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THE COLLEGE OF  
**WOOSTER**

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**Date:** September 12, 2018  
**To:** Faculty, Staff and Board of Trustees of The College of Wooster  
**From:** Sarah Bolton, President, and Don Frederico, Chair of the Board of Trustees  
**Re:** Strategic Priorities Memo, 2018-2019

In this memorandum, we briefly summarize the progress made last year, and outline the major new areas of focus for the year to come. These priorities were developed in close collaboration with the board of trustees, as well as students, faculty, and staff. The Educational Policy Committee (EPC), Strategic Planning and Priorities Advisory Committee (SPPAC), Student Government Association (SGA), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Advisory groups, and cabinet played particularly important roles.

The priorities described here represent initiatives and efforts that are particular to this year. These efforts stand on the foundation of the superb and intense work that happens across campus every day to bring wonderful students to Wooster and provide them a great educational experience inside and outside the classroom.

### **Review of 2017-2018**

The past year was an extraordinary one for our College. Because of excellent work on our board and across the campus, we made significant progress toward each of our strategic objectives – fulfilling our educational purpose with distinction, strengthening the College’s foundation, and sustaining our momentum for the future. Much of what we achieved was years in the making, and it was wonderful to see it come to fruition.

### **Curricular Evolution**

Our curricular efforts in recent years have engaged both pillars of our curriculum – the broad study through which students explore and the focused work in the major through which students learn deeply and ultimately create new knowledge. Our goal is to ensure that our academic program meets Wooster’s highest promise, broadening students’ understanding and preparing them well for their futures.

Last year, faculty developed and voted on changes to the core curriculum for the first time in nearly 20 years, in the areas of quantitative literacy, global engagement, diversity, social justice, and first-year seminar. These changes emerged from several years of study and discussion with faculty, staff, and students and will take effect in the fall of 2019.

Faculty also explored possible new areas of study that would be compelling to students and important for their future endeavors. They focused on areas of inquiry that connect ways of knowing across traditional academic departments, as these interdisciplinary fields are

particularly vibrant areas of growth. This work developed rapidly, with the department formerly known as Geology re-envisioning itself as the Department of *Earth Sciences*, now consisting of two majors: *Geology and Environmental Geoscience*. Significant progress was made toward developing several other areas of interdisciplinary study. New funding from The Andrew W. Mellon foundation will allow us to bring four new interdisciplinary faculty to the College over the next two years to support the development of these promising programs.

### **Infrastructure for Learning**

Extraordinary work across the College has led to great improvements of the physical spaces that support learning inside and outside the classroom. Stevenson Hall, Timken Gymnasium, and Lowry ground floor had major renovations, and the marvelous Ruth W. Williams Hall of Life Science opened its doors after two years of construction.

### **Strengthening our Resources**

June 30, 2018 saw the close of the extremely successful *Wooster's Promise* Campaign. Started in 2013, the campaign's goals were to deepen alumni engagement and grow the resources that support five critical facets of a Wooster education. The campaign exceeded both its fundraising and engagement goals and has positioned Wooster very strongly for the future.

The new resources from the campaign are allowing us to:

- build our academic strength, hiring faculty in new fields of study and supporting all faculty in their research with students and in their teaching and mentoring;
- broaden and deepen the connections between students' studies in the classroom and the ways they use that learning in the world, through internships, experiential learning, study away, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement;
- create a marvelous new facility, the Ruth W. Williams Hall of Life Science, which supports students and faculty working together on cutting-edge science across disciplinary boundaries;
- expand The Wooster Fund, which contributes to every part of the student experience, for every student, every day;
- endow more student financial aid – ensuring that we can enable great students to study, learn, and fulfill their promise here, even if their families have limited means.

This extraordinarily generous support will help us enact Wooster's mission and realize its most powerful promise for generations to come.

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

Last year we began the implementation of our [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan](#) and we made progress in each of its dimensions. We began running the Perry-Williams Fellows program, which brings excellent scholars who increase the diversity of our faculty to our campus

for one-year fellowships. All four of our fellows have been extraordinary, and all are continuing at Wooster for at least a second year. We hired two new fellows for the 2018-19 year. We also made substantial progress in training for faculty, staff, and students in creating equitable and welcoming communities, with programs undertaken by all students and faculty, as well as hundreds of staff.

The excellent work of our admissions and financial aid teams brought Wooster the most nationally, racially, ethnically, religiously, and socioeconomically diverse first-year class in our history, with 99 international students, 129 U.S. students of color, and 27 percent of the class eligible for Pell grants. (Pell grants support a portion of the educational costs of low-income students.) The College also joined the American Talent Initiative, a national initiative to support college access and success for talented, lower-income students.

