My fellow alumnae and friends,

We are off to the races! In mid-August, students returned to the all-too-familiar bend in the road off U.S. 29. Excitement was building as they passed the old growth sanctuaries, the security gate, the residence halls, and finally entered the Quad. Each and every student returning remarked, “the campus looks amazing!” Our new students are visibly and completely hypnotized with the beauty of the College. Thanks to our Sweet Work Weeks heroines and their families and friends, over 2,000 hours of love was literally spread around the campus through painting, gardening, bushwhacking trails and so many other organizational tasks to prepare the campus and facilities for the opening of a new academic year. Thank you to all who worked so hard to steward this beautiful learning environment. Stewardship of our alma mater will be central in everything we do moving forward.

What other College on the planet has such dedicated alumnae with the intense level of devotion toward our alma mater? That dedication is one of the key reasons why we are so successful.

As we enter the fall season, we are reminded that there are a number of indicators of success for our College — many that standard rankings just cannot capture. The core of our success emanates from a compelling vision, a dynamic president, dedicated faculty and staff, unwavering alumnae and friends, and extraordinary students!

President Meredith Woo has reminded all of us that we should honor our campus and our cultural legacy and find ways to live with beauty throughout the year. In Pannell Gallery, the Living with Art initiative is underway with students selecting art from the College collection to hang in their rooms for the year, and new exhibits are up in Benedict and the Vaulted Gallery of the Library.

Convocation closed with a poignant charge from

President Woo to remember that 100 years ago, the suffrage movement culminated in woman’s right to vote and challenged all of us to ask ourselves, “What will my contribution be? How will we truly make a difference?”

After Convocation, our new students walked to the Chapel and signed their new honor pledge board, surrounded by a group of alumnae faculty and staff members, which was a beautiful reminder of our mutual commitment to the College and each other.

As Sweet Briar’s 114th academic year is launched, you will see that the best is yet to come.

With gratitude,

Mary Pope M. Hutson, ’83
Vice President of Alumnae Relations and Development

P.S.: Start making your plans for our All-Class Reunion, May 29-31, 2020!
A festive tune opened Sweet Briar College’s 114th session as faculty and senior staff marched into Murchison Lane Auditorium on Wednesday afternoon. It fit the mood of President Meredith Woo, who was happy about a number of things.

During orientation, she had hosted a group of new students and reported she was “thrilled” to find they had come to Sweet Briar from all over the world. But what made her just as happy, she added, was to see the “massive transformation” in returning students. “I was a bit overcome with emotion [during the morning’s faculty meeting]. You can see as they become wiser … more thoughtful,” she said. Another thing that had made her smile in the last few months, Woo added, was the campus’ physical transformation as it continues to advance its agricultural enterprises.

Student Government Association President Cailey Cobb ’20 took to the podium next to offer words of advice for each class — and a few words for everyone else. “Please pour into this campus,” she closed, “Everyone in this room has something more to offer this college.”

One of them is Vice President of Finance, Operations and Auxiliary Enterprises Luther Griffith, who was announced first as one of two new vice presidents by Woo. She admitted that his title was a difficult one to remember, and attempted to recount every aspect of his large portfolio, which, she admitted, means he has “more things to do than God himself.” Though new to his role, Griffith has lived on campus for several years and has volunteered his expertise in the Career Services Center, as well as taught in the business program.

Next, Woo introduced Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College Teresa Garrett, as well as new faculty and staff. In her remarks, Garrett noted the kinship she shares with the Class of 2023. “You and I together will be learning and growing in this place,” she said. “Look around you at the Sweet Briar community that surrounds you. They are here to help us succeed.”

Looking back at her own undergraduate experience at a larger institution, Garrett said she realized that it planted in her a “spirit of exploration. It was there that I started to become something.” First, she discovered cycling. As a mountain
biker and later a road cycler, she found the “freedom to explore,” Garrett said. It taught her to explore her limits and her environment, and to ask herself: “Can I find the courage?”

