
THE COLLEGE OF
WOOSTER

Date: September 13, 2016
To: Members of the Board of Trustees, Alumni Board, and Campus Community
From: Sarah R. Bolton, President
William A. Longbrake, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Subject: Strategic Priorities for 2016-17

In this memo we outline particular priorities for the coming year. It's important to note that the particular priorities we have laid out here are ones in which we wish to make change and progress. Of course, they overlay a great deal of core work that is ongoing. So, for example, teaching excellently through both classes and mentored Independent Study, while centermost to our mission, isn't on this priorities list, nor is continuing to build the Ruth W. Williams Hall of Life Science, or doing all we can to ensure that Wooster's strengths are well understood by students and families around the country and the world. This does not mean that these activities are unimportant, only that they are not new or unusual parts of our plans for 2016-2017.

The priorities we lay out here have come forward through the shared work of faculty, staff, and students collaborating both with the Board of Trustees and with others on campus through groups such as the Staff Committee, Educational Priorities Committee (EPC), Strategic Priorities and Planning Advisory Committee (SPPAC), Student Government Association (SGA), Black Student Association (BSA), Campus Council, and many more.

2015-2016 Accomplishments and Challenges

The 2015-16 year was in many regards one of transition. Led by the wisdom and enthusiasm by our wonderful interim president, Georgia Nugent, it was a time for reflection and research and an opportunity to learn more about ourselves as a college and emerge prepared and eager for the future.

President Nugent enabled us to make important progress in many areas. Observing, at the beginning of the year, that we needed to move to enact a better work environment for staff, she created the One Wooster initiative, which promoted opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to become better connected. Working with the SPPAC and the Staff Committee, she commissioned a year-long study of staff needs and concerns and a review of staff compensation that led us to raise the minimum hourly wage at the College to \$11/hour for benefits-eligible staff. This study provides an important framework for this year and into the future as we continue our efforts to ensure that Wooster is both a good place to work and an employer of choice.

In one short year, the College accomplished a major building project in Brush Hall, a fully accessible and extremely well-designed residence hall that replaces the "temporary," 94-year-old Holden Annex, and which opened in time for occupancy this fall to terrific reviews from students. We also broke ground on the Williams Hall of Life Science and created expanded space in APEX for student learning that was

buzzing with students within hours of the doors opening for the first time.

In addition to a new President, the College completed a search for a new Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Scott Brown, and for a new Dean for Faculty Development, Peter Mowry, as well as new leadership in other important areas, including APEX, Dining Services, Alumni Engagement, and Financial Aid. And, we welcomed 30 new faculty members and 80 new staff members. During all of this transition, progress continued apace for the Campaign and Wooster Fund, enabling funding of key projects including the Williams Hall of Life Science, Brush Hall, and APEX expansion, as well as new scholarship and faculty endowments.

We did face some challenges last year, many of which were national in scope. The economic climate continued to be relatively unfriendly, both to our endowment, on which we rely for funding of 15 percent of the College's annual operating budget, and to liberal arts institutions as a whole, which saw decreasing enrollments. Through hard work in many offices, we were able to welcome an excellent first-year class and achieve a balanced budget. But, we anticipate these challenges will continue and need significant ongoing effort and attention.

We also were reminded last year of the ways in which students experience bias and discrimination while at Wooster and the ways those experiences affect their time at the College. Wooster is not alone in having a distance to travel to create a truly welcoming and just environment for all students to live and learn. President Nugent, faculty, and staff in the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, as well as other areas of the College, undertook important work to make progress towards that goal. Creating such equity amidst a national and global environment which is deeply inequitable will continue to require the commitment of every part of our community.

2016-17 Strategic Priorities

Strategic Objective 1: To Fulfill Wooster's Educational Purpose with Distinction.

Sustaining the Quality of our Educational Mission

Our mission is to prepare young people to become leaders of character and influence in an interdependent global community. Curricula in which students gain a broad knowledge of literature, human experience, the sciences, and the arts are often the key to such lifelong work of consequence in a world where the specific skills needed change daily. Small classes and extensive one-on-one interaction with professors prevent students from being invisible, even if they want to be. Each student is invited - and required - to develop their voice, and is supported by close relationships with faculty in doing so.

The residential aspect of the College - students building close community with others whose life experiences are very different from their own - must work hand-in-hand with the academic program if we are to create global citizens able to move fluently and thoughtfully among cultures. The curriculum and the close work with faculty intersecting with a lived experience of leadership, service and community, both within and beyond the College, can make our graduates particularly effective in addressing complex, global problems.

