
THE COLLEGE OF
WOOSTER

DATE: September 6, 2013
TO: Members of the Board of Trustees and Campus Community
FROM: Grant H. Cornwell, President
David H. Gunning, Chair of the Board of Trustees
SUBJECT: Strategic Priorities for 2013-14

Introduction

In this memo, we convey Wooster's strategic priorities for the coming year. As we reflect on the accomplishments of 2012-13, we find evidence of a college that is getting stronger and being recognized as such by external observers, evidence of a college that is realizing the benefits of being strategically focused, and as a result, evidence of growing prominence in the competitive environment of distinguished liberal arts colleges. Over the course of the last year:

- Wooster completed the self-study for continuing accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in a manner distinguished by its substance, thoroughness, and rigorous honesty. The report of the HLC visiting team conveyed its esteem for our review process and for the integrity with which we discharge our mission. We have received the decision of the HLC Institutional Actions Committee and, as anticipated, the results were unqualified and strongly positive.
- The new edition of *Colleges That Change Lives* was released and describes Wooster as "a hotbed of creative and analytical thinking" and "one of the country's finest educational establishments" (263).
- The new edition of the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* recognizes Wooster as one of twenty private and twenty-one public colleges and universities in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. that the editors deem a "best buy," distinguished for high quality academics and affordability.

- On campus we have completed the conversion from coal to natural gas in our power plant, an initiative that has enabled us to reduce dramatically our carbon footprint and our energy costs.
- The Mellon Foundation awarded Wooster a grant of \$700,000 to advance our efforts in CoRE to enable our faculty and students to employ digital technology in their research and communication.
- The launch of APEX was highly successful and resulted in an extraordinary increase in the number of students using the resources of the program: one-on-one visits in academic advising are up 100 percent from 2011-12; learning center visits are up 50 percent; peer tutoring use has more than doubled; career planning visits are up 50 percent; and the number of internship opportunities listed in the Experiential Learning catalogue has grown from 90 to 160. In the first year of the APEX Fellowship Program, \$100,000 of fellowship support was granted to 38 students from a pool of 68 applicants. All of this activity is evidence of a well-conceived program being vigorously implemented to position our students to prosper after graduation, putting their Wooster education to work in the world.
- The College received the gift of the Gault Family Learning Center. Exciting plans are underway to transform the building into a creative and dynamic new student residence for 75 upper-class students, opening in the fall of 2014.

After all of the extraordinary commitment, visionary thinking, hard work, and courageous initiative displayed by the entire Wooster community over the last several years, it is gratifying to reflect on the objective evidence of our progress. We are grateful to count as colleagues and partners such an exceptional community of faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni. As we look ahead to the coming year, we see a great deal of important work to be done, building as we must on our hard-won momentum.

As is our practice, this memo highlights those projects or initiatives 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

Future of the Sciences at Wooster: Our primary objective is to support, improve, and invest in the creative development of our core educational mission. At Wooster, superior education in the life sciences is critical to our educational mission, to our strong legacy and reputation, and to our market competitiveness. This year, we will set to work in earnest to define the scope of a future facilities project to support our vision of the future of inquiry and teaching in the life sciences. This fall our space planning consultant, Art Lidsky, will present the findings of his study of Wooster's programmatic needs. His findings build upon the work that occurred this past year in which Carolyn Newton, together with the faculty stewards of the initiative, Dean Fraga and Mark Snider, engaged science faculty in fruitful discussions of the future of the sciences and exploration of ideas of what facilities Wooster will require. Groups of faculty, staff, and in some cases trustees, visited colleges that have recently undertaken successful projects in building new science facilities, including Haverford, Swarthmore, Dickinson, University of Scranton, and Muhlenberg. Thanks to the generous invitations of our trustees and alumni, groups also visited the research facilities at DuPont and Novartis.

Our initiative in the sciences received an enormous boost with the visionary gift of a new endowed chair in computational biology and bioinformatics from A. Morris Williams and Ruth E. Whitmore Williams. The Whitmore-Williams Endowed Professorship in Biology is a harbinger of the philanthropic enthusiasm behind the science initiative.

Community of Learners: We intentionally pursue our mission in a residential campus community, believing as we do that the process of living and learning together is an exceptionally powerful educational design. Hence, the Community of Learners initiative signals our commitment to steward the overall quality and value of campus life; we recognize that learning takes place in classrooms, studios, libraries, and laboratories, but also in residence halls, dining halls, on athletic fields, and through our myriad clubs and student organizations.

This year, we will focus our strategic attention on respect as the principle to govern our overall campus climate. In our Graduate Qualities, we set lofty learning goals for our students. In our Mission and Core Values, we articulate our fundamental purpose. For the most part, the campus community is comprised of good people doing good work. But Wooster is part of a larger society. Just as there are instances of disrespect - issuing from bias or ignorance about race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or sexual identity - found throughout society, so, too, we have instances of disrespect within our own campus community.

