

# Faculty Engage with Big Questions

Emily Gowen, Jan 8 2015

“One of the most exciting things about St. Andrew’s,” reflects Giselle Furlonge ’03, Chair of the Classical Languages Department, “is that we are able to keep a thumb on the essence of the School while also attending to the ways in which we need to grow.” This is precisely what, in a series of school-wide strategic planning discussions, students, faculty, parents, and alumni of the school have been doing during the course of the fall semester.

On the morning of January 5<sup>th</sup>, faculty gathered for a final day of strategic planning, discussing the promise of the St. Andrew’s experience, what core values remain essential to the School, and ultimately what we, as a community, can do to ensure that St. Andrew’s remains strong throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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“We know that St. Andrew’s is a school that honors its roots,” said Gordon Brownlee ‘75, “but it is important for us to understand precisely what it is about the St. Andrew’s tradition that we want to uphold. For me, it revolves around the notion of the School as an egalitarian place.” This theme—of inclusion, of an ever-evolving commitment to diversity initiatives—has been at the center of the school’s mission since its founding in 1929, but headmaster Tad Roach has urged community members to go beyond stating this commitment and to consider what it takes to create a truly diverse community in an increasingly globalized world.

Also discussed were the ways in which St. Andrew’s assesses learning and the increasing demand among stakeholders for demonstrations of excellence in the classroom. Following a decade of proven commitment to authentic student assessment, faculty discussed the possibility of increasing emphasis on project-based learning, building student-led independent and group projects into the curriculum, and allowing for more fluid, individuated academic schedules.

Faculty groups raised questions about professional development, discussing the possibility of increased training surrounding mentorship and advising for new faculty, as well as opportunities to co-teach courses with others more experienced than themselves. Young faculty shared stories about challenging, rewarding, and unexpected interactions with students, and agreed that open, constructive communication between adults in the community is paramount for student success.

All of these conversations were part of a deep dive into the strategic questions that will help Tad Roach and the Board of Trustees to sharpen the focus of the School during the coming decade. Faculty demonstrated a keen awareness of the issues at stake in 21<sup>st</sup> century education, and a clear passion for the commitments that the School has already made in these areas.

The insights generated during Strategic Planning days, including conversations with alumni, students, parents, and faculty, have reaffirmed for all involved that the work we are doing here at the School, as well as new efforts that will be launched in the coming years, have the potential to transform the lives of generations of St. Andreans to come.