STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN THE ACADEMIC AREA

(draft dated April 8, 2010)

Taking Wooster's Mission, Vision and core values into account and reflecting on what we do really well, and what we need to improve, we identify four areas of our academic program that need particular attention. The identification of the four areas, does not by any means imply that we do not value or that we should not continue to work on many other programmatic areas. These four areas here have emerged as high priorities, as we compare our academic program with the principles articulated by the AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) report as essential for the twenty-first century liberal education. The LEAP report was a major undertaking that integrated national level research on the value and relevance of liberal education. "This report, based on extensive input both from educators and employers, responds to the new global challenges today's students face. It describes the learning contemporary students need from college, and what it will take to help them achieve it." (from AAC&U website) Some of the areas identified in this brief also emerged in our SWOT exercises (2008-09) as weaknesses (that can be construed as missed opportunities if no action is taken.)

1. GLOBAL EDUCATION
(*High-Impact Educational Practices*: Diversity/Global Learning)

Wooster has a long tradition of international connections. In order to offer a variety of global opportunities for our students, we have developed several faculty-led study abroad programs and course-embedded global experiences. We have also started the process of evaluating the quality of our endorsed programs. Last year, we brought in external consultants for our Off-Campus Study programs and have implemented some of their recommendations, including the establishment of an OCS Advisory committee. However, compared to several of our peers, we are not at the forefront or the leading edge of Global Education, and continued focus on this area of our curriculum can help us move ahead.

Issues that need our continued attention:
- strategies for educating undergraduates about global interconnections and increasing intercultural awareness (perhaps through a pre- and post-off-campus study course)
- intentional integration of students' academic plans with their global and off-campus experiences
- strengthening our students' proficiency with a range of languages
- making off-campus study affordable
- sustaining short term programs abroad (increasing support for faculty in developing and implementing 'Wooster Summer in—' and embedded courses with a field component)
- deepening the links between study abroad and I.S. where applicable (The Copeland Fund provides exceptional opportunities but is there more we can do to link study abroad with undergraduate research?)
- maintaining a manageable group of endorsed study-abroad programs that can be evaluated periodically for quality assurance

SWOT
- o Making our signature I.S. program more unique (tie in with off-campus study)
- o Overcoming inertia to be innovative in our programs and thus improve branding

INDICATORS
- o Wooster will have better reputation
- o Easier to recruit students

2. DEVELOPMENTAL ADVISING
(*The Principles of Excellence* – Principle Two: Give Students a Compass)

Academic advising plays a crucial part in a student's success. The model of developmental advising can help students play an active role in their own academic planning and navigate their path through the four years. If structured correctly, our advising process can work effectively to provide students with the 'compass' or the 'GPS' they need for their academic journey.

Developmental advising is "a systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources. It both stimulates and supports students in their quest for an enriched quality of life. Developmental advising relationships focus on identifying and accomplishing life goals, acquiring skills and attitudes that promote intellectual and personal growth, and sharing concerns for each other and for the academic community. Developmental academic advising reflects the institution's mission of total student development and is most likely to be realized when the academic affairs and student affairs divisions collaborate in its implementation" (Winton, Miller, Ender, and Grites, *Developmental Academic Advising*, 1984:19)

A Taskforce chaired by Tom Tierney and Lisa Kastor has been working diligently to develop an implementation plan for Developmental Advising at Wooster. They have developed a set of objectives for each of the four years of a student's academic path, and identified numerous offices and programs that are available to assist students in achieving these objectives in a thoughtful manner. Since it is not possible to concentrate all these resources in an actual center, the Taskforce is designing an *Educational Planning and Advising Center* website (EPAC) that identifies the academic, co-curricular, and personal development objectives for each of the four years of undergraduate study, and provides links to the resources that can support students on this journey. This EPAC website will also assist faculty in fulfilling their advising responsibilities by creating a shared sense of the objectives students should be thinking about at any given stage in their academic and personal development, and by providing easy access to the various resources available to support advisors as they guide students through this developmental process.

Wooster's unique excellence in independent study means that we have a special opportunity to give purpose to a four-year (and beyond) process of reflection and

planning, all mentored by faculty and staff. This approach will allow us to integrate and strengthen career counseling as part of life planning.   If we do this well, we will ask students to be critically reflective and intentional about their purpose at Wooster, their choices as they move through the curriculum, their preparation for I.S., their research, and their post-graduate trajectory.

