



Final Report

Wheaton College

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Documenting Effective Educational Practice (Project DEEP)

FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) are working together on an initiative to identify and describe the policies, practices, and cultures of colleges and universities that are unusually effective in promoting student success. With support from Lumina Foundation for Education and the Wabash College Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project features case studies of about twenty colleges and universities that have higher-than-predicted scores on five clusters or “benchmarks” of effective educational practice and also higher-than-expected graduation rates. The benchmarks are based on how students respond to the questions on the National Survey of Student Engagement. The benchmarks are academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Appendix A contains additional information about the benchmarks and the NSSE project.

The institutions selected for the DEEP project reflect the diversity of four-year institutions, including large universities, small colleges, urban universities, and special mission institutions. Our aim is to discover and document what these institutions do, and to the extent feasible, how they have achieved this measure of effectiveness. Then, we intend to share with other colleges and universities the educational practices that seem to work in a variety of different settings with different groups of learners and to further our understanding of how institutions of higher education can modify their policies and practices to promote student success. The major findings from the project will be reported in a monograph and other vehicles by NSSE and AAHE. Additional information is available on the web: <http://www.iub.edu/~nsse>

Methods

The conceptual framework guiding our work is anchored by a concept called “student engagement.” Although the importance of student engagement has been known for years, many colleges and universities have not had good information about the student experience to know where to best direct their resources and energy to improve undergraduate education. Since 2000, more than 730 different institutions of higher education have turned to the NSSE to learn more about this important dimension of the undergraduate experience.

Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation). The latter feature is of particular interest, as it represents the margin of educational quality that institutions contribute – a measure of value added – and something that a college or university can influence to some degree. NSSE benchmark results were used to help us identify Project DEEP schools. While the NSSE data provide a useful structure for our work, they are not the only topics of interest in this study.

A time-honored approach to improving productivity is the identification and adaptation of qualities that characterize high-performing organizations. In a similar way, virtually all institutions of higher education can learn valuable lessons from educationally effective colleges. Toward this end, we used a case study approach to learn as much as possible about your school and the other DEEP colleges and universities. We visited Wheaton College twice. The first was February 12-14, 2002 and the second visit was September 29-30, 2003. Prior to and during the site visits, team members reviewed many pertinent print and web documents about Wheaton. David Caldwell and Erin Gerlach coordinated our visit schedules and campus tours and arranged meetings with a diverse group of faculty, students, and administrators. Overall, we met with more than 100 people (some of them on more than one occasion), including students, faculty, administrators and staff. Following the first visit, the team prepared an Interim Report. The report was distributed widely prior to our second visit to the campus. Our primary goal for the second visit was to further our understanding of Wheaton and to correct factual errors and questionable interpretations in the Interim Report. To do this, we met with small groups to discuss the report with an eye toward better understanding aspects of undergraduates' experiences at Wheaton that were not adequately depicted in the Interim Report. We also met with some additional people who helped clarify particular elements of institutional policies and practices. We then revised the Wheaton Report to incorporate these additional insights and findings. Information about the DEEP researchers who participated in the visits is provided in Appendix B.

We are grateful for the cooperation of the Wheaton students, faculty, staff and others who shared their time and insights during our first visit. We are especially indebted to David Caldwell and Erin Gerlach who arranged our interview schedule and attended to many other details to make our visit productive and enjoyable.

Guiding Principles

Three principles guided our work and the preparation of this Report.

First, the goal of Project DEEP is to document and describe effective educational practice. We are interested in understanding what works well in engaging different types of students at high levels and how the institution achieved their success. We are less interested in identifying institutional weaknesses, though we realize that even high performing schools can improve in certain areas. As a result, we attempted to emphasize descriptive statements about Wheaton College.

Second, we attempted to be inclusive and to learn the views of as many different groups as time would allow. Whenever possible we sought out people who we were told might have different or divergent perspectives on the student experience.

Third, our goal was to understand Wheaton as students, faculty, staff and other "insiders" experience university life.