Now that she’s here, Garrett said, the Blue Ridge Mountains are calling to her. She’s already scoped out campus, and couldn’t believe the size of it. “I implore you to explore this beautiful campus — all 3,250 acres of it,” she said. “It’s huge! This just illustrates to you how much Sweet Briar has to offer. … Let this place inspire you, center you and ground you.”

In addition to exploring campus, students should explore new fields of study and take courses outside their comfort zones, Garrett said. “In those explorations, be sure to make connections,” she noted. “College is this unique time to make connections to not only the place, but the people. So many people are deeply loyal to the college or university they attended, but none more so than Sweet Briar women. Connect with each other. Connect with the history of this place.”

Making meaningful connections takes time, she admitted, and though she had asked, Garrett joked, the engineering faculty was no closer to finishing their time machine. “Take the time to listen to one another and be authentically present for one another in your time here,” she added. “In your time here as Sweet Briar women, I would love to hear what you’ve discovered in your explorations, what has challenged you, and what you are connecting to. I would love to hear your stories. And maybe I will have some to share with you, as well, as we embark on this journey together.”

The Convocation Address was delivered by longtime community member Anna Billias, an adjunct assistant professor of music and recipient of the 2019 Student Government Association Excellence in Teaching Award. Billias admitted that when she came to the U.S. 14 years ago, she did not think she was “cut out to be a teacher.” One year later, she was employed at Sweet Briar College and loved it instantly.

“You, the ladies of the 21st century, determined and bright, fearless and sincere, are the reason I loved my job so much,” she said.

Recalling the College’s near-collapse in 2015, Billias explained how the campaign to save it succeeded — not by miracle, but perseverance. “I believed in Sweet Briar and never lost my faith in this place, and it did not disappear into the dark night. You would think magic? I don’t consider it to be magic. It is teamwork. It is the spirit of unity, of determination to succeed, it is resilience, it is the spiritual overcoming the physical.”

She said it was that same attitude that has helped her overcome other obstacles in her personal and professional life. “Listen to your gut, trust the goodness of your soul and treat others as if this is the last time you see them,” she told the audience. “The universe will embrace you for the goodness that you spread and make your life journey memorable and special.”

In her charge to students, Woo reflected on the year 1919. Lots of national and global transformations took place that year, she said, although many didn’t play out as expected. One big change, women’s suffrage in the U.S., however, was part of a movement that continued to gain traction and hasn’t stopped since, Woo explained.

“We are standing on the shoulders of giants,” Woo said. “That doesn’t mean that women didn’t have to fight for more rights throughout the 20th century, but the beat continues. So my charge to you is this: You are part of a movement that is the greatest movement the world has seen. … The movement of women, their struggle for equal rights has borne tremendous fruit. So I want you to think about what it means to be part of the world’s greatest progress. And also to ask yourselves: In the 20th century, women fought in order to obtain equal rights. You have it. You have equal rights, but you own this century. And what does the owner of this time and place, the owner of the 21st century, do? Well, that is the charge I give you.

“Think about it carefully. Think about what it means to be an empowered woman, a woman who is capable of thinking, who is capable of inquiry, who is capable of imagining, capable of being creative. Not to become what men are. Not to acquire what others have. But to imagine something different in the smithy of your soul. To own the new century and your future in new and creative, meaningful ways. And I promise you that I will endeavor along with the faculty and the superlative staff to help you in your journey to discover and invent creatively what it means for you to be part of the greatest social movement and imagine it in ways that are utterly different, utterly creative and utterly unprecedented. The world is your oyster.”
Admissions Blog: 3 reasons why Sweet Work Weeks is my favorite new tradition at Sweet Briar

by Jill Gavitt ‘97

Traditions are among the most beloved parts of the Sweet Briar experience. Every college has academics, residence life, sports and clubs, but Sweet Briar has some of the quirkiest traditions that you can never quite explain to an outsider. Each current student and alumna can wax poetic for hours about the traditions they love the most. (I know I can!) These traditions keep us bonded to each other and to the College. They lift our spirits and they make us laugh, and they remind us how lucky we are to be learning in such a unique place. But, once you leave the College, how do you keep the spirit of those traditions alive? Like other colleges, we have Reunion for the alumnae; it’s a fantastic event that gives us all the chance to reconnect.