### **Strategic Priorities for 2018-2019**

#### **Strategic Planning**

Last year we began a strategic planning process to chart Wooster's direction for the coming years. We described our planning process this way<sup>1</sup>:

*While we will maintain the bedrock of our mission, we will consider anew the ways we can best fulfill it and deepen the realization of Wooster's central promise for students of the coming decades. We will engage this process with our eyes open, bringing together our own sense as a community of the kinds of teaching, living, and learning that best serve our students with an honest understanding of the rapidly changing national and international environment in which we work. We will recommit to our central purpose – providing a superb education that prepares young people to become ethical and inclusive leaders with global perspective – while at the same time considering changes that will enable us to meet our commitments even more deeply.*

We are working from a position of considerable strength, with an excellent educational program, a great faculty and staff, a very successful campaign, and several years of strong new-student enrollment. At the same time, we face a challenging national context, with decreasing numbers of college students and flat family incomes limiting what families are willing and able to contribute to their children's education. These challenges result in strong competition for students, and lower net (after financial aid) tuition revenue and total financial resources at Wooster, despite robust enrollments and good endowment results. For Wooster, this trend is very important, as more than 75 percent of the financial resources that support our mission come from student tuition, fees, room, and board. While we are always working to increase gifts to the College, student-related revenue will continue to provide the lion's share of our financial resources for the foreseeable future.

The purpose of our strategic planning process is to meet Wooster's mission and realize its most powerful promises in ways that are right for our rapidly changing world, keeping the College strong and rooted in our core values, while also evolving to serve students of the future. We seek to:

- evolve our educational program to ensure that Wooster graduates are superbly prepared to contribute to the futures in which they will live and work;
- increase equity, student thriving, and graduation rates;
- inspire wonderful students to come to Wooster from across the country and around the world;
- strengthen our resources and steward them excellently, so that Wooster remains strong in a challenging and rapidly evolving context.

Last year, members of the Strategic Planning Group (SPG) of faculty, staff, and students held conversations across campus, as well as with alumni and the board of trustees, about [Wooster's strengths and challenges and the opportunities and threats created by changes outside our campus](#). With that background, we considered the ways that a Wooster education might evolve to serve our students even better for the future, resulting in a number of [emerging themes](#). We also undertook two research studies – one of current student experience, and one of our positioning. The first study tested how current and withdrawn Wooster students have experienced the College, asking how we might improve thriving and retention. The second study tests how prospective students view our College, and whether enacting initiatives toward our emerging themes might inspire more students to come here.

This year, we will bring together those discussions and study results. We will also carefully study and openly discuss the trajectory of the College's costs, needs, and resources, and review our campus infrastructure to identify our facilities challenges and opportunities. Our goal is to carefully assess the implications of various paths forward, and then to articulate a new strategic framework and identify initiatives that will support it.

That work will be led on campus by the Strategic Planning Group, with substantial ongoing engagement of students, staff, faculty, and the full board of trustees. The plan is expected to be brought to the board for its final review in June of 2019.

### **Strategic Objective 1: Fulfill our Educational Purpose with Distinction**

#### **Overview**

- Enact the new curricular requirements approved by the faculty last spring and continue to develop new modes and areas of study that are compelling to current and prospective students and crucial for the coming decades
- Create a framework to strengthen key areas of student experience identified in the retention study and campus discussion: community and connection, student engagement and involvement, and student well-being and support
- Build and support a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community through work across campus, and recruit our inaugural Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer (CDEIO)
- Create a plan for environmental sustainability at the College

#### **Curricular evolution**

This year, we will implement the changes in core requirements that were developed last year and continue to develop new areas of study. We will also work toward stronger integration between learning inside and outside the classroom, to ensure that students are aware of both the courses of study and the experiential opportunities that connect to their areas of interest.

EPC will continue to lead discussions of various aspects of the curriculum that emerged in discussion last year, including targeted work on enhancing our first-year seminar and advising program for all students, and reviewing our core requirements regarding foreign language and religious studies.

### **Community of Learners**

We bring students together to learn in community because we know that the interactions they have in every part of their lives on campus – from the dining hall to the concert hall to the playing field and residence hall – are critical parts of their preparation for life. Our retention study has underscored how important these components of a Wooster education are to our students' thriving, and the importance of investing in them. This year, we will undertake careful study of three areas of student life – community and connection, involvement and engagement, and well-being. Through committees made up of students, staff, and faculty, we will review our strengths and challenges along these dimensions of student experience and lay out a vision for the future of key areas such as residential life, student activities, student support, and the spaces, programs, and facilities that support them.

A diverse, equitable, and welcoming community is necessary for excellence as a college. In this second year implementing our [DEI strategic plan](#), we will hire an inaugural chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer (CDEIO). The CDEIO will work closely with the President to build and enact a vision for a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community at The College of Wooster. They will lead and shape the ways we enact and assess our strategic plan and bring new approaches and frameworks to creating progress and to addressing areas where change is needed. Their work will include a strong emphasis on collaborative change-making and will engage every part of the College. Important areas of emphasis include leading educational efforts for all staff, faculty, and students to create a more culturally competent and welcoming campus, as well as strengthening the supports and resources for those with historically-marginalized identities. As a member of the President's cabinet, the CDEIO will be a senior officer of the College, sharing responsibility and authority for the leadership of the College as a whole, for making decisions about strategy, priorities, and resources, and for working with the board of trustees.