We submit this report with two caveats. The first is that we are certain to have not fully captured everything worth knowing about the College. We are mindful that at best this report

provides only a snapshot of a moving target; that is, some of what may have been issues at one point in time may now be settled, and new issues may have emerged. Second, in instances where we have misinterpreted factual matters we want to be notified so that we may correct these errors.

Overview of the Report

This Report is organized into four sections. First, relevant aspects of Wheaton's history and institutional context are introduced, followed by a discussion of general themes related to effective educational practices. Then, information illuminating and supporting the benchmarks is discussed. The report concludes with a section with some thoughts about the quality of the undergraduate experience at the College.

WHEATON COLLEGE: CONTEXT

Introduction

Wheaton College is a private liberal arts college located in Norton, Massachusetts, near Boston and Providence, Rhode Island. The story of the transition from all female college to co-educational institution has been at the core of the Wheaton story for most of the last decade. The transition to the Wheaton curriculum and co-education happened in an environment of collegiality which pervades the campus culture. In the late 1980s, the College administration decided to become a co-educational college after 152 years as a female seminary and college. This decision was made to address concerns of enrollment trends and the College's capacity to continue to offer a high quality liberal arts curriculum were those trends to continue. Alumnae, faculty, and students voiced concerns and objections to the decision but, in the long run, few disassociated from Wheaton. An environment characterized by respectful listening and supported by small group discussion enabled the ethos of collegiality to shape the transition to co-education. Men were first admitted to Wheaton in 1987.

Wheaton community members' voices and the ideas they communicate are valued at the College. Whether regarding a major change, such as a change in the College's mission or curriculum, or day-to-day communication about the business of the College, Wheaton emphasizes and values the individual's contributions to the whole. It is a campus where the needs of the few and the needs of the majority are given equal voice. Faculty members seek out staff and student input as a matter of course. The message these practices send is clear: everyone is welcome at the table.

The College

Established in 1834, by Judge Laban Wheaton as a memorial to his recently deceased daughter, Elizabeth (Eliza) Wheaton Strong, the school was guided by his daughter-in-law, Eliza Baylies Chapin Wheaton, until her death in 1905. Originally founded as a women's seminary, the Wheaton family enlisted the expertise of Mary Lyon, founder of Mount Holyoke College, to develop a curriculum that was equal to that of men's colleges. Today, as was true over 165 years ago, the curriculum remains at the core of the College's mission. Wheaton's Mission Statement begins:

The mission of Wheaton College is to provide an excellent liberal arts education in a small, residential, coeducational learning community, enabling students to understand and participate in shaping the multicultural, interdependent world of which they are part. Collaborations with faculty and staff challenge and transform students into lifelong learners with skills to become problem solvers committed to justice and the global community. Wheaton teaches women and men to live and work as equal partners by linking learning, work, and service in a community which values equally the contribution of men and women.

A senior administrator summarizes the mission of Wheaton: “What we’re doing here is quality liberal arts.” The mission provides the context for the discussions that have taken place over the last four years, discussions that led to a 91-3 vote to adopt Wheaton’s current curriculum. Collegiality, conversation, and collaboration all contributed to the campus-wide dialogue under the Educational Policy Committee (composed of students and faculty) that led to the near unanimous vote.

Most students (98%) live on campus and the faculty and staff members live in the Norton, Providence and Boston areas. Wheaton has a mandatory residency requirement and only students who live contiguous to the campus may enroll as non-resident day students. Eighteen residence halls and ten houses comprise the residential options for students. Most residence halls house both men and women although single-sex living options are available. The newest residence hall, Beard, features a faculty-in-residence program and a variety of special interest living options. Students who share a common interest may petition to live in one of the ten houses by proposing how that interest will be presented to the campus.

To continue their effort to have a student body that is representative of the world outside Wheaton, the admissions staff has set five foci for recruitment: They seek to bring students of color, legacies (offspring of Wheaton graduates), students from outside the geographical region, individuals with special talents who will round out the academic environment of the campus of 1500 students, and male students. Six percent of the students are international students, 4% are African American, 3% are Asian American, and 3% are Hispanic. About 65% of students receive some type of financial aid to help cover the \$36,000 annual cost of tuition, room and board. First-year to sophomore retention is 88%; 72% persist until graduation.

