

## **2015-16 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

DATE: September 16, 2015  
TO: Members of the Board of Trustees and Campus Community  
FROM: S. Georgia Nugent, Interim President  
William A. Longbrake, Chair of the Board of Trustees  
SUBJECT: Strategic Priorities for 2015-16

In this memo, we outline, at the highest level, our work for this year. The "strategic priorities" described follow from our planning, assessment of our progress, and continuing attention to our external environment. Our goal is to advance Wooster's mission by making significant progress on these priorities in our committees, divisions, and departments.

### **2014-15 Accomplishments and Challenges**

Despite experiencing tragic losses of colleagues and friends, we built strength and made considerable progress in 2014-15. We continued meeting enrollment challenges while attracting the most diverse classes in Wooster's history. We were amazed at our fundraising progress, completing the construction funding for our new Ruth W. Williams Hall of Life Science and tallying more than \$118.6 million in commitments in the first two years of the leadership phase of our campaign. We opened Gault Schoolhouse to rave reviews from students and our neighbors. We demolished Holden Annex -- a facility that has been "temporary" housing for two-thirds of the College's history -- in order to make way for our newest state-of-the-art student residence, which will be ready for occupancy next fall.

The entire campus engaged in the work of developing a longer-term sustainable resource plan for Wooster. Immediate-term tactics were implemented in the FY16 budget, and longer-term ideas that emerged will be considered this year. Recognizing the importance of planning and aligning our priorities and resources, the faculty unanimously endorsed, and the Board approved, a new governance committee: the Strategic Planning and Priorities Advisory Committee (SPPAC), which replaces the Financial Advisory Committee.

Externally, we continued to be recognized for our distinctive approach to a liberal arts education. For the fourteenth consecutive year, *U.S. News* ranked us alongside Princeton for having outstanding undergraduate research opportunities and stellar senior capstone projects.

## Reflections

The pace of change in higher education is significant and many institutions are struggling. Thanks to the hard work of many, The College of Wooster is not one of them. As we reflect back on the year just concluded, it is clear that we accomplished a great deal and Wooster is in a much stronger position than ever before. However, we acknowledge that the intensity of effort that much of our work entailed inevitably resulted in a degree of fatigue. High-performing organizations including those in sectors where the pace of change is fast and challenges abundant -- like The College of Wooster -- need to moderate the level of stress and intensity from time to time to enable recuperation and renewal.

Thus, following the intensity of last year's initiatives, in this year of transition in presidential leadership, we believe our focus should be on *preparing the way forward* to ensure Wooster will continue to be able to fulfill its mission of providing an exceptional liberal education. Our success in this effort will require that we remain attuned to the opportunities and challenges facing higher education and Wooster in particular, responding accordingly so that we fulfill our mission in ways that maintain our leadership and distinctiveness while managing our resources as effectively and efficiently as possible

In short, we believe this is a year for renewal following a year of incredible achievements, including continued advances in the quality of our educational program and intense focus on planning our future financial resources to meet our strategic objectives, all of which required the tireless effort of faculty and staff.

## 2015-16 Strategic Priorities

Our priorities for this year remain ambitious. Georgia has characterized this year as a kind of institutional IS: a time for reflection and research, an opportunity to learn more about ourselves as a college and emerge prepared and eager for the future.

Georgia has introduced to the campus a new initiative this year, called "One Wooster." One Wooster is a way of celebrating our strong sense of community and purpose; the goals and aspirations we all share; and the conscious recognition that faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and students all make a contribution toward those goals that matter. One Wooster is a sort of shorthand, expressing solidarity and pride, similar to the way in which we call out, "Go Scots!" The One Wooster logo will mark events and activities that are inclusive of the full community—and individuals and groups have already begun using the logo. There will be a One

Wooster calendar, where events and activities can be registered. A number of our existing events are already inclusive and open to all. But some members of our community may not be aware that opportunities are open to them. The One Wooster “brand” serves as a simple way to make that clear. We also anticipate organizing some new all-campus activities, drawing on suggestions coming forward from the staff, faculty, and students.

There is no question that this is a year of transition. During the course of this year, we will be seeking a new president, a new senior leader for Student Life, and senior leadership for APEX. As you are aware, the search for a new president is well underway, and the search committee will keep us informed, periodically, about that process. This fall, we will explore how best to organize and carry out activities in the Student Life area to serve our students well today and in the future, and that vision will be the basis of our search for new leadership in the spring. Similarly, we will develop a longer-term program vision for APEX, which will factor prominently in our search for leadership of that initiative.