As a liberal arts college, however, we have both the obligation and the opportunity to engage our shortcomings educationally. We have the obligation to do this because each and every student at Wooster has an equal right to pursue her or his liberal education unimpeded by the profound disruptions that instances of disrespect can cause. We have the opportunity to do this because our educational framework, academic and co-curricular, is designed to help all engaged with our mission to learn to recognize bias and replace ignorance with understanding.

Beyond CoRE: We are committed to continuous innovation and improvement in our hallmark approach to mentored undergraduate research. We created the Collaborative Research Environment (CoRE) in Andrews Library to provide the space and resources necessary for our students and faculty to engage creatively with digital technologies in their research. Now, with the grant awarded by the Mellon Foundation, we will be able to engage students and faculty in imagining new directions for Independent Study. We will continue to broaden the availability, understanding, and use of digital teaching, research, and communication technologies in our mission. Our colleagues in Information Technologies have reorganized their duties to improve

support for educational technologies, and CoRE has become much more than an abundantly used space: it is a programmatic locus of our efforts to enable our faculty and students to be creatively engaged with emerging technologies.

APEX: This year we will seek to deepen student engagement with APEX both practically, in their use of the services and programs offered, and philosophically, in the degree of intentionality they bring to their Wooster educations.

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 the following strategic initiatives.

Gault Schoolhouse: The truly exciting opportunity to be realized over the course of this year is the conversion of the Gault Family Learning Center into the Gault Schoolhouse residence.

We know from our Campus Master Plan that we have systemic needs in the stewardship of our student residences. While we offer a range of diverse and high quality student housing, we also press into service residences that are chronically difficult to maintain at the level we seek or which have passed their useful life. This past summer we renovated the Rubbermaid building and the Culbertson-Slater complex to accommodate our large campus enrollment; in this case, necessity did give birth to invention, and these two air-conditioned facilities increase the high quality residential options for our students.

Working with architects, we have developed a creative design that will render the Gault Schoolhouse not only some of the highest quality student residential space on our campus, but on any campus. Combining air-conditioned, suite-style residences in space designs that provide for both community and privacy, in a beautiful, historic building proximate to downtown, the

Gault Schoolhouse will enable us to decommission some of our most tired student residences and replace them with the best.

Anticipating the addition of Gault Schoolhouse next fall, we will assess our entire stock of student residences, measured against our enrollment plan to seek a balance of 1900 students living and learning on campus, and begin to develop a feasible multi-year plan to maintain all of our residences at a level of quality we judge appropriate.

Strengthening Wooster's Position in a Competitive Market: Continually advancing our distinctive approach to undergraduate education, committing to the facilities essential to support our program in the sciences, and confidently launching a focused fundraising campaign are initiatives that advance Wooster's position in the marketplace and among our constituencies. They are as much a part of our marketing plan as the elements of the marketing plan that support their advancement.

A good marketing plan is like a good strategic plan; it is constantly reviewed and revised based upon our assessment of its effectiveness. We will continue to analyze which of our efforts have had the greatest impact, continue to invest in those that are working, and explore new ideas.

The consistently strong enrollment results we have achieved recently, coupled with the numerous external recognitions Wooster has garnered, are evidence that our marketing plan is being deployed to good effect. In the coming year, we will continue to create new content and design for our web sites, our social media initiatives, our print media, and our articulation of Wooster's story to convey our mission and our message to our key constituencies.

Campaign Planning: In 2012-13 we welcomed several critical new hires in development and alumni relations; we conducted a systematic research project on the philanthropic capacity of our donor base; and we received the results of a study assessing the scope and timing of the College's next fund-raising efforts. In the coming year, Grant and Laurie Houck will work closely

with the Board of Trustees to design and structure our fund-raising strategy. We will convey more as the year progresses.

Strategic Objective #3

To sustain our momentum by developing a sustainable culture of planning

The last several years have demonstrated that we have a hearty appetite for planning, proving true our promise that ours would be a dynamic process, marked by continuous analysis, innovation, and decisive action. Over the course of the last year, we have:

- Completed the self-study for the Higher Learning Commission, itself, in both process and content, a probing exercise in strategic analysis;
- Received the report from Art Lidsky and ratified our new Campus Master Plan, beginning immediately to plan in earnest for the future of the sciences at Wooster;
- Received the report of our development consultants assessing our current philanthropic potential, informing our fund-raising plans; and
- Engaged all of Wooster's constituencies in an exercise to re-assess our strategic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT).

Refresh our Strategic Framework: This coming year we will draw upon our demonstrated progress in establishing a culture of planning at Wooster to accomplish two things: (1) We will refresh our Strategic Framework, revisiting our strategic objectives and engaging in a collaborative process to identify promising strategic initiatives to achieve them, and (2) we will attract a new Vice President for Finance and Business to provide highly expert, mission-driven leadership in our finance and business functions, essential for the next phase of our advancement.

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 distinction and prosperity.