Wheaton has not used standardized entrance exam scores for admission since 1993 because “[test scores] can undercut achieving other goals. Now it says something about us, about not being a numbers-driven place.” The application does include a graded paper from previous educational experiences; “We want to assess their thought processes,” as well as “their expectations for involvement.”

Wheaton has a number of cross registration programs with schools in the Northeast and in the Washington, D.C. area. About one-third of the junior class participates in the Junior Year Abroad (JYA) program. All international study has recently been brought together in the Center for Global Education. In addition, students may choose from over 100 internship, service learning, and research sites in the Boston area to gain practical experience and test classroom learning. These experiences are coordinated through the Filene Center for Work and Learning, established in 1986 to help students explore the link between the classroom and the world of work.

A member of the NCAA Division III, Wheaton has 19 intercollegiate sports teams, 10 club sports teams and 7 intramural sports programs. This wide array gives students easy access to sports participation. Only twelve schools in the United States have a synchronized swimming team that competes at the NCAA level; Wheaton is one of those schools. Active participation in clubs and organizations is encouraged, as is the creation of new groups to address students’

needs and interests. *Rushlight*, the student literary magazine, was founded in the middle 1800s and is the oldest club or organization on campus.

Campus Culture

Members of the Wheaton family have a very strong sense of who they are as a collegiate community. The members of the family (faculty, students, staff, and graduates) have a collective understanding of the norms and mores of the Wheaton community. These are communicated to prospective members of the community, taught to new members, and reshaped as the community changes. Four elements of the culture we focus on here are collegial communication, gender balance, residential community and commitment to innovation and creativity.

Collegiality and Communication

Communication of the community norms is enhanced by the spirit of collegiality that pervades the campus. “You are here to get a job done and to help others get theirs done,” is how one student described the campus environment. Whether the job being done was developing the new curriculum or promoting the “Smoke Free Campus Initiative,” faculty, staff and students worked together to bring about change. The Provost reported that the faculty members think of the staff as their partners in education. Weekly teas in the library, weekly socials at the Science Center, and the faculty dining hall all serve as gathering places for the community.

In fact, “the Lunch Room” was described as a locus and a metaphor for collegiality at Wheaton. Many faculty members talked about how they plan their schedule around the times – 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. each day – that the faculty dining room is open. Members of the faculty and staff at Wheaton know that the lunch room is the place to discuss ideas across the curriculum, examine the big picture of an issue or just to “talk an idea through with a colleague.” One faculty member said that this type of interaction is important to her because, “I really can’t even decide how I am going to vote at a faculty meeting until I hear [my colleagues] talk it through.” When one group of faculty was asked how they successfully recruit new faculty to the rural setting of Norton, MA, one responded, “We always take [candidates] to the faculty dining room” where “the prices are cheap and the conversations are frequently rambunctious,” referring to the spirited interdisciplinary dialogue.

Wheaton is a college with a high degree of civility and interaction among the students, faculty and staff. An administrator described Wheaton as “a thoughtful place. People think about who we are and how we interact.” At the same time, however, we were told the commitment to collegiality does not stifle disagreement. For example, “Wheaton has the highest percentage of faculty membership in AAUP in New England, so the loyal opposition is alive and well here.” Yet “faculty and staff here can talk about their differences. There’s an acknowledgement that we’re all in this together.”

This approach supports the effort to educate and to provide a holistic education for the students. By working together, the faculty and staff engage students via joint program planning and implementation. The concept of collegiality, that the leader is the first among equals, is very much in evidence on the campus. A student said, “There is no hierarchy here; we have

respect in the classroom and a belief that we can teach the professors.” Because they feel they are equals, students engage faculty in discussions and they debate on issues. Administrative staff members view themselves as integral to the education of the students and consider themselves partners with the faculty. As a result, students are able to connect academic and co-curricular experiences through interaction with both faculty and staff. Most of the faculty and staff we interviewed talked about how their relationships with students foster learning opportunities for students.

