Why Smith?

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In 2001, I was hired as one of the founding faculty members of Smith College’s Picker Engineering Program – the first at an all-women’s college. In starting this new program, we took on the challenge of identifying and meeting the goals for engineering education in the twenty-first century and integrating them with the values and strengths of a liberal arts college. The result is a commitment to impart to our students a deep understanding of the scientific, mathematical, and technical principles that underpin all engineering disciplines with an appreciation for the human condition and the societal and ecological contexts in which engineering designs are created.

The decision to join the faculty in launching the Picker Engineering Program at Smith was a significant departure from the traditional academic path in engineering. At Smith, my colleagues represent all disciplines of engineering, and our focus is on undergraduate education with no graduate program. I found I like balancing a strong teaching commitment with a vigorous research program, though it is not always easy. Without graduate students, I seek creative ways to engage undergraduate students in my research and carry out much of the work myself. Recently, I have taken on the added challenge of directing Smith’s new Center for the Environment, Ecological Design and Sustainability. Again, we keep the focus on undergraduate education and work with our students to develop innovative and collaborative solutions to environmental challenges.

The opportunity to create and shape an engineering program to prepare the next generation of engineers, to develop and maintain an active research program that engages undergraduates, to communicate the excitement and promise of engineering to a broad audience, and to lead a center that brings together faculty and students from across disciplines to tackle important and pressing environmental challenges is stimulating and rewarding for me.