

## What Happened Last Year: A Transparent Explanation to Reunite a Community

Amy Hruby, Editor-in-Chief

Meredith College President Maureen Hartford gave her final State of the College address on Friday, August 27, 2010. Presenting an overview of the 2009-2010 academic year, President Hartford's speech came across as a bit routine after Sam Ewell's caution that Meredith "[could] not afford to continue doing business as usual." Regardless of what was said, the power of the speech was in the growing murmurs and seat-shiftings in the audience. As soon as questions were welcomed, every speaker had an agenda to discuss—a program to fight for, a budget decision to deride, a complaint to be heard. Underneath these arguments was a simple, unspoken statement—"What happened last year was wrong"—and it was accompanied by a common inability to articulate what actually had happened last year. Avoiding inflammatory accusations and spoken from an "on-the-ground" student and faculty perspective, *The Herald* has attempted to outline the events of last year with the aim of clearing the air so that Meredith College administration, faculty, staff and students can move forward as a unified community.

In July 2009, an Ad Hoc Committee was assembled by college administration to assess a variety of college programs, ventures and operations. The Ad Hoc Committee was given three original goals: to consider new graduate programs, to identify new revenue sources and to review current undergraduate programs. However, there is no evidence that their activities moved past review of current undergraduate programs, and their reports only indicate the determination of eleven "negative outliers" amongst undergraduate programs. Faculty in these outlier programs were notified of their inclusion on July 20, 2009 and requested to submit proposals for program revision. The

faculty members were told that a financial crisis made it necessary to reassess programs, but the details of this budgetary problem and the end goal of the program revisions were unclear. All of the outlier programs had been completing periodic program review and reporting to their Deans and the Vice President for Academic Programs on their findings—receiving what faculty have now realized was questionably little feedback. On September 1, 2009, departments submitted program review proposals to the President and Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAP), remaining worried about the implications of this budget-driven review process.

On September 18, 2009, VPAP Allen Page announced the actions that would be made in response to the proposal revisions. Faculty (and shortly after students and community members) learned that some proposals had been accepted (like the Religion Department's plan to become the Department of Religion and Ethical Studies) and others had been rejected, resulting in three eliminated majors (French, Public History and Women's Studies). These decisions led to immediate outcry amongst faculty and students, who requested information on why programs had been dropped and faculty positions eliminated when many programs and faculty members had recently been positively reviewed. An anonymous faculty member argued that this discrepancy occurred because last fall's program review was not a normal, ongoing program review but rather a "program-cutting review." This difference was apparent in that the "program-cutting review" lacked the normal wide quality criteria of ongoing reviews and focused only on three



Photo from Meredith Marketing Department

narrow statistics: the number of majors currently in the program, the number of majors that had completed the program, and the student-to-faculty ratio. A September 21st Faculty Council Memo explained that only using these statistics left "departments [feeling] that competition between departments was being encouraged based on arbitrary goals for survival." And the memo further argued that the program review "[went] beyond temporary budget measures, raising critical questions about process and faculty governance."

The Just and Equitable Treatment (JET) Committee is a standing faculty committee whose 2009 report analyzed the college's shared governance structure and made recommendations for faculty involvement in college planning and academic decision making. In relation to this program review, their report argues that "rationales for program and positions cuts [were] inconsistent and vague" and outlines that rationale given by administration include: placement of blame on the Board of Trustees, constant reference to an advanced budget crisis with "no evidence of true financial exigency," and arguments that programs were unnecessary to the college mission. Clyde Frazier, a History and Politics Department faculty member on the JET Committee, argued that "decisions seemed to be driven by response to perceived student demands and not by any vision of what we want a Meredith education to be." The recognition of this lack of common vision, combined with the acknowledgement of a questionable administrative hierarchy involved in the decision-making process created a discernible sense of discord on campus. The JET Committee report recognized this discord and most broadly

concluded that it could be healed with an emphasis on open communication in academic program affairs and the development of shared goals between students, faculty, and administration.

As the community adjusted to the controversial program cuts, the faculty learned of a new administrative decision made involving tenure. Where departments had previously been required to have one untenured faculty member for budget flexibility, they now could be composed of no more than 60% tenured faculty. This decision was made by the Board of Trustees as a method of saving money in a time of economic downturn, but faculty were quick to point out that the change greatly decreased departments' abilities to tenure current faculty members or to recruit new professors. The tenure decision was paired with announcements that adjunct professor positions were not renewed, faculty raises were put on hold and college contributions to faculty retirement accounts were eliminated for the year. These decisions came as a shock to faculty, staff and students, and administrative officials justified choices as money-saving necessities.

During a time of economic downturn, financial problems were apparent to the Meredith community. President Hartford explained that the college had been overly generous with its financial aid offers for the incoming class. When a larger-than-expected number of students accepted the offer, Meredith was left with one of its largest freshmen classes and barely enough money to pay out their financial aid packages. On the Meredith Budget website, President Hartford poignantly noted that "salaries and benefits represent (continued on page 6)

### IN THIS ISSUE...

**State & Local:** The Tender Fruit, Hopscotch Music Festival  
**National & International:** Flooding in Pakistan, Ground Zero  
**Arts & Entertainment:** Lady Gaga, SparkCon  
**Campus Life:** Chaplain Stacy Purdue, Front Page Continued  
**Science & Technology:** Masdar City  
**Sports:** NCSU Football  
**Opinion:** Ying-Yang Twins Controversy