

## A “PLAN TO PLAN” FOR THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

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### Executive Summary

It is time to return to our planning work. This “Plan to Plan” outlines a 12-month planning process intended to continue our efforts to develop an institutional culture of planning that fosters strategic thinking and influences all decision making, resource allocation, and assessment efforts. Appropriately fitting to such a culture, our plan will be an agile, living document that will be based on our core educational values and realities of our current and future contexts.

This document summarizes The College of Wooster’s strategic planning-related efforts to date and outlines our assumptions about and *process for* developing a “strategic plan” for the College (a “plan to plan”). While a number of strategic planning-related efforts have been completed or are in process, annual strategic priority memos have served as the College’s strategic plan. Most recently, contingency planning efforts have focused our attention on the urgent and pressing challenges of the current economic downturn.

Our “Plan to Plan” has seven phases:

- I. Develop, review, and endorse the “Plan to Plan” [April-May 2009]  
*Solicit feedback on the proposed planning approach, revise accordingly, seek Board endorsement in May 2009.*
- II. Complete internal “SPOTs” (strengths, problems, opportunities, threats) [April-May 2009]  
*Identify opportunities that may lead to our strategic initiatives and assess our wherewithal to undertake such initiatives.*
- III. Develop our Situational Analysis [late Spring – Summer 2009]  
*Affirm the realities of our context and return to answering the “strategic questions” identified in spring 2008 through a focused information seeking and knowledge building process.*
- IV. Affirm and Update our Mission, Purpose, Educational Values, Character & Vision for the College [Summer & early Fall 2009]  
*President Cornwell carefully reviews and crafts revisions that offer a contemporary articulation and offers these to the College community for comment and conversation leading to Board affirmation in October 2009.*
- V. Identify our Target Outcomes [Fall 2009]  
*Identify mid- and long-range key indicators against which we will assess our progress.*
- VI. Identify our Strategic Initiatives to Achieve our Target Outcomes [Fall 2009 – Winter 2010]  
*Identify those broadly defined, distinctive initiatives that will achieve our vision; outline specific actions that support the initiative and identify resources required. Make appropriate choices within guiding principles that we will establish.*
- VII. Draft, review, and endorse the “Plan” [Spring 2010]  
*Draft plan for review and comment by the College community leading to Board adoption in May 2010.*

## The “Plan to Plan”

### Strategic Planning Context

***Our goal is not to produce a strategic plan per se, but to develop an institutional culture of planning at the College of Wooster that fosters strategic thinking and influences all decision making, resource allocation, and research and assessment efforts.***

The College of Wooster began its current strategic planning effort in fall 2006 with the presidential search prospectus. The mission, distinctive characteristics, challenges, and opportunities for the new president guided our priority setting for the first two years of Grant Cornwell’s presidency. For all practical purposes, the strategic priority memos written by Mr. Cornwell and Jim Wilson in fall 2007 and by Mr. Cornwell, Mr. Wilson, and David Gunning in fall 2008 have served as the College’s strategic plan; the priorities articulated have guided resource allocation, behavior, decision making, and assessment. In spring 2008, the Trustees, Cabinet, and faculty and staff leadership engaged in a process to identify a “Strategic Issues Agenda” for the College through a process facilitated by Max Stark, an organizational consultant. Mr. Stark facilitated a June 2008 marketing summit that brought together members of the Board of Trustees, Alumni Board, Administration, with our admissions, financial aid, and web consultants. In late summer 2008, our strategic planning efforts were redirected to contingency planning with the onset of the sharp economic downturn. While contingency planning remains our priority in the immediate, we need to return to our strategic planning effort, now more learned in the world of our College and the world outside that impacts us.

This brief summarizes where we are in the strategic planning process and proposes a “plan to plan” – the assumptions, activities, and outcomes of those activities that will lead to our next strategic plan.

### Where We Are

As noted, we have completed a number of activities that inform our strategic planning efforts:

<b>Activity Completed</b>	<b>Resulting Strategic Planning Component Information</b>
<b>Fall 2006: Presidential Search Prospectus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Situational analysis of the College as of fall 2006</li><li>• Challenges and Opportunities</li></ul>
<b>Fall 2007, 2008: Annual Institutional Goals &amp; Priorities letters (2007-08; 2008-09)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institutional priorities and specific actions targeted to meet the challenges &amp; opportunities identified in the Presidential Search Prospectus</li></ul>
<b>Summer 2008: Strategic Issues Identification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compilation of strategic issues facing the College from the perspectives of Trustees, Faculty and administrative leadership</li></ul>
<b>Summer 2008: Marketing Summit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment (internal) of market position; desired market position; actions to achieve desired market position</li></ul>
<b>Summer 2008: Competitor and Peer Benchmarking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparisons to competitor and peer institutions on an initial set of strategic indicators (work continues)</li></ul>
<b>2008-09: Contingency Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principles to guide choices of actions, initiatives and programs</li><li>• Understanding of key financial drivers</li><li>• College-wide awareness and engagement</li></ul>