As is our practice, this memo highlights those projects and initiatives that we will focus on and pursue in the coming year, because we believe they will move us further along in realizing our long-term strategic objectives.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: TO FULFILL WOOSTER'S EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE WITH DISTINCTION**

### **Sustaining the Quality of the Educational Mission**

We are dedicated to making continuous improvements in our liberal arts education. This year, we are focusing on conversations that will incorporate the Graduate Qualities into *A Wooster Education* and enhance curricular cohesion for our students. To sustain Wooster's leadership role in scholarly writing and research, we will search for innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to enhance our First Year Seminars, Writing Intensive Courses, and Independent Study. To provide evidence pertinent to these broader discussions, our assessment of the student learning outcomes articulated in our Graduate Qualities will concentrate on direct (rather than indirect) measures of elements such as critical thinking, written communication, inquiry and analysis, and quantitative literacy. This project is funded through a Sherman-Fairchild grant.

### **Enhancing the I.S. Experience**

Wooster continues to be nationally recognized for its mentored undergraduate research program. We are proud to be one of six institutions with high impact educational practices that the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) featured last January in the launch of their LEAP (Liberal Education – America's Promise) initiative and their centennial video, which highlighted the importance of a "signature work" project. Unquestionably, we are leaders in the national conversation on the merits of mentored research. Maintaining our legacy of excellence, however, demands continuous efforts to keep I.S. relevant in our rapidly changing educational environment. This year, through CoRE activities and programming, we seek to build new capacity for the effective use of digital scholarly resources and techniques by our faculty and students. We will also continue to encourage collaborative research, both within and across the disciplines.

### **Achieving Wooster's Mission in the Sciences**

Now in the third year of our six-year process to create a new science complex, we will complete the design phase for the Ruth W. Williams Hall of Science, a facility that distills Wooster's mission of research as pedagogy into a physical structure. Just as we expect the building itself to serve students beyond the sciences, we will also focus on a new initiative, STEM-Zone, designed to support students from all backgrounds toward successful completion of introductory courses in the sciences, whether to fulfill general education requirements or as a start to a science major.

### **Taking the Next Bold Steps in APEX**

After three successful years in establishing the foundations of an integrated program for Advising, Planning, and Experiential Learning, we are now poised to address the future leadership structure and develop a program vision for the next five years. Our overarching goal is to improve our service to

students by fully integrating the areas of APEX and by developing closer connections with curriculum, with faculty, and with alumni.

## **Community of Learners**

### ***Diversity & Inclusion***

Last year we completed a comprehensive listening study in which we sought to learn perspectives, hopes, and ideas evoked by two questions: "Does the College do all that we can to create the conditions where all of our students, faculty, and staff have equal opportunities to thrive at Wooster?" and " Does the College 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?" Over 100 students, faculty, and staff participated in the conversations. Themes that emerged from those conversations included: how we define diversity on campus, gaps between our rhetoric and experienced reality, perceived lack of -- or ineffective -- communication, needed skill development, the campus and community climate, and the role of the Center for Diversity and Global Engagement.

This report will help guide our work this year. This summer, we hired an Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, and a Director of Sexuality and Gender Inclusion. We are currently searching for a Program Coordinator for Multicultural Student Affairs. The re-named Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) will move forward on several initiatives based on the findings of the listening study. The new President's Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion will help coordinate and strengthen our efforts by bringing together those responsible for our work in these areas, including students and faculty, to promote a positive climate for diversity on campus. We will support the diversity and inclusion initiatives in Athletics in response to the external Diversity and Title IX reviews we initiated last year. Faculty orientation and faculty development programming will continue to include emphasis on developing sensitivity to student backgrounds and experiences in course design and classroom management. We intend to develop a sustainable model for the MLK day celebration, continuing connections between the College and the broader Wooster community.

### ***Campus Life***

This year we seek to shape a creative and innovative vision of student life that is student-centered and advances our mission through student learning, living, development, and leadership opportunities. Last year, students came forward with concerns about campus life. We took those concerns seriously, investigated them, and are implementing changes. Carolyn Buxton and Angela Johnston are partnering to provide interim leadership. This year, we will support their leadership of the division as they address the most pressing campus life issues

and build a community of trust. Several empty positions have already been filled. The Wellness Center is more fully staffed, with a third full-time counsellor, and a search is underway for a health education and prevention coordinator. Overall goals are to provide clarity and stability, as well as accountability, to the student life area. During the fall semester, we plan to work with an external consultant (likely a Vice President or Dean from a comparable college environment), to assist us in determining how to structure the organization and carry out the activities in student life in ways that effectively serve current and future Wooster students in our increasingly complex and diverse culture. This work will assist us in defining the qualities we will seek in the next leader of the student life division. We plan to undertake the search for that individual during the spring semester, timing it in such a way that the incoming president will be able to be involved in the conclusion of the search.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: TO STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATION OF THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER**

