
THE COLLEGE OF
WOOSTER

DATE: September 17, 2014
TO: Members of the Board of Trustees and Campus Community
FROM: Grant H. Cornwell, President
William A. Longbrake, Chair of the Board of Trustees
SUBJECT: Strategic Priorities for 2014-15

Introduction

In this memo, we convey Wooster's strategic priorities for the coming year. These priorities articulate initiatives to receive particular emphasis within the context of our long-run strategic plan and goals.

We continue to build a strong foundation in a challenging environment. We have benefitted from our commitment to the integrity of our core educational mission and to the strategic planning necessary to sustain and advance it. In looking over the past year, we find evidence of strength and progress:

- Our professors were once again recognized for their excellence. *U.S. News and World Report* listed Wooster as one of America's top liberal arts colleges "where the faculty has an unusually strong commitment to teaching," ranking Wooster seventh in the nation, just behind Williams, tied with Haverford, and ahead of Amherst. In the ranking by *College Prowler*, a report generated "by students for students," Wooster ranks number one in the nation for having "professors most interested in their classes," number three in the nation for having "the smartest professors," and number four in the nation for having "the most caring professors."

- The class of new students beginning this fall is the most diverse in Wooster's history, an outstanding achievement for our mission and promising for our future, with 12 percent of the class being international students from 20 countries, and with 22 percent of the class being U.S. students of color.
- Ruth and Morris Williams pledged the largest single gift in the history of the College, \$15 million to support science education at Wooster; \$10 million will help fund the construction of a new science facility, \$3 million will endow new scholarships, and \$2 million will endow the Whitmore-Williams Professorship in computational biology or bioinformatics.
- Overall, Wooster had one of the most successful years of fund raising ever, raising \$37.8 million in cash and pledges in the first year of our new campaign, and raising the largest Wooster Fund total in our history, \$3.2 million.
- The Gault Schoolhouse renovation project was completed, adding an extraordinarily creative and beautiful residence hall to our campus.

We are grateful for and inspired by the passion and commitment that these accomplishments represent and know that these qualities have strengthened our foundation and, above all else, will carry Wooster into the future with confidence.

As is our practice, this memo highlights those projects or initiatives that we will focus on and pursue in the coming year because we believe they will move us further along in realizing 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: What we said last year remains true: a primary objective is to support, improve, and invest in the creative development of our core educational mission, believing as we do that educational excellence is the most solid foundation for a prosperous future.

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. We are two years into a six-year process to reimagine our programs in the life sciences, bringing a thoroughly contemporary vision of them to reality in our teaching and research. The center of gravity for this undertaking is the design and construction of a new life sciences facility. Progress thus far has been excellent, thanks to the leadership of Carolyn Newton and the faculty stewards of the project, Dean Fraga and Mark Snider, and to the fund raising success of Laurie Houck and her colleagues in Development.

This past year we brought 16 nationally recognized architectural firms interested in Wooster's initiative to campus to develop a clear understanding of Wooster's mission of using research as pedagogy. In the spring, we selected the top six firms to present their visions of a facility specifically designed to support Wooster's unique mission, and following reference checking, we chose three firms as finalists in the selection process. At the Fall 2014 Board meeting, the finalists will give short presentations to the entire Board and subsequently the Selection Committee will select our architect. The 2014-15 academic year will be an exciting time of planning with the selected architects. By the late fall, we anticipate that the architects will be working with faculty and staff on the detailed design work, and before the academic year is over, we will have initial drawings of possible designs.

Graduate Qualities Assessment: We have committed to achieving six outcomes for our graduates. We remain convinced that we must be crystal clear in our claims about the outcomes

and value of a Wooster education, and then we must demonstrate the truth of those claims with compelling evidence. We are clearly more advanced in our thinking and articulation of our value proposition – the claims we make about a Wooster education – than we are in the evidence we adduce to support them. We have good traction on the Proof Project, as we call it, but in the coming year, we will devote increased attention to this effort.

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 exceptionally powerful. 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, and also in residence halls, dining halls, on athletic fields, through our myriad clubs, and other on- and off-campus organizations.

For several years now we have been trying to be more intentional about the quality of human relations and human development in our Community of Learners and to cultivate a culture of respect on campus grounded in the values and commitments that we express in the Wooster Ethic. We are a diverse community on purpose, believing as we do that the process of living together among others with different faith traditions, different socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and national backgrounds, and different gender identities advances our mission and the cultivation of Wooster's Graduate Qualities in our students. In spite of these ideals, we have a persistent representation of the social ills that plague our society: racism, intolerance of difference around gender identity, and the worst forms of sexual disrespect towards women. We simply have to aspire to be a community that models how society should work, rather than mirroring how it does work.