Gender Balance

Another important characteristic of the Wheaton culture is the gender-balanced ethos of the campus. This ethos began with the change from a women’s college to a coeducational institution. According to one administrator, prior to the decision to make the change, “Women’s studies were integrated across the board,” and Wheaton was a center for “new scholarship on women.” This implies that the College made an intentional effort, upon deciding to become a co-ed institution, to maintain the connection to its roots.

The gender-balanced ethos has enabled the college to be “consciously co-educational” and to take the key elements of a women’s college (collaboration, nurturing, non-competitive interactions and supportive environment) to the coed college. These key elements served the campus well as it went through a self-described “reflective period” after the admission of men. In effect, Wheaton had to decide what it wanted to be and for whom. As one administrator commented, “To make the transition successful, [they] thought about ‘What are we best at?’ We are 100% a residential, liberal arts undergraduate education. The keys to our success include quality individual attention and a valuing of experiential learning, not gender.” They decided on their strengths, and they needed to provide this experience for everyone who attended Wheaton.

It is important to note that the driving force behind the gender-balanced ethos and the impact on the transition to a coed college has, at its base, intellectual reasons. These are issues to study and understand as are any other intellectual issues, according to an administrator. Andrea Walton, a faculty member at Indiana University who studies women’s colleges, has said that Wheaton College is one of the former women’s colleges that has successfully become coeducational, without losing sight of women’s needs and learning.

Currently, 50% of Wheaton’s faculty members are men and 50% are women. All, according to a senior administrator, value difference and are committed to teaching in the context of understandings about differences in how people learn and interact. An administrator said, “The faculty take women and men equally seriously. We don’t presume anything about gender; it is one facet of the human experience.” This commitment extends through the curriculum and is closely associated with the collegial nature of Wheaton.

Gender balance at Wheaton means that the academic and intellectual accomplishments of both sexes are addressed in the classroom. In addition, the learning styles, aspirations, and expectations of men and women are regularly explored to learn how they may differ. A faculty member noted, “Students just eat this up, self-consciousness about gender is a context for the study in the disciplines.” For example, a fine arts faculty member described studying “gender

and the audience for works of art” in an art history course. In the sciences, according to another faculty member, “The scientists I mention by name are female. Sexual differentiation is a conscious choice,” this faculty member asserts, for selecting topics to study in biology.

The student is the ultimate beneficiary of the collegial environment and the gender-balanced approach to education. By taking the intellectual approach to the issues of gender in a collegial environment, Wheaton College has removed a potentially contentious issue and allowed faculty and staff to focus their energies on developing quality learning experiences for students.

A Residential Community

Wheaton is a residential community in every sense of the phrase. Students report that the faculty and staff “never seem to go home.” “You see them and their families at events in the evening and weekend.” There is also a belief among students that, “while we may leave to do things on weekends,” Wheaton is not a suitcase college. The move to becoming coeducational might have had some impact on what was once considered a suitcase environment, but other factors prevail today. First, students have very tight links with each other and, second, they hold a strong belief that their actions matter on campus. Students regularly praised each other and one another’s work. When one student was reluctant to speak of her own success, another student spoke on her behalf. She described her efforts at organizing an event on Chinese culture as “awesome” and important for the campus. The size of the community enables personal connections. Personal connections fuel opportunities and desire for students to come together: “When we get together we can create; we can get it done.”

Wheaton’s requirement that all students (except those in the Norton contiguous area) live on campus provides a tremendous opportunity for student socialization. The residential environment is a place where formal and informal messages of socialization appear to be exchanged. Students are expected to be active participants in governing their living environment. They are called upon to make decision about “maintaining appropriate standards of order for residents to live together harmoniously.” A system of student staff and elected student officers form the framework for the governance of each residence center. A student staff mentor is assigned to each residence hall floor to offer peer counseling on issues of social and academic adjustment. It appears that a structure is in place through the Dean of Students staff and that the residents have a great deal of latitude to develop programs that help shape the environment.