In addition to our continuing contingency planning efforts, we have a number of strategic planning-related activities in progress, including:

- **Preparation of divisional “SPOTs”<sup>1</sup>.** Each of the President’s direct reports has led her or his area through an assessment of its strengths, problems, opportunities, and threats (“SPOTs”). The SPOTs were presented to the Administrative Strategy Group (a group of senior directors and managers). The Administrative Strategy Group identified those strengths, problems, opportunities, and threats that had the most institutional significance. [April 2009]
- **Preparation of an academic program SPOT** with the elected faculty leadership (“Big 5”) [April 2009]
- **Preparation of a student-focused SPOT** with student leadership and a cross-section of the membership of our nearly 100 student organizations [April 2009]
- **Preparation of an alumni-focused SPOT** with Alumni Board members [April 2009]
- **Preparation of a staff-focused SPOT** with members of the Staff Committee [May 2009]
- **A trustee retreat focused on marketing** at which we will review an admissions/marketing SWOT and competitor analysis and commence development of a marketing plan [May 2009]
- Development of the framework and initial assumptions for **an enrollment plan** [February 2009 continuing]
- **Review and assessment of our budget**, budgeting process, and assumptions and development of a comprehensive budget model that enables financial assessment of long-term strategies [May & Summer 2009]
- **Preparation of Long-Term Fixed Assets Requirements** that would identify needs for additional investment, such as the campus center, and a thorough replacement cost and timing analysis for all existing fixed assets [Summer 2009].
- **A comprehensive survey of admitted students** to understand their enrollment decisions and to obtain greater insight into how we stack up to our competitors. [August 2009]
- **A Board of Trustees governance review initiative** [Spring 2009]

## The “Plan to Plan”

The “plan to plan” that we propose begins with a few fundamental **assumptions**:

- We will not fundamentally change the core educational purpose or character of the College of Wooster.
- Our goal is not to produce a strategic plan per se, but through all our activities, develop an institutional culture of planning at the College of Wooster that fosters strategic thinking and influences all decision making, resource allocation, and research and assessment efforts.
- Our plan will be an organic, agile, living document. After this initial planning start-up, our planning will be a continual activity that will include annual assessment of our effectiveness in achieving our objectives and goals, resource allocation based on our plan priorities, and revision and refinement of our plan strategies based on our assessment.
- Our plan will be based on our core educational values and the realities of our current and future contexts.
- Our planning process will build upon our planning-related activities to date and link and inform the developing enrollment, marketing, and strategic financial plans appropriately to support our strategic initiatives.
- Our planning process will engage all trustees, students, faculty and staff, drawing primarily on our existing governance and consultative groups and providing “all call” opportunities for ideas and feedback throughout the phases of our planning process, not just at calendared meetings. Our challenges will be to build upon our growing culture of planning and assessment so that our strategic plan is the basis for everyone’s work, and to have this work be considered priority work, especially given the likely need to work outside traditional governance schedules.

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<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary for the “SPOT” concept. The two differences between traditional “SWOT” approaches and “SPOT” are in the use of “problems” rather than “weaknesses” (one can solve problems, one compensates for weaknesses), and accomplishing the institution’s mission and purpose sets the context for thinking about the strengths, problems, opportunities and threats. .

- Our planning and assessment processes will be facilitated by all members of the Cabinet.
- We may proceed to implement some actions as they emerge; we will not wait until the end of the planning process as we should reap the benefits of such strategic actions earlier rather than later.
- Our plan document will be recognized and appreciated for its brevity, clarity of our outcomes, and comprehensiveness.
- Our planning process will be recognized and appreciated for its agility and integration with our resource allocation, institutional renewal, and assessment processes.
- Our goal is to develop a plan to be adopted by the Board at its fall 2010 meeting.

Our **process** neatly falls into seven phases:

**I. April & May 2009: Review of the “Plan to Plan”**

We solicit comments and suggestions relating to our proposed “Plan to Plan” from Trustees, Faculty and Staff with the intent of producing a final version informed by such comments to the Board at the May 2009 meeting.

**II. Spring 2009: Picking Up Where We Left Off**

We engage all areas of the College in “area-based” SPOTs. These internal perspectives on our strengths, problems, opportunities, and threats provide us with a comprehensive assessment of our wherewithal to undertake strategic initiatives that will emerge in the planning process.

