

STRATEGIC PLANNING: STRENGTHS, PROBLEMS, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

A Summary of Perspectives

A Report to the Board of Trustees – May 2009

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15 May 2009

In Spring 2009, the College returned to its strategic planning effort, engaging faculty, students, alumni, administrators, and staff in a series of working sessions to identify, from each of their perspectives, the College of Wooster's strengths, problems, opportunities, and threats. This report summarizes the perspectives of each of these stakeholders and is intended to provide background for an abbreviated Board SPOT activity which will occur as part of the Marketing retreat on Saturday afternoon, May 30.

The Process

Each group was asked to focus on the College from its perspective and the aspects of the College it knows best. Thus, we asked the Administrative Strategy Group (ASG) to bring forward SPOTs for each of their respective divisions (Academic Affairs, Development, Enrollment Management, Finance & Business, Information Technology, Planning); we asked the "Big 5" elected faculty committee members (FAC) to consider our academic programs, curriculum, and educational approaches with consideration given to what they know about programs at other colleges; the Alumni Board (ALU) focused on the College from its perspective as active, engaged alumni; student leaders (STU) considered their experiences, as well as what they knew from their friends at other colleges; and the Staff Committee's lens was that of those involved in serving and supporting our students. Members of each group were then asked to take an institutional view, identifying the most important strengths, problems, opportunities, and threats. We then took what each group identified and summarized the results across groups. This summary follows. We note that the "Admissions/Marketing SWOT" prepared for the marketing retreat largely influenced the SPOTs brought forward in the session with the ASG, but was not shared with any other groups.

The College of Wooster's Strengths, Problems, Opportunities and Threats – a first articulation

The groups were remarkably similar in their identification of the institutional elements of the SPOT, though their specific articulation of an item often reflected their unique perspective. It was not surprising that some strengths were also problems and some opportunities also threats; that some problems were related to external threats identified, and our strengths could be leveraged to take advantage of external opportunities. For each element of the SPOT, we identify which groups included the element in its prioritized SPOT. We have also indicated which SPOT items appear in the Admissions Marketing SWOT (*'d and ADMMKT indicated in brackets).

Strengths, Problems, Opportunities & Threats Summary

	STRENGTHS		PROBLEMS	
INTERNAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Study • Faculty • Facilities • People • Traditions 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • "Best kept secret" • Faculty • Cost & affordability • Co-curricular facilities • Future donor base • People development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources • "The Wooster Way" • Clear priority setting • Philanthropy culture • Collaboration & communication • Information access & use
	OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
EXTERNAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum re-evaluation • Valued I.S. characteristics • Value of small-class mentoring relationships • Millennials' interests • Engaged alumni & parents • External grant funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging communications & information technologies • The City of Wooster • Students tending to stay near home • Economic conditions fostering new ways of doing things • Gaining culture of assessment • Engaged & energized new leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society's awareness & value of a liberal arts education • [not] re-conceptualizing liberal arts education in the 21st century • Failure to differentiate from competitors • Lack of name & brand recognition • Economic crisis • College costs & aid stresses • Competitor facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never ending construction • Change in donor base • Better wages & benefits elsewhere • Greater competition for donor resources • Low enrollment • Changing demographics • "The Wooster Way" • Location • Technology • Increasing bureaucracy & accountability

STRENGTHS

Relating to Our "Brand" or "Product"

***Independent Study** (ASG,ACAF,ALU,FAC,STU,STA) [ADMMKT]

Our education is a liberal arts and sciences approach emphasizing research and inquiry-based learning. As an undergraduate residential college, our approach extends beyond classroom and links student educational and developmental outcomes throughout college years. We support I.S. with extraordinary resources: most notably our faculty, Copeland funding for students, and our faculty leave program. This leads to a distinctive and strong academic culture and student/faculty relationships and a solid academic reputation.

Relating to Our Resources

***Faculty** (ALU, STU,FAC) [ADMMKT]

Our faculty members are of high quality. They have a teaching focus and culture of research. They care deeply about our students, their teaching, and the liberal arts educational approach.

***Facilities** (ASG, ALU, STA,STU) [ADMMKT]

Our beautiful campus and quality academic and residential facilities are evidence of our continued investment in facilities and campus.

***People** (ASG, STA, STU) [ADMMKT]

Our people – students, staff, faculty, alumni, and trustees – have a high investment in and commitment to the institution. In particular, we have an eclectic student population; a “warm and welcoming campus personality;” a stable, service-oriented, responsive staff; and “awesome” alumni who are passionate about their alma mater.

Relating to Our Culture & Environment

Our **traditions** create community that spans generations. (ALU, STU)

PROBLEMS

Relating to Our "Brand" or "Product"

***Our curriculum** (ACAF,FAC) [ADMMKT]

The curriculum and programs supporting I.S. have limitations in the 21st Century. Our curriculum is not innovative as it is largely a traditional model built on disciplines; additionally, we do not adequately support interdisciplinary activity. The Writing Program is underdeveloped, and does not adequately support I.S.. Our “entry point” to the I.S. experience, First Year Seminar (FYS) tries to do too much, is considered “plain vanilla” compared to first-year programs at other colleges, and generally lacks student buy-in. We have not assessed “A Wooster Education” (our curriculum) and therefore lack concrete evidence of whether our curriculum is achieving its outcomes. We have not defined diversity and global engagement in the context of the curriculum. With respect to educational technology, we are not

preparing students for the world outside and we are not preparing faculty for new technologies and supporting use of such technologies in teaching and research.