SWOT
- o   Building on the recognition for teaching and mentoring
- o   Improving the understanding of our academic program and its value through developmental advising
- o   Improving the understanding of liberal arts as preparation for careers

INDICATORS
- o   Better retention (increased graduation rates)
- o   Graduates more successful in career launching (measured by job placement, career success)
- o   Improved name recognition (better recruitment results)

UNIQUENESS
- o   Integration of Developmental Advising with Career advising and Lilly project (vocation) is very unique. This is very much in keeping with the liberal arts tradition of treating the student as a whole

3. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS & INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY INTO RESEARCH PRACTICES
(*High-Impact Educational Practices*: Undergraduate Research)

The LEAP report recommends written and oral communication as one of the essential learning outcomes. In addition, the report recommends that: "the power of new technologies be harnessed in order to give all students experience in research, experimentation, problem-based learning, and other forms of creative work---."

Writing across the curriculum has been a cornerstone of *A Wooster Education* and we have committed some resources to the writing program. Yet, our current assessment efforts have not revealed conclusively that our students are achieving writing proficiency to the extent we would like. Based on feedback from the faculty, they need more support for teaching writing. In addition, beyond traditional writing, we have not made much progress in integrating technology effectively into research practices. Moreover, we have not articulated the importance of oral communication for our students as a desirable learning outcome. Thus, this area emerges as a priority for us.

Some of the goals related to this area are: 1) to strengthen communication and presentational skills and the sharing of new knowledge with others beyond the campus; 2) to help Wooster students employ more sophisticated research methods and thus engage more fully in the scholarly discourse of their discipline; and 3) to use educational technologies to enhance student research.

As a further step in the development of more public presentations of student work, we could consider helping students create an electronic archive of their senior I.S. abstracts or précis and make them available on the web. Students could be trained to include various forms of digital communication such as video, mash-ups, and podcasts, when appropriate for the project. A realistic plan might be to have the entire senior class digitally publish their abstracts in three years.

SWOT
- o   Improving students' writing skills
- o   Integration of technology in research and writing
- o   Improve general understanding of our signature program and make it less intimidating

INDICATORS
- o   Better writing skills seen in Senior I.S.
- o   More innovative research projects
- o   Better communication of our students' work beyond the campus

UNIQUENESS
- o   Once fully implemented, this set of programs can increase the visibility of I.S. and Undergraduate Research. At the same time make our signature program more understandable, by easy to access public archives of our students' work.

4. LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE
(*The Principles of Excellence* –
Principle Three: Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation
Principle Five: Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action
Principle Six: Emphasize Personal and Social Responsibility in every field of study)

The LEAP report by AAC&U cites internships as a High-Impact Practice "that provides students with direct experience in a work setting, and gives them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field." One of the recommendations of the LEAP report is that: "every student engage in some form of field-based learning and that faculty and staff create opportunities for students to learn collaboratively and systematically from their field-based experiences." Another recommendation in the report states: "To build students' preparation for both work and citizenship, higher education needs to give new emphasis to fostering practical judgment and problem-solving *in the field*."

At Wooster, we offer a variety of opportunities to "connect knowledge with choices and action," but they are not sufficient in numbers, nor coordinated in a way that encourages students to integrate these options in their academic planning. We need to (i)strengthen programs that nurture in our students a better understanding of their vocational aspirations that are central to their educational plan, (ii)help translate theory into practice and using practice to strengthen students' understanding of

theory, and (iii)engage in "real-world" projects that strengthen the quality of learning. Some examples of currently available opportunities at Wooster are: field research in Geology and Biology, laboratory research in the natural sciences, including summer research programs (such as Research Experience for Undergraduates Site in Physics, HHMI grant funded projects, Sophomore Research program, etc.), student-teaching, Internships, Applied Mathematics Research Experience, Social Entrepreneurship, the Artful Dodge (editing a literary magazine), an Inside/Out course, Environmental action, the Entrepreneurship program, and Lilly program Fellowships (Azimuth, Medical & Legal Humanitarian, Civic Engagement, etc). In addition, we have recently joined the *Project Pericles* with a commitment to education for responsible and participatory citizenship. We have created Global Social Entrepreneurship programs. Some of our current opportunities are not open to all the students and have prerequisite courses or background. Students who are engaged in the current opportunities do not always learn to integrate them with their educational experience and thus there is a need for "guided learning on real-world problems." This is particularly true of many off-campus summer internships. In addition, non-scientists taking science courses, seldom take a course with a laboratory component and thus miss out on the entire hands-on experience of 'doing' science. In conclusion, there is much room for strengthening the real-world learning of our students and helping them translate ideas into actions.

Our next step will be to develop strategies for improving these four areas of our academic program.

SWOT
- o   Overcoming inertia to become more innovative in our curriculum
- o   Increasing the perceived 'value' of liberal arts education and not lose students to public institutions (sometimes seen as directly preparing for careers)
- o   Developing more unique programs (beyond I.S.) and improve branding
- o   Investing in 21st Century curriculum (going beyond the traditional)

INDICATORS
- o   Better name/brand recognition
- o   Graduates better prepared for real-world (measured by job placement, career success)
- o   Increased parents' confidence in our education (better enrollment)

UNIQUENESS
- o   We have several experiential learning programs, some are well established, others young and yet some others under developed. Once fully developed and launched as a coherent package of opportunities to our students, these programs can make Wooster very distinct.