We are also moving forward with other components of the DEI strategic plan. We will use what was learned in last year's trainings to strengthen the equity of our hiring practices as well as the inclusiveness our community. We are also continuing with new trainings and educational opportunities for all students, student leaders, faculty, and staff, providing new resources to support academic departments in adopting inclusive pedagogies relevant to their particular fields. We have written a new draft policy to clarify processes for reporting and responding to sexual harassment and gender discrimination and will be reviewing it with the community this fall. Developing a similar policy regarding other types of bias and discrimination will be one of the priorities of the new CDEIO when they begin their work at Wooster in the spring.

## **Sustainability**

Environmental sustainability is integral to stewarding our facilities – both to reducing costs and to minimizing waste, carbon emissions, and other negative impacts of our campus operations. This year, our sustainability committee will create a five-year plan for sustainability at the College, setting goals for progress and determining resources that will be needed, so that we can prioritize and coordinate this work effectively. Study of the environment is of great interest to current and prospective students, and Wooster's curricular opportunities in this area are growing. The sustainability committee will consider how this growing curricular interest and our initiatives to become a greener campus can connect to create the greatest synergies for learning.

## **Strategic Objective 2: Strengthen the Foundation of Our College**

### **Overview**

- Celebrate the generosity of alumni, families, and friends of the College and the success of the *Wooster's Promise* Campaign
- Strengthen and enhance our alumni, parent, and friend volunteer base
- Finish developing a new College website to tell Wooster's story and showcase the student experience for prospective students, while also improving usability and ease of navigation for faculty, staff, and students
- Implement a new campus calendar and room reservation system staffed by a dedicated coordinator of scheduling and events

This year, we will take the time to celebrate and thank the alumni, families, and friends of the College who have so generously supported the *Wooster's Promise* campaign. We will describe the impact of their generosity through every kind of connection, from social media to in-person gatherings, with the goal of continuing to build the engagement of alumni who have reconnected through the campaign.

Alumni, parent, and friend volunteers play a pivotal role in the success of reunions and reunion giving, admissions outreach, and career development efforts through APEX. As we celebrate the campaign and finalize the strategic plan for our future, enhancing our volunteer base and providing training opportunities for them to most effectively work on our behalf is important to our future success. We will gather our volunteers in April to discuss how we can most effectively support their work and engagement.

Our online presence is an ever-more important facet of our communications, and it is critical to most students' and parents' first impressions of Wooster. We will finish developing a new website this fall, based on best practices and analytics about the way our site is used. It will prioritize the experience of prospective students and their families, but will also include much easier navigation and search functions for our on-campus community. It will enable us to tell our story through an up-to-date news and event feed that pushes out across the site, and (in the spring) will incorporate a new calendar system that will allow vastly improved scheduling and listing of events. We are strengthening our support for those running events with a scheduler focused on that complex work which is so important for staff, faculty, and students.

### **Strategic Objective 3: Sustain our Momentum for the Future**

#### **Overview**

- Engage the campus in creating a culture of risk-management and programs and practices to support it, to ensure the safety of the campus community and the long-term strength of the College
- Complete an assessment of the structure and practices of the board of trustees, to enhance their ability to act strategically in their role as part of the College's shared governance

#### **Risk Management**

Wooster's staff and board of trustees are developing campus-wide risk management (also called enterprise risk management) to ensure that we are aware of the risks in the work we do across campus, doing what is appropriate to minimize them, and preparing effectively to address issues that may arise. Importantly, enterprise risk management includes training and preparation to prevent and respond to emergencies such as a chemical spill, dorm fire, or staff injury, and addresses longer-term issues that could arise, such as a gradual decline of our reputation, enrollment, or morale of faculty and staff. We are coordinating this work across the College to ensure that we have a culture of risk-awareness as well as systems to help us prioritize our efforts, track our preparedness, and identify new areas of risk that may emerge. This approach also allows us to assess risks appropriately, and in a way that accounts for impacts across campus, when making important decisions or considering new initiatives.

#### **Board Governance**

Wooster's board of trustees is engaging in a governance review, considering its structure and function in light of best practices. Our board seeks to make the most of our board members' tremendous expertise and generosity with their time, to be sure that the board is well-structured to enact its role in our robust shared governance system, and to make good decisions for the long-term strength of the College and education of our students in an increasingly challenging external environment. The board's work began in the summer and will likely result in proposals for changes in the board's *Bylaws* at its March 2019 meeting.

#### **Conclusion**

We look forward to working with all of you on these priorities on behalf of the College and will keep you informed as they progress. Thank you for all of your dedication and commitment to Wooster and to our students.