration that the new program is approved.

The approval means the computer science degree is included in the scope of the College’s current accreditation.

The computer science major will complement the school’s strong science, technology, engineering and mathematics offerings, including the B.S. in engineering science. Sweet Briar is one of two women’s colleges in the country to offer an ABET-accredited engineering program. The College also is known for innovations in biomathematics and boasts faculty who have been recognized by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia for excellence in teaching.

SACSCOC’s approval comes on the heels of a successful search for a full-time computer science professor, says mathematics professor Steve Wassell, who spearheaded the program’s development. He never doubted accreditation, but finding a highly qualified candidate proved challenging in the current job market, he says.

“We were able to accomplish that as well. I am happy to say that we are all set for the fall semester.”

In a previously released statement, the College noted that it began working early in 2016 with Harvey Mudd College — a leader in STEM education among liberal arts colleges — and Silicon Valley companies to develop a focused curriculum that will provide Sweet Briar graduates with a competitive edge in the workplace.

Computer science majors will take two semesters of Python, one semester of Java and one semester using C/C++ and Linux. Sweet Briar continues to explore collaborative opportunities with Google, and in February, hosted a National Engineers Week dinner with a presentation by one of the company’s lead software engineers.

According to the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT), women made up only 25 percent of the professional computing workforce in 2015. Building a program that is attractive to women from the first class has been a priority, says Wassell.

Electives include the use of Swift, the new and upcoming language developed at Apple, as well as R. Upper-level electives include computer security, computer vision and data science.

First-year courses for computer science majors include engineering design, which features some Arduino programming and a team-based approach to problem solving, as well as calculus and statistics. Majors will complete a two-semester capstone project in their senior year.

Although the computer science major requires 47 credits, students will have the opportunity to take a broad array of liberal arts courses, the hallmark of a Sweet Briar College education, Wassell said when the program was announced.

“Employers need skilled programmers who can also write well, communicate their ideas coherently, and think about the larger issues for their company and society.

“This is a lean and mean major. Our students and eventual employers want practical coursework. Practical is the program we are building — because job growth in this field is strong and only getting stronger.” ■

As of May 24, there are just five and a half weeks left in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2017. Many classes have successfully increased their giving and participation over this fiscal year, as you can see in the chart below.

While classes that have the highest giving and participation among their decades will be recognized at Reunion, there will still be more time to close out those class challenges before June 30.

Alumnae giving and participation is a metric used by corporations and foundations to determine grant recipients among colleges and universities. By increasing your class participation and giving, you are adding to Sweet Briar’s chances to receive grants from these valuable partners.

Take the opportunity to increase your class giving and participation today by making a gift at sbc.edu/give.

Class Challenges Are Heating Up for June 30!

Make a gift today at sbc.edu/give!

Class Year	Giving	Participation
1940	\$3,175	7.0%
1941	\$1,050	4.5%
1942	\$52,350	8.0%
1943	\$25,045	9.7%
1944	\$23,808	34.7%
1945	\$1,150	16.3%
1946	\$62,875	13.8%
1947	\$1,955	15.7%
1948	\$9,402	22.4%
1949	\$105,388	27.9%
1950	\$57,656	24.4%
1951	\$24,067	39.2%
1952	\$39,250	41.0%
1953	\$25,616	35.6%
1954	\$35,405	34.0%
1955	\$132,925	34.6%
1956	\$25,370	23.8%
1957	\$908,661	33.8%
1958	\$150,524	30.9%
1959	\$51,239	25.8%
1960	\$545,863	41.4%
1961	\$309,966	23.8%
1962	\$376,940	33.3%
1963	\$642,409	32.0%
1964	\$708,307	35.6%
1965	\$70,283	29.0%

Class Year	Giving	Participation
1966	\$616,314	26.6%
1967	\$104,071	47.4%
1968	\$357,640	32.2%
1969	\$8,075	9.6%
1970	\$141,866	25.9%
1971	\$42,957	21.3%
1972	\$659,705	27.8%
1973	\$41,010	26.3%
1974	\$102,872	24.1%
1975	\$395,749	27.6%
1976	\$78,589	23.1%
1977	\$234,485	20.7%
1978	\$361,275	25.4%
1979	\$150,474	19.5%
1980	\$55,587	20.2%
1981	\$187,758	15.7%
1982	\$464,313	21.0%
1983	\$186,319	23.4%
1984	\$68,919	19.1%
1985	\$69,311	18.9%
1986	\$55,509	24.4%
1987	\$77,610	17.6%
1988	\$39,883	17.3%
1989	\$28,736	13.1%
1990	\$51,381	14.8%
1991	\$34,647	25.3%

Class Year	Giving	Participation
1992	\$24,419	19.9%
1993	\$40,926	23.4%
1994	\$12,217	16.1%
1995	\$22,427	23.8%
1996	\$82,037	25.5%
1997	\$20,009	20.2%
1998	\$33,701	26.3%
1999	\$43,534	21.6%
2000	\$13,610	18.3%
2001	\$37,228	19.9%
2002	\$17,542	14.2%
2003	\$18,604	20.8%
2004	\$15,670	14.3%
2005	\$20,206	15.5%
2006	\$19,513	20.2%
2007	\$19,282	11.1%
2008	\$11,080	12.8%
2009	\$5,630	15.5%
2010	\$8,263	12.2%
2011	\$9,518	11.9%
2012	\$8,661	11.1%
2013	\$1,136	9.1%
2014	\$6,798	9.6%
2015	\$1,351	8.1%
2016	\$2,253	20.6%

Data reported on May 24, 2017.