

September 17, 2012

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees and the Campus Community  
FROM: Grant H. Cornwell, President  
David H. Gunning, Chair of the Board of Trustees  
SUBJECT: Strategic Priorities for 2012-13

## **Introduction**

In this memo we convey Wooster's strategic priorities for 2012-13. We begin this year in a very good place, seeing ample grounds for confidence and optimism. The objective indicators of institutional health show growing strength and there is a palpable sense of momentum and pride among Wooster's constituencies.

Looking back on last year's strategic priorities and significant college milestones, we note that:

- We completed the Scot Center with resounding success;
- We enrolled a first-year class that was exactly on target in all regards and achieved for the first time 90 percent retention of our returning sophomores;
- We opened the Collaborative Research Environment (CoRE) in Andrews Library, a dynamic new space and program to support continuous innovation and improvement in our commitment to being the nation's premier college for undergraduate mentored research;
- We completed a new Campus Facilities Master Plan that will guide our facilities projects for the next decade;

- As part of that plan, we authorized the project to convert our central plant from coal to a contemporary combination of natural gas and electricity, thus saving money and dramatically reducing our carbon footprint; and,
- We began our self-study for the upcoming Higher Learning Commission continuing accreditation with great gusto and crisp organization.

These highlights are not exhaustive of the positive strides forward accomplished last year, but they do offer ample evidence that Wooster is a college moving boldly forward.

As is our practice, this memo does not detail all of the important work to be done, but instead highlights those projects or initiatives that follow directly from our Strategic Framework that we will pursue because we believe they will move us further along in the pursuit of our strategic objectives: (1) to fulfill our educational purpose with distinction by making continuous improvements in providing a liberal arts education that is distinctive and demonstrably superior; (2) to strengthen the foundation of our college by securing and enhancing the availability of the human, financial, and physical resources needed to achieve our vision; and (3) to sustain our momentum by developing a campus-wide and sustainable culture of planning as an effective, collective endeavor.

### **Strategic Objective #1:**

#### **To fulfill our educational purpose with distinction**

Our primary objective, our leading strategic commitment, is continuously to support, improve, and invest in the creative development of our core educational mission. Excellence in teaching and learning is the *sine qua non* of our integrity and prosperity as a liberal arts college. Strategic initiatives currently underway are examples of our

commitment: the Collaborative Research Environment (CoRE); planning for the future of the sciences at Wooster; the Center for Diversity and Global Engagement; and the Community of Learners initiative, of which the Wooster Ethic is a part, that will insure that the quality of campus life for all students contributes positively to their education.

### **On-going Initiatives**

**CoRE:** Our Collaborative Research Environment in Andrews Library is fully functional as a space, and it is already achieving the goals of providing students and faculty with the resources and support necessary to employ information and communication technologies in their research and inquiry. But CoRE as a program – as a creative support system to encourage the use of technology throughout the teaching and learning culture of Wooster – is just beginning. With CoRE we do not only want to support students and faculty in how they are already using information and communication technologies in research, but to instruct and inspire them to go farther, to experiment, innovate, and develop literacies in these technologies.

We have recognized that in order to inspire our students to innovate with technology and collaborative research, we need to provide support and inspiration for our faculty. Our best student digital projects have developed in environments where there is an active, risk-taking faculty member mentoring them. Hence, we will be providing a number of programs to support faculty work. Our Teaching Matters series for the faculty will highlight the work of our IT Fellows group, a number of faculty who spent the summer learning new uses for technology in their pedagogy, as well as discussions about how to develop collaborative student projects and use digital media in the classroom.

Likewise, if faculty are innovating in their research, they will support innovative research among their students. Thus, we will be launching a new series called Research Matters that provides a venue for discussing innovations in research across the disciplines. Topics might include the use of digital media in research, pursuing collaborative research, and creating a digital scholarly identity.

Finally, we would like to provide the opportunity for faculty and students to engage in interdisciplinary collaborative work through the support of summer investigative teams addressing multi-disciplinary topics and supporting student/faculty travel opportunities to present their work. Our expectation is that this work will model for our students how collaborative work might be accomplished, and establish the beginnings of inter-dependent I.S. projects linked around research themes.