But Sweet Briar has never been content to just simply do what other colleges do.

Recently, Sweet Briar alumnae have fiercely embraced a new tradition. For the last five summers, we have come together for Sweet Work Weeks to help the College staff prepare campus for the new school year. Like all Sweet Briar traditions, SWW is quirky and fun, and it eludes explanation to the uninitiated. It is an opportunity for alumnae and other friends of the College to volunteer their labor to the land and institution that Indiana Fletcher Williams entrusted to us. But that’s just what it is on paper.

I have been on campus for the last three years for these sessions and am constantly asked why I would do this. Why do I (especially as a teacher busy starting a new school year) give my precious free time to go and work at my college?

1. Because here, work is play. There are tasks we need to accomplish — from clearing overgrown back trails to weeding the campus to painting all the dorm rooms to contacting future Vixens. And the list might seem onerous, especially when you’re working in the August heat, yet surrounded by these alumnae, I never worry that the day will be dull.

2. Because Vixen alumnae are the best company. I spend each day having conversations about topics all over the map with alumnae from all different classes. I can start my morning with a debate on the finer points of the perfect chocolate croissant and move on to discussing the best way to prevent poison ivy, the books we’ve read lately, and the environmental impact of single-use plastics. One of my last evenings was spent in the parlor of Randolph [Hall] talking politics while decorating T-shirts for a dear (and sassy) alumna, and this was just before my classmate came in and, with her killer fast-pitch precision, threw me the candy I was craving. The night ended with hugs all around before we dragged ourselves to bed — mine being in the same room I occupied my senior year.

3. Because every part of Sweet Briar feels like home — from the dorm rooms to the dining hall to the pathways to the academic buildings. I moved around often after I graduated, but this campus has always served as a beacon. Coming here to spend time for Sweet Work Weeks only solidifies that bond. We take pride in helping to ready this spectacular campus for student arrivals so that they, too, may pull off of U.S. 29 and feel like they are home. When I am volunteering here, I once again remember why Sweet Briar is so unique and so special for all of us.

So why do we give our free time to the College?

Because it’s a tradition.

Jill Gavitt graduated in 1997 with a Spanish major, a dance performance minor and a teaching certificate. She is originally from Rhode Island and currently teaches high school Spanish in Staunton, Va.

Save the Date!
2020 All-Class Reunion
Open to all alumnae and friends, honoring classes ending in 0 or 5
May 29 - 31, 2020
Bookmark sbc.edu/reunion for future updates!
Sweet Briar awards 2019 Girl Scouts scholarships to two first-years

Sweet Briar College has awarded this year’s Girl Scouts Gold Award Scholarship to two members from the Class of 2023: Jesseca Ballard and Cynthia Plaugher. This marks the second year the joint scholarship has been awarded.

The partnership between Sweet Briar and the Girl Scouts of the USA was first announced in 2017. This year, additional funding was added to allow for up to seven scholarships annually. Only students who have completed the Girl Scouts Gold Award may apply. The Girl Scouts Gold Award Scholarship is funded by multiple generous Sweet Briar alumnae who are former Girl Scouts and who care deeply about advancing women’s leadership.

“We’re so proud of these young women and what they have already accomplished with the Girl Scouts,” said Beth Clarke, acting vice president for enrollment management. “We’re confident they will do great things at Sweet Briar!”

Ballard, from Leicester, N.C., is the daughter of Sweet Briar alumna Jennifer Ballard ’93. She is interested in the College’s pre-veterinary track and plans to ride in the equestrian program. “Within the 10 years of my life that I have spent in Girl Scouts, I would not give back one second,” she said. “I have learned who I am — from elementary school all the way to graduating high school. It has taught me who I am and how to express myself, plus so much more!”

Plaugher, of Fredericksburg, plans to study environmental science and is also interested in the College’s equestrian program. “In my experience, there are many similarities between Girl Scouts and Sweet Briar,” she told us. “Both organizations instill the same drive for courage, independence and leadership in women, and both have the same goal: to build strong women and help them be productive, responsible members of our world community.”