This coming year we will continue to focus on the theme of sexual respect, which includes building social norms and judicial processes that are intolerant of sexual assault, and also positively embraces the variety of different forms of sexual identity. With regard to racial respect, we will push forward with our campus outreach and educational programming, especially that coming out of the Center for Diversity and Global Engagement, even as we

initiate a project to consider whether we have the right resources and framework both to support the diversity of our community and to encourage all students, faculty, and staff to engage our diversity as a central dimension of our mission.

With regard to the campus climate for diversity and issues of safety, we are making interventions into the historical pattern of harassment on Beall Avenue. We have new Blue Phones installed and surveillance cameras on Beall, and we have launched a new smart phone application that enables our students, faculty, and staff to call for help with one touch of a button. This “app” will also help, we hope, with improving the campus climate for the safety for all of our members.

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 are 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 our students’ 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. This year, the focus in APEX will be to:

- Increase the number of first-year students who have a rich and active e-portfolio to 75 percent;
- Support underprepared STEM students through the STEM Scholar Zone, a program designed to encourage persistence in the study of STEM disciplines;

- Expand the Experiential Learning Symposium and the number of applications for APEX Fellowships;
- Launch Woo-Link, a searchable web application for internships and experiential learning programs.

In the first two years of APEX, we supported a series of “start-up” initiatives. Now we will place a priority on developing sustainable models for those successful start-ups.

Strategic Objective #2

To strengthen the foundation of our college

The ambitions and goals 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.

Strengthening Wooster’s Position in a Competitive Market: The consistently strong enrollment results we have achieved in recent years were challenged this past year. This challenge was not unique to Wooster and foreshadows an increase in competition for a limited number of potential applicants that could become more intense over time. Our top priority will be to determine our strategic response to the sector-wide enrollment shortfall we and our peers experienced. Our reputation, agility, and capable enrollment staff enabled us to weather this past year’s trial with results that should make us proud and confident, but not complacent. We need to do the analysis necessary to come to the best determination we can of what happened and why and then deploy our strategy for the coming year that will achieve both our enrollment and revenue targets.

Campaign Progress: We had an outstanding first year in our campaign, breaking many fund raising records at the College. We are off to a terrific start, but much remains to be done. With the help and guidance of Laurie Houck and our excellent staff in Development and Alumni Relations, we will sustain our very high level of commitment to this endeavor. We look to the campaign as a critical element in our strategy for the future of Wooster; over the course of it we

will be asking all of our alumni and friends to help sustain Wooster's momentum forward as we approach our 150th year of excellence in liberal learning.

Strategic Objective #3

To sustain our momentum by developing a sustainable culture of planning

Developing a Sustainable Budget: Competitive, media, and political pressures on our major revenue source – tuition – continue to escalate while demands for enhancing our academic and support programs, which require additional expenditures, remain unabated. Our planning initiatives this year will focus on resource allocation and developing a sustainable budget for the College.

For well over a decade, Wooster's published price has increased approximately five percent annually, comparable to the average increase at other private four-year colleges and universities. At five percent, the nominal increase has exceeded both the Consumer Price Index and the Higher Education Price Index. Our net price, the cost to families after financial aid, has increased at approximately four and a half percent annually, about two percent more than the CPI during the period. There are many signals in the market and the media that we – everyone in our sector, including Wooster – need to discipline our future published price increases. The challenge in front of us is to develop a sustainable balanced budget, one that works with smaller annual increases in both our published price and net price inclusive of financial aid than those to which we have been accustomed.

This work will be informed by two research projects, one a comprehensive benchmarking study of administrative and support staffing levels at Wooster and the other GLCA colleges. The other will be a comprehensive and thorough analysis of all aspects of our cost structure and resource allocation at Wooster.

Staffing Analysis: We are in receipt of the second iteration of a comprehensive comparative staffing study for the GLCA, undertaken for the association by Ellen Falduto and Gina Holmes.

This study will provide a basis and sound perspective for assessing how we manage our staff levels across the divisions of the College.

Cost and Resource Allocation Study: We have initiated our research on the Cost Study, undertaken to follow the Pricing Study white paper the Board discussed in depth last year. We are framing the project as a study of how we allocate our resources, leading with two thematic questions: whether our current resource allocation is consistent with our Strategic Objectives; and whether resources can be redeployed in ways that will enable us to achieve our Strategic Objectives and discipline our cost increases.

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.