**Future of the Sciences at Wooster:** Last year, Carolyn Newton worked with science faculty to begin to imagine the future of scientific inquiry and teaching at Wooster. Through discussions, workshops, and visits to other campuses, we have begun the critical process of clarifying our needs to remain a liberal arts college distinguished for the quality of science education we provide. This year, we will continue this work focusing on defining our specific programmatic goals, aspirations, and needs.

**Center for Diversity and Global Engagement:** As we begin our fourth year with the Center for Diversity and Global Engagement, we will look to the Center to advance its mission of fostering a collaborative culture of inclusion and local/global engagement for the campus community. Through the very act of creating the Center, and thus naming our commitment to the issues and values it represents, we have set high expectations for the campus climate for diversity and global engagement. Developing an inclusive campus climate remains, and must always be, a mission for all constituencies on

campus, but the Center, through its programming, outreach, and coordination of efforts, works to facilitate this mission. In the coming year, the Center will strive to connect its work more directly with the academic program, including (1) faculty/staff development projects focused on diversity pedagogy (international and domestic) and (2) off-campus study and global engagement programming. The Center will also work to construct and enhance programs that will empower students to take responsibility for creating and implementing their own initiatives to improve campus climate.

**Community of Learners:** The vision of "Community of Learners" initiative is to insure that our approach to learning outside the classroom is every bit as purposeful and mission-centered as our approach to our academic program.

Media is filled with stories of how higher education is being transformed by the Internet; from the ethical shambles of the for-profit sector to the bold, new projects being launched by Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, there is no question that digital resources are changing, for many, what it means to pursue a degree. As the world moves on-line for college, we face a profound threat and opportunity. For Wooster to thrive, we have to redouble our efforts to make the meaning and value of being a campus community – a Community of Learners – really count. We have to have a clear message about why being a residential campus matters and why it differentiates the learning experience here, and hence the quality of a Wooster degree, from what might be obtained on-line or in a large, impersonal university.

The value proposition of a residential learning community is the sum total of the growth and development made possible by living and learning on campus. Thus, the Community of Learners initiative is an attempt to steward the overall quality and value of campus life. The elements include but are not limited to: the campus dining

experience; athletics and recreation; the health and wellness services offered through the Longbrake Student Wellness Center; the opportunities for music, theater, and the arts; student organizations, governance, and leadership opportunities; the support for students pursuing our mission afforded through CoRE, APEX, the Center for Diversity and Global Engagement, the Learning Center, and the Writing Center; and most importantly, the interactions among students, faculty, and staff made possible only by the fact that we are all living and learning on the campus. This holistic philosophy of education is as true and powerful today as it has been for generations.

Put in this way, the “strategic initiative” is not about developing new programs or adding to the already rich array of opportunities and services. The strategic initiative, instead, is to steward them in such a way that students and their families, as well as faculty and staff, understand that we are a small campus learning community on purpose, that we offer the richness of opportunities and services we do because we understand the role they play in the overall development and liberal education of our students.

Doing this well will not differentiate us from other residential liberal arts colleges, but it certainly will differentiate us from Phoenix or Coursera and from the student experience of large state and research universities.

### **New Initiative**

**APEX:** This year we launch APEX, our distinctive program to integrate academic and post-graduate advising, planning, and experiential learning. APEX is the mature vision of the work we have been doing for several years to harness the potential synergy in bringing together academic advising, career planning, and the host of programs we

offer in experiential learning, including: internships, the Lilly Project in vocational discernment, our hallmark Applied Mathematics Research Experience (AMRE), and our Entrepreneurship program. These programs, each strong in its own right, have been relatively siloed, serving student constituencies according to their particular missions. Through the organizational architecture of APEX and its newly renovated space in Gault Library created to foster collaboration, these programs will provide an environment of continuous mentoring and planning for our students, with the promise of transformative outcomes for all.

In our Strategic Framework we say, “we will improve the quality and effectiveness of our educational program by developing distinctive approaches unique to Wooster in:

- Student Educational Planning and Advising: We will build upon the strong student-faculty and student-staff relationships that occur at Wooster to develop a distinctive program, uniquely Wooster’s, based on the principles of developmental advising, which will encourage students to develop a clear sense of purpose in their educational program; and
- Integrating Theory and Practice: We will increase opportunities for students to connect theory and practice through campus life and ‘real world’ projects and experiences that strengthen the quality of student learning.”