Internal SPOT Timeline:

- Administrative & Operational areas - complete
- Faculty Leadership – April 2009
- Students – April 2009
- Alumni Leadership – April 2009
- Staff Committee – May 2009
- Board of Trustees – May 2009

**III. Late Spring through Summer 2009: Affirming our Realities & Answering the Open Strategic Questions: Developing a Situational Analysis**

A new president, new senior staff, and new challenges have brought an increased emphasis on the use of information for planning and decision making. Our recent activities have focused on identifying and gathering the information we need to understand our opportunities and problems better. During the late spring and summer we would continue to gather and review such information, seeking comment on drafts from Trustees, Cabinet, and faculty and staff leadership as appropriate.

**IV. Summer 2009: Affirming our Mission, Purpose, Educational Values, Character, and Vision for the College**

The College of Wooster’s distinctiveness is deeply rooted in its mission, statement of purpose, long-held educational values, the character of its people and programs, and its vision for its future. The College’s plan must be congruent with our mission and purpose; its strategic initiatives and actions must be consistent with our educational values and character, yet distinctive enough to achieve our vision. During summer 2009, Mr. Cornwell will carefully review and craft revisions that will offer a contemporary articulation of our mission and purpose, identify our educational values from his consultations with our key stakeholders, affirm our character, and outline our ambitions for the College. The mission, purpose, educational values, character, and vision will be the theme of Mr. Cornwell’s opening convocation speech, kicking off a broadly inclusive discussion to occur during September 2009. The resulting mission, purpose, educational values, character, and vision would be

presented to the Board for endorsement at the October 2009 meeting.

#### **V. Fall 2009: Identification of Outcomes**

With affirmation of our mission, purpose, educational values, character, and vision, and mindful of our current realities as described in the situational analysis, we would proceed to develop long- and mid-range target outcomes. These outcomes would be key indicators against which we would assess our progress and include metrics in the areas of student engagement in their educational experience, student outcomes, enrollment, resources, pricing, market position.

#### **VI. Fall 2009 - early Spring 2010: Strategic Initiatives, Initial Actions, Resource Implications**

Given the outcomes we established, how do we get there given who we have affirmed that we are and our current context? This will be the most difficult and intense phase of our planning effort.

During this phase we will identify those broadly-defined strategic initiatives that will achieve our vision. These should be few in number, distinctive, and leave no doubt that they are rooted in our mission, purpose, educational values, and character. For each strategic initiative, we will outline the specific actions that support the strategic initiative and the resource investment (financial, human, facilities, technology, etc.) required for each. In addition, we will identify corollary actions which are those activities that must be supported for us to be generally viable and that will generate resources to support the implementation of our strategic initiatives, for instance, enrollment and development. This is where we will connect our enrollment, marketing, and strategic financial planning efforts that are underway.

We will establish a set of principles to guide our choices of strategic initiatives and actions. The set of principles originates in the principles that guided our contingency planning work.

We will consult with Trustees, faculty, staff, and student and alumni leadership as to the best ways of engaging our various stakeholders in this process. We expect all of the College's stakeholders to be involved in the process, that their engagement will entail responsibility for making appropriate choices within our established guiding principles, and that their engagement will lead to a plan that we will be able to truly call "our plan."

Review of the proposed strategic initiatives, the initial actions we will take, and the related preliminary strategic financial and resource plan will occur with the campus and Board in late spring 2010.

#### **VII. Spring 2010: Pulling it all Together: Initial Plan**

Based on the comments and guidance we receive, we will bring all of our work together in the form of an initial plan that will include:

- a. Our mission, statement of purpose, educational values, character, vision
- b. Outcomes by 20XX ["XX" to be determined by the vision and outcomes horizon]
- c. Our strategic initiatives
- d. Initial specific actions (two year horizon, with larger/longer-term items also identified, e.g., campus center)
- e. Initial multi-year strategic financial plan
- f. The means by which we will assess our progress [benchmarks, key indicators/metrics/dashboard, assessment measures for each of our desired outcomes]
- g. Contingency plan [What is the alternative if our assumptions about our future are incorrect, if the economy/marketplace changes, or if our strategic initiatives do not yield the intended outcomes?]

h. Annual planning, institutional resource allocation, assessment cycle

Review of the proposed plan will occur with the campus and Board throughout the Spring with the intent of the Board adopting the plan at its May 2010 meeting.

### **Corollary Work**

During our discussions we quickly learned that planning terms vary from industry to industry, organization to organization, and individual to individual. One of our first projects [spring 2009] will be to develop an agreed upon “planning lexicon” that will include planning and assessment terms, both standard and unique to the College that we will use throughout our planning and assessment activities.