### **Continue to Promote Wooster's Identity**

This year we will continue to build on the success of our efforts to increase Wooster's visibility both nationally and internationally, and to strengthen our distinctive and valuable position as "America's premier college for mentored undergraduate research." On a strategic level, we will review and update our multi-year marketing and enrollment plans. Specific tactical initiatives growing out of those plans include investing in a very targeted, national recruiting effort focused on students who are interested in continuing their education beyond a baccalaureate degree; development of a new print piece focused exclusively on mentored research, and a new print piece and website focused on APEX; and an overhaul of our online campus tour to create a mobile-friendly, GPS-enabled tool that combines 360-degree imagery, audio narration, text, video, and a virtual reality component.

### **Campaign/Sustained Fundraising**

First, as a component of our Sustainable Budget initiative, we have committed to growing the Wooster Fund to \$3.5 million this year, an effort in which we will encourage the entire campus community to invest. Second, we will continue developing the overall fundraising and alumni relations initiatives for long-term growth, focusing on developing new leaders and philanthropists, identifying new trustees, and engaging alumni in the life of the college. Last, we also will sustain the momentum of our campaign, now in year three, during a presidential transition year, so that we are in a strong position to launch the public phase of the campaign as early as spring 2017. We will do this by engaging the Board and other campus constituencies as part of the fundraising process, discussing campus priorities with individual donors, and elaborating on those that resonate with donors.

## **Implementing the Sustainable Budget Planning Recommendations**

When we began our Sustainable Budget planning, we knew that our work would span more than one year. Our work this year will not require the intensity of 2014-15's effort, as we have scores of additional, longer-term ideas that we agreed we would examine and, where viable, pursue. From that list, we will identify a number of the most promising ideas to analyze and implement. This process will fall largely to Cabinet, with the advice of the new Strategic Planning and Priorities Advisory Committee. Sustainable Budget planning was initiated last year because we understood the importance of anticipating and developing responses to the challenges posed by the external environment in which Wooster operates. One of these challenges is the Affordable Health Care Act. These new government regulations will have an effect on healthcare costs, and we will seek to address them in a way that remains sensitive to the needs of our employees and also offers a sustainable solution.

## **Strategic Financial Plan**

Several longer-term considerations will inform ongoing work with the Finance Committee of the Board, as we develop a mid-range strategic financial plan that builds upon our sustainable budget work. These considerations include: residential facilities needs and having an appropriately sized and configured inventory of housing options; other facilities needs; and deferred maintenance. Other considerations include addressing our currently limited annual capital budget, examining the purposes and adequacy of our various reserve funds, managing and investing non-endowment cash funds, and prudent use of debt (borrowing) in financing our resource needs.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: TO SUSTAIN WOOSTER'S MOMENTUM BY DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE CULTURE OF PLANNING.**

### **The new Strategic Planning & Priorities Advisory Committee (SPPAC)**

SPPAC will set out to fulfill its responsibilities as outlined in its charter, determine its agenda, and further develop a strategic approach to consideration of key issues likely to have an impact on Wooster's future. SPPAC's agenda for the year includes advising on our strategic priorities for 2016-17, reviewing and revising the College's "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats" (SWOT) analysis, and addressing the Faculty's request that it "make the development of principles by which all individuals who work for the College might be justly and equitably compensated for their work a priority for the coming year."

### **Spending to Our Mission**

During our Sustainable Budget planning, the concept of a "spending to mission" analysis emerged. What if we could examine how we allocate our resources in terms of our mission and strategic objectives, rather than by the traditional categories used for financial reporting? Last year we explored the feasibility of the concept through an initial analysis that examined our resource allocation in

categories aligned to our strategic objectives and initiatives. Given the Board's and the Financial Advisory Committee's enthusiasm about the promise of such an approach, we will work with SPPAC and the Board to refine it further.

### **Continuing Accreditation**

We will begin our mid-term "assurance" review for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). We will build upon our excellent self-study and the HLC visiting team's reports to provide the HLC with an update that demonstrates we continue to meet the Commission's criteria for accreditation.

### **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.