Girl Scouts who have been accepted at Sweet Briar from anywhere in the United States can apply for one $2,500 award, and another 5 awards of $2,500 each are reserved for students in Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Georgia and Texas. A $5,000 award is designated for a Girl Scout from the Girl Scouts Nation’s Capital.

All seven scholarship awards are available for eligible incoming first-year students from the designated geographic areas who have achieved the Girl Scout Gold Award and have been accepted to Sweet Briar College. The scholarship award is for the first year of study.

Scholarship winners are judged on the following criteria:

1. Acceptance to Sweet Briar College and a commitment to attend
2. Current (or recent) active membership in a Girl Scout troop and completion of the Girl Scout Gold Award (please provide copy of the certificate or letter)
3. Letter of recommendation from the troop leader
4. Essay on your Gold Award project or how you have demonstrated a commitment to community service, leadership and/or sustainability

Gold Award winners can apply to Sweet Briar College at sbc.edu/admissions/apply-now. After submitting your application, you can submit the required Gold Award essay inside your Sweet Briar admissions portal.

For questions, contact Sweet Briar’s Office of Admissions at admissions@sbc.edu or 434-381-6142.

For more information about joining the Girl Scouts, visit girlscouts.org.

Interested in funding a Girl Scout Gold Award scholarship in your state?

Contact Claire Dennison Griffith ‘80, Senior Director of Alumnae Relations and Development, at 434-381-6479 or cgriffith@sbc.edu.
Accolades abound for Sweet Briar!

**Sweet Briar makes Princeton Review’s list of Best Southeastern colleges for 2020**

Sweet Briar has once again been crowned a Best Southeastern college by The Princeton Review.

According to the annual publication’s “Region by Region” web feature, the 656 schools on the five lists (Northeastern, Southeastern, Midwestern, Western and International) are deemed “academically outstanding and well worth consideration in your college search.” The Southeastern list contains 142 colleges in alphabetical order. Sweet Briar is one of them.

“I am not at all surprised by our inclusion on this list,” said Dean of the College Teresa Garrett. “Sweet Briar has so much to offer women who want to make an impact on the world. Our leadership core curriculum, and committed faculty and staff, all support women who are successful right out of graduation and beyond.”

**Sweet Briar named on Kiplinger’s Best College Values 2019 list**

Sweet Briar College is among 400 colleges and universities ranked on Kiplinger’s annual list of best-value colleges.

As in recent years, Kiplinger features a combined list that ranks the top values for all U.S. colleges and universities, plus lists of the best values in private universities, private liberal arts colleges (which are ranked separately to account for their different missions) and public colleges.

All schools on Kiplinger’s list meet its definition of value: “a high-quality education at an affordable price.” First, the publisher analyzes academic measures, including student-to-faculty ratio, test scores of incoming freshmen, and the percentage of students who return for sophomore year. The most points are awarded for four-year graduation rates because “graduating on time helps keep costs down,” Kiplinger’s argues. However, “that isn’t a reality for many students. To reflect the benefit that comes from earning a degree — even if it takes more than four years — we’ve revised the rankings to award a handful of points for five- and six-year rates. We also reward schools that do a first-rate job of graduating students with financial need.”

Sweet Briar is ranked No. 273 among all colleges and universities and No. 115 among liberal arts colleges.

**Sweet Briar makes Forbes’ America’s Top Colleges list for 2019**

Just days after winning Forbes’ #MyTopCollege contest in the small-schools category, Sweet Briar has another reason to celebrate. The women’s liberal arts college is included on Forbes’ 2019 America’s Top Colleges list, which features the country’s 650 institutions that deliver the “top academics, best experiences, career success and lowest debt.”

Sweet Briar came in at No. 608 among all institutions, at No. 383 among “Private Colleges,” No. 199 among “Liberal Arts Universities” and No. 146 in the “South” category.

“We include just 15% of the 4,300 degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the U.S., so appearing here at all is an indication that a school meets a high standard,” Forbes editors note.