Community of Learners:

With the arrival of our new Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, we go into the year with a shared focus on the student experience. It is our goal that students make the most of their opportunity to live and learn together in community. This year we will be focused on building some

central aspects of that work, including leadership development, mentoring, residential life programming and building a safe and welcoming social environment. At the same time, we will be reviewing the role and structure of the Office of Interfaith Campus Ministries, as we recruit new leadership for spiritual and religious life at the College through the chaplaincy.

Our work on student well-being and safety will include building new health education programs and also hiring a full-time Title IX Coordinator, who will lead the campus in deepening our sexual violence prevention and gender diversity inclusion work, as well as ensuring that our responses to sexual violence, both in terms of support and adjudication, meet best practices and work well for our students.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:

Even the most excellent liberal arts college fails to fulfill its mission if its students are drawn from only a narrow slice of the population. Bringing a breadth of experiences to a college is crucial for the learning that students do there. And, teaching a broad set of students in the liberal arts is crucial for the impact a college can make – through its graduates – on the world. It is one of the College’s highest responsibilities to ensure that all students experience deep welcome in this community and an environment that is supportive of their learning and thriving.

The work is ongoing and urgent to ensure that the lived experience of historically marginalized students, faculty and staff is equitable and welcoming. Wooster has undertaken a variety of efforts in this regard, but recent conversations with students, staff, and faculty, as well as our more formal “listening study” from 2014, demonstrate clearly that we still have a long distance to travel, and that further resources and coordination are needed. This year we will move forward to create a multi-year strategic plan that lays out our commitments, resources, goals, areas of responsibility, and ways of assessing progress. With this plan in hand, we will be able to chart a course forward and ensure that our staffing and resources are best positioned to support it.

Education in the Liberal Arts Tradition:

This year the EPC will continue its work on revisions to the curriculum, to ensure that the curricular goals we hold for all students of broad liberal arts exploration and development of critical thinking and expression are met in ways that will best serve the lives and work of our graduates in the coming decades. The EPC will also consider ways to support the intellectual community on campus beyond the classroom setting.

We are also undertaking an assessment of areas of strain in faculty teaching loads and class sizes, and looking at possibilities for addressing those so that our core mission of closely mentored educational experience has the necessary resources in all areas of the curriculum.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Strengthen the Foundation of Our College

This year we will continue our efforts to gather and carefully steward resources to meet the College’s mission.

Campaign/Sustained Fundraising

We will launch the public phase of the Campaign, with an emphasis on building broad-based alumni engagement. This stronger engagement of many alumni will both support the Campaign and, even more importantly, ensure continued connection between alumni and the College into the future.

Strategic Financial Plan

We are also building a variety of long-term projections for the College's finances. These models will help us to better understand the likely range of fiscal impacts of major decisions and also enable us to consider how our financial model might be affected by external trends and economic factors, so that we can plan accordingly.

Staff and Faculty Development

In many regards, the foundation of the College is its people. Our goal is to ensure that we recruit and retain an excellent and diverse staff and faculty, by ensuring that Wooster is a good place to work and by careful consideration of workplace environment and compensation. We aspire to be an employer of choice in the local area and a strong competitor with our peers in national searches. Last year's Staff Committee did superb work in assessing the working environment for staff, and in making recommendations regarding areas of concern. This year, we will continue working on those recommendations, particularly in regards to communication, benefits, professional development, mentoring, and grievance process.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: Sustain our Momentum for the Future

We shall continue our practice of careful planning and review of what we do to ensure that our resources are used as effectively as possible in support of our core mission and highest priorities.

Continuing Accreditation

This year, the College is tasked with completing the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Mid-Cycle (4th year) Assurance Review. This requirement of the HLC will give us the opportunity to assess where the campus stands relative to the goals we laid out for ourselves in 2012, and also to work with committees, departments, and the community as a whole to discern new questions, concerns, and opportunities.

Strategic Thinking

At last year's board retreat, trustees agreed to develop ways to engage more systematically in strategic thinking. During this year, the president and the board chair will develop approaches to engage the board and its committees in strategic thinking on an ongoing basis. In consultation with board committee chairs, this will include identifying a short list of issues, topics and trends important to Wooster's ongoing success, which trustees, committees, and the board will explore.

Conclusion

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