As we mentioned earlier, a new addition to the residential community at Wheaton is the Beard Living-Learning Center. Beard is intended, according to a faculty member involved, “to bring the classroom experience out-of-class.” Also, “We’re attempting a cultural shift in thinking about work and play.” Beard houses additional student support staff along with a faculty member in residence who “is a catalyst for student initiatives and a liaison to the faculty and staff.” Students apply in “clusters” to live in Beard; interest clusters in 2002-2003 included stress relief, ethnic foods, and women of color. Still in its early days, Beard’s focus has been “problematic. Our theme is living and learning but students are really unclear about what that means.” Basically, “we bring people together out-of-class in ways that aren’t frivolity.” Staff are working hard to build the residential and learning connections.

Commitment to Innovation and Creativity

The College's historic and current commitment to "innovation and creativity in the absence of resources" was offered as an essential aspect of Wheaton's record of supporting student success. One example is the current faculty salary plan, a "profit-sharing plan in a non-profit organization." According to an administrator, "the faculty felt they were last" in setting financial priorities of the College. Now, "We're putting people first. It builds on our collegial culture and has been key to helping morale" during tough economic times. The Wheaton Curriculum was offered as another example of the culture of innovation in the context of collegiality; "everything was on the table" for discussion.

A staff member commented, "I can't remember a time when I heard, 'We can't do it because of money.' Instead, you hear, 'Put your money where your mouth is.' If you have the energy to do it, someone will find the money for it." Another noted, "We're endowment poor, but grant rich. We use external funding very well." What is essential is that the proposed initiative be consistent with the College's mission: "We take our latest idea and cram all our Wheaton values into it."

Curricular Initiatives

General Education Curriculum

Four years ago the new provost asked the faculty, staff and students to find a way to "break out to the mold of the old curriculum." A faculty member stated the focus of this effort: "What are we going to do about the good old Gen Ed checklist?" This set in motion a process – described as "synergistic organizational change" – to develop a curriculum that would invest students in their learning. Students, faculty, and staff collaborated in the process that produced the Wheaton curriculum that was put into use beginning Fall 2003.

Although this new initiative does not have a direct impact on past NSSE scores, that process and resulting structures provide insight into the collaborative nature of the campus. The process was characterized as instilling a sense of "full, shared ownership" of the curriculum, through "respectful, thoughtful, and open-minded listening." A faculty member commented, "It has transformed my relationships with my colleagues."

The Provost saw her role as encouraging the faculty to think about what was "true, good and special" about Wheaton. She enabled the faculty to think creatively by presenting the attitude that "everything is on the table." In addition, she made it clear that no jobs were in jeopardy with this curriculum review. Finally, she placed the Educational Policy Committee (comprised of elected members) in charge, as opposed to an ad hoc committee or herself. The Provost, who is a member of this committee with a single vote, commented that she was committed to collaboration and wanted to foster faculty ownership of the process. Indeed, the process gained a very strong foothold with the faculty early on and grew. The Committee welcomed faculty "study groups" on topics of interest to specific factions (e.g., interdisciplinarity, writing across the curriculum, gender, diversity) in relation to the new curriculum. This resulted in about 18 study groups that included anywhere from five to fifty

members who communicated in open forums via e-mail and Blackboard. At the same time, the two student members of the Committee held forums to solicit student feedback. In addition, eight teams consisting of three interdisciplinary faculty members traveled to peer institutions that had recently conducted a curricular review, as well as schools with innovative curricular practices, to learn from their experiences. This led to strong faculty bonding (one group even composed their own theme song!) and increased levels of collegiality. The Provost was also insistent on ensuring that junior faculty and faculty of color had a strong voice in the process: “It’s *their* curriculum and we wanted to make sure that they felt empowered.” In the end the campus generated a great deal of excitement for the change and, as a faculty member noted, “Happy workers do good work.” Another commented, “The Provost trusted us to make well-informed decisions.”