- *The College of Wooster is a "**best kept secret**" (ALU,STAF,STU,FAC) [ADMMKT]
We lack national recognition and reputation. We are inconsistent in our branding and marketing messages, and perhaps unflattering for the caliber of institution we desire to be thought of (our use of "COW" and "WOO"). Some consider our marketing efforts to be ineffective and insufficient, relying too heavily on I.S. to the exclusion of other strengths and features of the College of Wooster experience.

Relating to Our Resources

Faculty (FAC, STU)

The quality of our visiting faculty is uneven.

***Cost and affordability** (STU, ALU, STA) [ADMMKT]

Our rising cost and current financial aid policies, specifically gapping of students with financial need, have affordability and retention implications.

***Recreational/athletics and co-curricular facilities** (ASG, ALU, STA, STU) [ADMMKT]

***Residence halls** (STA) [ADMMKT]

While we have made progress in new construction and renovation, some of our residence halls remain "dark & dreary".

Future donor base (ASG, ALU, STA)

Our future donor base is weak, and while our "alumni care about the College," they do not give. Alumni perceive that there are too few volunteer opportunities for alumni, hampering the College's effort to effectively engage them.

People development (primarily staff) (STA)

We give low priority to organizational and supervisory development.

Finances (ASG, ALU)

The College has a structural deficit, and our resource profile, particularly our endowment, is weaker than our peers.

Relating to our Culture & Environment

"The Wooster Way" (ASG, FAC, STA)

...often hinders us, and we recognize that. New ideas met with "We can't do that here;" our unwillingness to sacrifice, prioritize or change; a reluctance to get rid of things that don't work; and our overall lack of agility prevent us from taking advantage of new ideas and hinder our ability to respond quickly to emerging challenges.

Lack of clear priority setting (ASG, STA)

Which results in staff overload, burnout, and confusion as well as ineffective use of our resources – both human and financial.

Lack of a culture of philanthropy (ASG)

Lack of collaboration and effective communication across and between areas (STA)

Institutional information access and use (ASG)

While we acknowledge that there is a cultural shift underway towards using data, information, and assessment results to inform our planning, strategy development, and decision making, access to the information we have is often difficult and few recognize the potential and opportunity for greater, easier access.

OPPORTUNITIES

Relating to Our "Brand" or "Product"

***It's the right time to re-evaluate the curriculum (ACAF, ALU, FAC, STU) [ADMMKT]**

Our external environment values traditional liberal arts strengths as evidenced in societal emphasis on globalization, sustainability, and appropriate application of information technology. We have opportunities in our current capstone assessment effort and in assessment of "A Wooster Education".

I.S. has characteristics and outcomes valued by employers and graduate schools (ASG, ALU)

Relating to Our Resources

Potential students value the kind of small-class mentoring relationship that is available at Wooster (STU)

***Millennials are interested in recreation, athletics, life sports, and social spaces (both real and virtual) (STU, ASG, STA) [ADMMKT]**

Our Campus Center project is already underway; we have a golf course.

***Engaged alumni and parents that have not been tapped as potential donors (STA, ALU, STU, FAC) [ADMMKT]**

We should make better use of alumni especially in ways to give back in non-financial ways and leverage the alumni network.

External grant funding continues to be available and stimulus funding may add to our revenue potential (FAC)

***Increasing use of the web, "cloud" and information technologies that represent attractive opportunities for marketing and operational effectiveness (ASG, STA) [ADMMKT]**

We are undertaking a "web initiative," employing social networking in recruitment, considering employing cloud computing, and have launched the President's "Datatel initiative."

Relating to our Culture & Environment

The City of Wooster (STA)

The City has small town characteristics, is safe, and has a vibrant downtown.

Students opting to remain closer to home (STA)

Difficult economic conditions make it more acceptable to consider new ways of doing things (ASG, FAC, STA)

A culture of assessment is gaining acceptance at the College (ASG)

Engaged and energized new leadership may make it easier to change old habits (ASG, STA)

THREATS

Relating to Our “Brand” or “Product”

***Shrinking value and awareness of the outcomes of a liberal arts education in current society (ASG, ALU, FAC, STU) [ADMMKT]**

Failure to re-conceptualize liberal arts & sciences education in the 21st Century (ACAF, STU)

Our students are members of a “Net generation” that has been characterized as never working alone; the world of their imminent future is one that is globally-interconnected and diverse; information-rich with knowledge developed across many sources, individuals, disciplines, and perspectives; and increasingly technology dependent.

***Failure to differentiate from our competitors (ASG, FAC, ALU) [ADMMKT]**

Other colleges have established and are establishing capstone requirements with many promoting an undergraduate research emphasis. In the public sector, larger state institutions are establishing honors and liberal arts-focused colleges, providing the “residential liberal arts and sciences educational experience” at a fraction of our cost. A number of our direct competitors have stronger programs in humanities and social sciences.

Lack of name [and brand] recognition (STU)

Relating to Our Resources

The Economic Crisis (ALU, ASG, STU, STA)

***College costs and related financial aid resource stresses (ASG, ALU) [ADMMKT]**

***Competitor facilities (ALU) [ADMMKT]**

Our never-ending construction (STU)

Change in donor base (ALU)

Potential loss of major donors, Culture of philanthropy is different for the new generation of donors (ALU)

Loss of employees to better wages and benefits elsewhere (STA)

Greater competition for donors' resources (ASG)

Low enrollment (FAC)

Relating to our Culture & Environment

***Changing demographics (ASG, ALU) [ADMMKT]**

"The Wooster Way" (ASG)

***Location (STU, STA) [ADMMKT]**

Cities provide more opportunities. Lack of public transportation for students who do not have cars.

Growing importance and impact of technology (STU)

Increasing bureaucracy & accountability (FAC)