

May 24, 2022

President Miller:

Mississippi University for Women faces a critical juncture in its proud history. Enrollment challenges face The W in the coming years, many of which threaten its long-term sustainability as an institution. Between fall 2019 and fall 2021, The W's overall enrollment declined by 12%. The number of full-time equivalent students, a more accurate measure of derived tuition revenue, declined by 16% over the same time period. Data, research, and demographic trends do not indicate a favorable climate by which to recover the recent enrollment losses.

- **Fewer High School Graduates.** Between 2025 and 2032, the number of high school graduates is projected to decrease by 5.6% in the United States and by 15.6% in Mississippi.
- **Growth of Transfer Population Slowing.** The rate at which associate's degrees have been awarded in Mississippi has been flattening in recent years. Post-pandemic declines in the state's community college enrollment will likely result in fewer degrees awarded in the near future. Nationally, the total number of associate's degrees awarded annually is projected to increase only 1% between 2017 and 2029.
- **Declining Interest in Women's Colleges.** In the 1960s, there were 230 women's colleges in the United States. That number has fallen to just 32 today (and only four all-male colleges remain). Since the onset of COVID-19, two women's colleges have closed (Mills College (CA) and Judson College (AL)) and many more are at risk. Reports indicate that only between 2% and 4% of female high school graduates would consider attending a women's college.

With the number of potential students dropping significantly in the coming years and with a name that presents at least the initial impression of a women's college, the pool of students interested in attending The W will likely grow dangerously thin. Compounding these already existing trends, we are aware that potential students who may have considered opportunities in higher education have dealt with multiple challenges in the past two years and may be less certain about pursuing a college degree. While we know we can provide the support students need to be successful, we need a bold change to both reach and be true to the breadth of our target population, which is all students in Mississippi and the broader region.

The Deans Council of Mississippi University for Women recommends that the university take the actions necessary to *identify a new name for the institution that clearly indicates that the university is for all students*. We view this moment as a very significant point of transition for our institution, one that requires us to clarify our commitment to welcoming and supporting all students we are missioned to serve. Despite the call for a more inclusive name, the Council wishes to state its strong belief that The W should always maintain "its historic commitment to academic and leadership development for women" and forever embrace its pioneering status as the first state-supported college for women in the United States.

Sincerely,



Dr. Brian Anderson  
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences



Dr. Marty Brock  
Dean, College of Business and  
Professional Studies



Dr. David Brooking  
Director, Student Success Center



Dr. Martin Hatton  
Dean, School of Education



Dr. Tammie McCoy  
Dean, College of Nursing  
and Health Sciences



Amanda Clay Powers  
Dean, Library Services



Dr. Scott Tollison  
Provost & Vice President for  
Academic Affairs