

Competitive Positioning & Enrollment

Background: The Competitive Positioning and Enrollment Strategy Plans were developed by Mary Karen Vellines, Ellen Falduto, Grant Cornwell and John Hopkins. Key messages were gleaned from work done in 2005 by the Arts and Science Group (with 800 prospective students), the Marketing Summit in June 2008 (with Big Bad, Royall & Co., Steve Brooks and the Ad Hoc Marketing Committee of the board), the Independent Minds, Working together focus groups, the Admitted Student Questionnaires, the May 2009 Trustee Marketing Retreat, and the publications focus groups in Columbus and Chicago (Fall, 2009). The five year enrollment strategy brief and the one year (2010) plan were formulated by analyzing statistical trends in the last ten years at The College of Wooster and considering demographic shifts ahead.

Strategic Objective: *To attract and retain students who have the characteristics to benefit from a Wooster education in sufficient numbers to utilize effectively our human and physical resources.*

Strategy #1: **Leverage *U.S. News & World Report* “Top 10 teaching” recognition to build name/brand recognition outside academic circles, especially H.S. counselors & teachers, high-ability students & parents in selected markets.**

Tactics:

- Highlight *U.S. News* recognition on all major admissions print materials.
- Revise and rewrite all direct mail and e-mail marketing communications to incorporate this and other core messages as appropriate.
- Develop ad campaign spotlighting recognition, targeted to HS counselors in selected markets (regional trade pubs, HS sports programs, etc.)
- Create web content to support excellent teaching claim
 - Aggregate in central location, link from home page and admissions landing page.
 - Distribute to relevant academic department pages.
 - Push out through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube.
 - Focus on stories, profiles that tie back to Independent Minds, Working Together tagline.
- Nominate one professor each year for CASE Baccalaureate Professor of the Year
 - State winners picked from same pool.
- Nominate a Wooster professor for 2012 Robert Foster Cherry Award for Great Teaching (deadline: Nov. 1, 2010)

Indicators of progress:

- Administer national Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) annually, with addition of specific question(s) re: perceived quality of COW teaching vs. competitors.
- Develop and administer annual survey of HS counselors, teachers in selected markets.
- Web analytics re: number, duration of visits to targeted “excellent teaching” content.

Strategy #2: **Build deeper understanding of I.S. and its outcomes among key audiences (H.S. counselors & teachers, high-ability students & parents) in selected markets.**

Tactics:

- Develop web content that tells alumni outcomes stories, explicitly tying their success back to I.S. and Wooster experience where possible.
 - Aggregate in central location, link from home page and admissions landing page.
 - Distribute to relevant academic department pages.
 - Push out through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube.

- Develop central collection function and clearinghouse for empirical data supporting our assertions of excellent alumni outcomes, both professional and academic.
 - Reinforce existing anecdotal evidence.
- Develop new admissions DM piece focused on outcomes and value of Wooster education.
- Identify, train and support (e.g., travel expenses) a cadre of recent alumni to speak specifically about the impact of I.S. at prospective and admitted student events, both on- and off-campus.

Indicators of progress:

- Administer national Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) annually, with addition of specific question(s) re: perceptions of I.S., role in decision making of admitted students.
- Develop and administer annual survey of HS counselors, teachers in selected markets.
- Web analytics re: number, duration of visits to targeted I.S. & outcomes content.

Strategy #3: Use regional and national media placements to build name/brand recognition outside academic circles.

Tactics:

- Continue to focus higher percentage of media relations effort on regional and national opportunities.
 - Minimize time on routine event releases and news with limited/local interest.
- Leverage major releases and successful placements through existing college networks and social media.
 - Ensure all admissions, development, and alumni relations staff set up RSS feeds to receive all college news releases and major media placements.
 - Push major media placements out through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube.

Indicators of progress:

- Volume, prominence, and message quality of regional, national COW media coverage.
- Volume of referrals, links back to media stories posted on-line.

Strategy #4: Focus all communication efforts around clear, defined set of messages under the umbrella of Independent Minds, Working Together tagline.

Tactics:

- Use value proposition and key messages in new IMWT message strategy document as touchstone for all major communication pieces from admissions, alumni, and development, whether produced in-house or by outside vendors.
- Begin phased rollout of IMWT tagline on all COW stationery and business cards, as they come up for reprinting.
- Begin phased rollout of IMWT tagline wherever appropriate on all major print communication pieces from admissions, alumni, and development offices, as they come up for reprinting and/or redesign.
- Develop PowerPoint templates incorporating COW wordmark and IMWT tagline in consistent fashion, for use by all departments.
- Develop and distribute new graphic standards, as next component (along with message strategy document) of COW brand toolkit.
- Identify, purchase, and deploy a digital asset management system to allow greater consistency and more efficient sharing of images among key offices responsible for external communication of the college's brand and message.

Indicators of progress:

- Increasing ubiquity of tagline.
- More consistent, disciplined messaging across all communication channels, audiences.

Strategic Objective: *Achieve a steady, on-campus enrollment of 1,800 students with a first-year to second-year retention rate of 90% and a six-year graduation rate of 80%.*

Strategy #1: Improve market position by “raising the bottom” of the class.

Tactics:

- Increase the number of applications and subsequently, the selectivity of the class.
- Increase the number of early decision applicants and position the College as an early action school.
- Refine search to focus on high school clusters and neighborhoods with students likely to enroll and be successful at Wooster.
- Develop new messaging and publications around the tagline, Independent Minds, Working Together.

Indicators of Progress:

- Increased application numbers and increased completion rate of applications.
- Increased number of common applications.
- A greater percentage of early decision applicants apply which means a greater percentage of students are selecting Wooster as their first choice.
- A larger percentage of applicants apply and enroll whose initial contact was search.
- Improvement in selectivity as measured by the holistic reader rating scale.
- Increase in yield.
- Improvement in the first to second year retention rate.

Strategy #2: Improve the discount rate and net tuition revenue.

Tactics:

- Continue to refine the financial aid strategy to attract a more able and less needy group of students.
- Use merit scholarship strategically to attract the middle class student who wants our type of liberal arts education, but questions the affordability of a private education.
- Increase market position in order to be more appealing to full pay students.
- Publicize and encourage the tuition exchange option for Wooster employees.
- Explore a low interest loan option to replace a small portion of institution grant to incrementally lower the discount rate.

Indicators of Progress:

- A slow but steady decline in the discount rate.
- Net tuition revenue that exceeds the increase in tuition.
- A greater percentage of full pay students.

Strategy 3: Achieve a culturally and ethnically diverse student body that is minimally 10% multiethnic and 5% international. Maintain our strength in enrolling African Americans while improving our market position with Hispanics and Asians.

Tactics:

- Create a 5 year strategic plan for international recruitment and alumni involvement.
- Enhance Wooster's international presence on the web.
- Work with agents to recruit international students to Wooster.
- Develop pipelines to schools with multicultural populations with particular concentration on schools with Hispanic populations.
- Host counselors from multicultural schools on our campus.
- Encourage current multicultural students to be involved in admissions and outreach.
- Develop relationships with leading community based organizations (CBO) in selected markets.

Indicators of Progress:

- Increased percentage of Hispanics and Asians enrolling.
- Referrals from CBO's and targeted high schools.
- Increased number and diversity of applications from international students.
- Increased retention of our multicultural population.