In APEX, we will make a bold advance towards realizing our goals of cultivating a sense of purpose and intentionality in each of our students, giving them guidance in developing their plans, and offering them ample opportunity to put their ideas to work in the world through a host of experiential learning opportunities. With the economic and popular pressure in our society today to demonstrate the value of a liberal education, we believe APEX will enable Wooster to distinguish itself among our peers in

offering decisive evidence of our value; our alumni, and their post-graduate opportunities, will be living proof of the value of a Wooster education.

## **Strategic Objective #2**

### **To strengthen the foundation of our college**

The ambitions we all share for Wooster can only be realized by continuously strengthening our human, financial, and physical resources. We will make progress this year by focusing on two strategic initiatives critical to this objective.

### **On-going Initiative**

**Marketing:** In the 2006 edition of Loren Pope's famous book, *Colleges That Change Lives*, he (in)famously begins his account: "The College of Wooster is my original best-kept secret in higher education; for thirty years I've been telling my clients that. As I have gotten to know what it accomplishes, I can testify that there is no better college in the country" (305). In the recently released 2012 edition, completely revised by author Hilary Masell Oswald, the account reports that students "walk around with smiles on their faces because they've discovered one of the country's finest educational establishments. You should discover it too," she admonishes the reader (263). In the last sentence of the lengthy, accurate, and highly complimentary account the author concludes: "It should be a well-kept secret no more" (270).

We agree.

Our recent efforts to articulate Wooster's unique character and quality to prospective students, to alumni and parents, and to external audiences have been creative, robust,



and effective. We continue to create publications, web pages, and social media to tell the Wooster story. This year, these on-going efforts will be brought together into a comprehensive marketing plan designed to advance Wooster's market position, our brand, and recognition in strategic demographics, and the pride and commitment that Wooster alumni and friends have in the College.

### **New Initiative**

**Campaign Planning:** Wooster's last comprehensive fund raising campaign came to a successful end in 2007, the year Grant took office. Annual, capital, and endowment fund raising since that time has kept a healthy pace, evidenced most dramatically by the generosity that was forthcoming to fund the Scot Center. With Laurie Houck, our no-longer-new vice president for development and alumni relations, now squarely in the saddle, we feel it is time to turn our attention to crafting a strategy and goals for Wooster's next comprehensive campaign.

In 2012-13 we will welcome and orient several critical new hires in development and alumni relations; we will conduct a systematic research project on the philanthropic capacity of our donor base; we will commission a rigorous feasibility study to assess the scope of the College's next campaign; and, we will work with the Board of Trustees and campus constituencies to establish our funding priorities.

### **Strategic Objective #3**

#### **To sustain our momentum by developing a sustainable culture of planning**

When we began our strategic planning process, now five years ago, we all promised ourselves that ours would be a dynamic process, marked by continuous analysis,

innovation, and decisive action. We believe we have been true to that vision. Rewarded for our collective strategic diligence and the extraordinary commitment to our mission demonstrated daily by the faculty, staff, and trustees, the opportunities and challenges in front of us now are very different than they were five years ago. Our foundation is strong: we have a clear sense of mission; the quality of a Wooster education is demonstrably outstanding; our enrollment is exactly on target; our leadership is experienced, sophisticated, and ambitious for Wooster; and our financial position is rock-solid. Returning to our Strategic Framework we intend to assess, revise, and refresh our planning efforts. This year's strategic planning work will build off our continuing accreditation study.

**Higher Learning Commission Continuing Accreditation:** This coming year is the climax of our continuing accreditation research and evaluation. As we have said all along, we have gone about our self-study not as an exercise removed from our normal way of doing business but as an element of our on-going strategic planning process. Its completion will provide us with an excellent framework for revisiting our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We have accomplished much since we last engaged Wooster constituencies in a SWOT analysis, and also much has changed in the context and climate of higher education. With the HLC self-study as the basis for our discussions, we will again go through the process of coming to a common understanding of our strategic position and ask again what we should be doing differently to advance the College towards our shared goals.

## **Conclusion**

We wish to express our gratitude to the trustees, faculty, staff, and alumni who, each in their own ways, contribute so much to this fine college. Together we are leading Wooster towards a future of prosperity and distinction.