



The Mississippi University for Women
Alumnae Association
since 1889

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

COLUMBUS, MS (July 28, 2008) – Citing reasons as varied as fiscal responsibility and preserving its national reputation for excellence, The Mississippi University for Women Alumnae Association has adopted a resolution which “re-affirms its support and endorsement for the university as it is currently named.” The group also “urges” the support of the governor and the state legislature to help preserve the current name and that all “vested” parties work in concert to achieve maximum success for the nearly 125-year-old institution.

The MUW Alumnae Association, which identifies itself as the “original and historic alumnae/i organization” in order to differentiate it from the recently created MUW Alumni Association, adopted the three-page resolution during a specially called meeting conducted by conference call. The move came about in response to members’ concerns, according to association president Kym Golden Gore.

“Changing the name is a drastic and permanent step, one that would be costly in a number of ways” Gore said. “The resolution adopted by the association speaks to concerns on many levels, including the concern that taxpayers’ dollars could be better used in other ways.

“After an outpouring of e-mails and phone calls that I and other Board members received in the past few days from our members and as elected representatives of the alumnae and alumni, we agreed it was important to take an official position,” Gore said about the Board’s almost unprecedented action.

The calls and e-mails came from alums whose concerns were sparked by apparent community support for a name change in the Columbus-Lowndes County area, where the historically women’s college campus is located. The Columbus-Lowndes Development LINK, a Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development entity, and the local daily newspaper “The Commercial Dispatch” have expressed support for the idea of changing the name. While the costs of a re-naming effort have not been identified by officials at Mississippi University for Women or the Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, some estimates place the figure for a complete corporate identity program in the millions of dollars.

The Alumnae Association resolution states that “Mississippi University for Women as a public institution has an obligation to be a responsible steward of taxpayers’ dollars and resources, and it is more fiscally responsible to market the institution as it is currently named rather than undertaking a vast and costly taxpayer-funded effort to rename, establish and market a totally unknown name and identity.”

Additional reasons to retain the name, particularly the word “women,” included in the resolution are:

- ◆ The university’s distinction as the first public institution of higher learning for women in the United States;
- ◆ Its legislatively mandated and singular mission to maintain its historic commitment to academic and leadership development for women;
- ◆ Enrollment successes, including having achieved a record number of students (in 1998) utilizing the current name;
- ◆ Repeated national recognition by U.S. News and World Report and Kiplinger’s Personal Finance magazines as one of the nation’s best universities;
- ◆ The thousands of degrees held by alumnae/i and their continuing connection to the university; and
- ◆ The relevance of the name to its women’s-focused mission.

Opposition to a name change was voted on by the Board of Directors, acting “on behalf” of the association’s members, and the Rev. Anghaarad Teague, President-Elect of The MUW Alumnae Association, believes the resolution represents the opinions of most alumnae/i. “The Executive Committee and Directors are the elected leaders of an association whose

members have been active and vocal in support of the university as it is named,” she said, adding, “In the weeks since the name change issue has been raised by the administration, we have been made aware of literally scores of letters and e-mails written by alums and sent to Dr. (Claudia) Limbert asking that she retain the name Mississippi University for Women.”

Dr. Claudia Limbert, MUW’s President, initiated the current discussion of a possible name change as part of “MUW 20/20: Envisioning Our Future, Fulfilling Our Promise,” a planning process undertaken in advance of the university’s 125th anniversary to be celebrated in 2009. Dr. Limbert has asked alumnae/i to share their opinions regarding the university’s name but has not yet issued an official position statement as to her views on changing or retaining the name.

The issue with the name change is part of a broader concern for the university’s women’s-focused mission, according to Rev. Teague. “The W still has a unique mission, one that continues to be important. Alums would prefer that resources be directed to sustaining that mission and maintaining the academic quality which built MUW’s reputation rather than using limited resources for a name change.”

Mississippi University for Women is impacted by recent funding changes implemented by the Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning and is expected to see state funding decreases over the next several years. This downward trend would be off-set by an increase in admissions, and advocates of a name change claim a new name would enable the university to attract more students, male and female.

Not so, said the Rev. Teague, pointing out that male enrollment and overall enrollment have both increased in three of the last four years with the current name. “Alumnae believe the university’s attention should be focused on retaining and enhancing programs that attract future students and benefit current students,” she said. “Instead of diverting funds to pay consultants and attorneys, the university should be using all available funds to fill unfilled faculty positions, upgrade the library’s holdings, and enhance programs which will serve students and alumni.”

By promoting its current name and capitalizing on its unique mission, MUW could achieve admissions targets with no need for a costly and possibly ineffective name change, according to “W” alum and marketing consultant Cheryl Jackson Cooper. “Women make up the majority of students enrolled in universities in Mississippi and the nation. That fact coupled with the growing trend for single-sex classrooms even in elementary schools demonstrates an opportunity to promote The W’s role as the university of choice for high-achieving college-bound females in the state and region,” she said. “MUW should capitalize on what makes it special; that’s the best way to ensure it continues to fulfill its special role in Mississippi’s university system.”

Cooper also questioned the lack of objective research available to those who might be involved in considering a name change. “The MUW 20/20 report is a totally subjective and scientifically flawed process which might be helpful as anecdotal ‘input’ but provides no valid and reliable data for decision-making,” she said. “The meetings were called focus groups, but I am not certain that is an accurate description,” she said, noting that the alumni groups were re-categorized as “focused discussions.” Furthermore, Cooper said her review of all 12 published “focus” reports available online showed that only one group listed a name change as being among the top three priorities facing the university.

The special called meeting in which the “Resolution in Support of the Current Name” was adopted was conducted Thursday, July 24. Fifteen of the association’s 18 Board of Directors members participated in the teleconference, as did Perry Sansing, Assistant to the President, Mississippi University for Women.

The Mississippi University for Women Alumnae Association has served MUW for nearly 120 years. Its members live in all 50 states and in countries around the world. The entire resolution and more details about the organization can be found on its Web site, www.muwalumnae.com.

ATTACHMENT:

The Mississippi University for Women Alumnae Association Resolution In Support Of The Current University Name
(Four pages)