References:
Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Project details, publications and other resources can be found at: https://www.aacu.org/leap/index.cfm

College Learning for the New Global Century, 2007
From AAC&U website: "College Learning for the New Global Century is a report about the aims and outcomes of a 21st century college education. It is also a report about the promises we need to make--and keep--to all students who aspire to a college education, especially to those for whom college is a route, perhaps the only possible route, to a better future. This report, based on extensive input both from educators and employers, responds to the new global challenges today's students face. It describes the learning contemporary students need from college, and what it will take to help them achieve it."

LEAP Executive Summary (with Employers' Views on Learning Outcomes and Assessment Approaches, 2008 edition)
These two publications include a list of Principles of Excellence (in liberal education) identified by the LEAP project and the Learning Outcomes associated with them.
From AAC&U website: "This publication includes an executive summary of AAC&U's widely disseminated report, College Learning for the New Global Century, originally released in January 2007. We have designed this shorter document specifically to launch discussions of the LEAP principles and outcomes with external constituents. This new 2008 edition of the Executive Summary includes a short summary of the original report as well as summaries of findings from our surveys of business leaders conducted in both 2006 and 2007. The findings detail the skills and knowledge areas on which employers want colleges and universities to place more emphasis and how and why they value a liberal education. They also highlight employers' views on various approaches to outcomes assessment and reveal their clear support for more qualitative forms of assessment and rejection of multiple choice testing at the undergraduate level. It is ideal for initiating discussions with trustees, boards of regents, business advisory councils, and other campus or community groups."

High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter, 2008
This publication distills out educational practices in higher education that result in the ideals discussed in the LEAP executive summary.
From AAC&U website: "It defines a set of educational practices that research has demonstrated have a significant impact on student success. Author George Kuh presents data from the National Survey of Student Engagement about these practices and explains why they benefit all students, but also seem to benefit underserved students even more than their more advantaged peers. The report also presents data that show definitively that underserved students are the least likely students, on average, to have access to these practices."

Community of Learners
April 6, 2010

Community of Learners

The College of Wooster's Community of Learners includes all Students, Faculty, and Staff, and is extended by keeping alumni, parents, and community members as friends of the College. Our overarching objective is to engage everyone in the community, recognizing that tradition never graduates. Our approach will encompass much needed conversations among the members of this Community, and will include ethical reflections. We will know that we have achieved our objective when this approach is reflected in the structures and practices of the College. Our work is greatly influenced by Wooster's Core Values. Our strategic initiatives will promote the cultivation and development of the following **qualities** of the members of the Community of Learners:

Civility:

We strive to treat each other with a deep appreciation for the contributions we each make to the community. This standard is based upon our Wooster Ethic and Civility Statement.

From our SPOT
Draws upon the strength:
- Recognizable traditions

To address the problem of:
- Campus culture doesn't support giving

Tactics:
- Promoting the Wooster Ethic and civility statement more broadly

Civic Engagement:

Every member of the Community seeks opportunities to be civically engaged locally, nationally, and internationally. These will be outside those expected in our educational pursuits or our current job responsibilities. We, individually and collectively, establish a legacy of giving of ourselves in big and small ways.

From our SPOT:
Take advantage of an Opportunity:
- Resources within the City of Wooster

Tactics:
Assessment indicator:
- Number of individuals involved and depth of engagement. (Hours of service, leadership positions, etc.)

Connectedness:
We will consider ourselves as connected members of an interdependent collaborative community reciprocity, gratitude, humility and responsibility.

From our SPOT:

Tactics include:
- Reflective components and face time among constituents.
- The visible signs of support are necessary.

Responsibility:
Individually, we will accept that "I am responsible for my actions," we have responsibility to the well being of humankind, and we recognize that responsibility is the personal piece of well being that nurtures our development. As a community, we will be concerned with social justice issues, compassion and understanding with a commitment to them.

From our SPOT:
Tactics include:

Lifelong Intellectual Engagement and Ethical Reflection:
Members of our Community will be committed to intellectual engagement and ethical reflection regardless of where they may find themselves in their life or vocations. We will, through our programs and individual and collective actions, inspire intellectual curiosity and growth.

From our SPOT:

Tactics:
- We have presenters and speakers which reflect this variety on campus. But how are we role modeling this value.

Assessment Indicators:
- A measure of this is the level to which we are even showing up when not required?
- Participating in alumni events off campus?
- Is the institution utilizing ethical assessment tools and mechanisms?