

Bryn Mawr College
101 N. Merion Avenue
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010-2899

610-526-7450 (FAX)

BRYN MAWR

To: <i>William Creeley</i>	From: <i>Bryn Mawr College</i>
Fax: <i>215 717 3440</i>	Phone: <i>610 526 5156</i>
Pages: <i>3</i>	Date: <i>8/23/07</i>
Re:	CC:

Urgent
 For Review
 Please Comment
Please Reply
 Please Recycle

Office of the President
 Bryn Mawr College
 101 North Merion Avenue
 Bryn Mawr, PA 19010-2899
 610 526-3146
 610 526-7450 Fax

B R Y N M A W R

August 22, 2007

Dear Mr. Creeley,

I am responding to your letter regarding the Social Justice Pilot Program at Bryn Mawr College. Before I address your concerns, allow me to give you some context.

From its founding, originally as a Quaker college, Bryn Mawr has always espoused a strong commitment to free inquiry, freedom of conscience and free expression. During the Nazi rise to power in Europe and World War II, Bryn Mawr became home to many distinguished European scholars who were refugees from Nazi persecution. In the McCarthy era, Bryn Mawr was the first college to decline aid rather than force students applying for loans to sign a loyalty oath to the United States and an affidavit regarding membership in the Communist party. Later, at the height of student protest against the Vietnam War, Bryn Mawr was the only institution in Pennsylvania to decline aid rather than report student protesters as a condition of eligibility for government scholarship support.

Besides its abiding commitments to free speech and freedom of conscience, Bryn Mawr values the creation of a more just society. Our alumnae choose careers that reflect this aspiration. They are well-represented in the nonprofit sector, in governmental and nongovernmental agencies, in social service and in higher education. Bryn Mawr has one of the highest percentages among all colleges of graduates who join the Peace Corps. Last September the Washington Monthly ranked Bryn Mawr first among liberal-arts schools in serving the public interest by fostering research, an ethic of national service and social mobility.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that a group of current Bryn Mawr students recently initiated an effort to create a social-justice program. Let me clarify the status of the Social Justice Pilot Program: it is experimental, it is voluntary and it is student-led. There is no pressure whatsoever for any student to participate. Furthermore, should a student sign up and later change her mind and drop out, she is free to do so without repercussions of any kind. The pilot may or may not ultimately evolve into a program that our faculty's Curriculum Committee might propose to include in our formal curriculum, but any such process would take time and extensive faculty and student debate.

You raise a number of concerns about the language that has been used to describe the Social Justice Pilot Program, including the lack of definition of the term "social justice" and the reference to a "contract." I agree that the issue of what constitutes or defines "social justice" is one the organizing committee will need to think through for themselves, and they have made clear to me since the inception of the pilot that they are

Mr. William Creeley

p. 2

engaged in that process. It will also be a concept that participants in the program must ultimately define individually and over time. As for the term "contract," the committee has told me that it is only a plan for the six elements that each participating student will choose to complete. I will recommend to the committee, for the reasons you point out, that they substitute the word "plan" for "contract."

Let me assure you that we remain ever mindful of fostering students' freedom of speech and conscience. The Social Justice Pilot Program is an attempt to discern whether this kind of program has a place in our extracurricular or curricular offerings. We won't know the answer to that, much less whether it can pass the high bar set by the faculty, until we see how this experiment progresses.

Sincerely yours,



Nancy J. Vickers
President

Mr. William Creeley
Senior Program Officer
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
610 Walnut St., Ste. 510
Philadelphia, PA 19106