The concepts of *connections* and *infusion* emerged from the process and became the basis for the new curriculum. “Connections” means courses can be connected or linked to provide a more creative and rigorous curriculum with greater breadth. All students must take either two sets of two-course connections (a total of four courses), or one set of three connected courses. Courses are linked across any two of six academic areas: creative arts, humanities, history, math and computer science, natural sciences, and social sciences. For example, one such connection combines a basic anatomy and physiology course with an art course in which students are expected to draw the human form. Connections can be made by faculty, by students or both. It is interesting to note that the scientists are leading the way in terms of the number of connected courses offered. The Educational Policy Committee approved courses that must be offered in the same or contiguous semesters. Control of the content rests with the individual faculty member, a policy that helps maintain the disciplinary integrity of the course.

One question that arose during the process was the extent to which faculty need to be intentional in making these connections for students across these courses. According to one Committee member, “We decided to trust the process and see if students were able to make those connections.” Another individual echoed this sentiment: “We were willing to give it a shot and see if students were able to generate some sense of connection.” Advising plays a key role in helping students make these connections and select courses that will feed their particular interests and complement their personal goals.

The concept of “infusion” provides a mechanism for the faculty to bring concepts important to the College into the course structure. The goal is to infuse the curriculum with subject matter related to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as writing and technology. One senior reported that issues of gender and diversity are at the core of the new curriculum. The general sense among the students was that the new curriculum was “amazing” in that the institution will be “openly talking about differences.” These connections and infusions are not new, but they are now a formal element of the curriculum. The Committee discussed the challenge associated with encouraging faculty to practice ‘infusion’ when it is not required and their courses do not get a special designation in the course catalogue. The answer seems to lie in the high level of faculty buy-in to this curricular agenda and their belief that this practice is in the best interest of students.

According to the Provost, the following factors are at the heart of the success of the curriculum revision process: 1) inclusiveness, 2) cross-disciplinary communication, and 3) trusting the process. She further advised: “Don’t divide into departments” at the start of such a process; interdisciplinary communication must occur from the very beginning. No doubt Wheaton will continue to revisit its new curriculum as new issues present themselves, but the initial process seems to have provided a firm base upon which collaboration and collegiality have flourished.

First-Year Seminar

Another example of the collaborative environment at Wheaton is the First-Year Seminar (FYS). This is a course all Wheaton first-year students must complete in their first semester. One of the hallmarks of Wheaton’s FYS is that it has buy-in from faculty and staff alike. While the program has been in existence for about 15 years, it has recently taken a “decidedly deeper academic focus” than in previous years. According to one of the FYS administrators, it is “a real program with full institutional investment.” Indeed, it is now accepted for credit in the academic departments, a change that came about during the discussions on the Wheaton curriculum. The process of consensus building enabled the transition to take place in a relatively smooth manner.

FYS tends to consist of “rich courses,” according to a professor. Each class has a librarian and two preceptors that are junior or senior level students. The faculty member, the administrative mentor, and the preceptors serve as advisors to the students. The faculty member is the student’s academic advisor throughout her or his first year, or until the student selects an academic major. Preceptors serve a similar role but use a peer educator model. Faculty conduct a variety of regular meetings to discuss the progress of the class and the students.

Students are assigned to their seminars in the summer prior to registering for their other classes. They receive a summer reading and writing assignment, which becomes part of the theme for orientation. Although some tensions were reported over the fact that exams are not given in FYS, staff and students reported that the class is academically rigorous, and they viewed it as “challenging.”

Focusing on controversial issues (the theme for the 2002-2003 academic year was “Great Controversies”), the course seeks to help students learn that knowledge is shaped through the clash of ideas. The Wheaton Catalog states: “Each section focuses on a topic from current events or history or within one of the traditional areas of academic study which has generated controversy among scholars, policy makers and others who have grappled with it.” A student reported that the course helped her grasp the college experience and that it was “vital” in her transition. Faculty members view the class as helping students become members of the intellectual community and adjust to college life. As one professor put it, “The class gives me permission to help the students adjust since most of their classes are strictly content driven. It’s not a parental function but we do attend to some of the issues that freedom brings.”

Despite this greater level of support for FYS, we learned that tensions exist between the program and academic majors. In addition, the extra teaching and advising that comes with FYS can stretch faculty thin. Finally, this workload does not seem to be spread evenly amongst the

faculty, in that there is a core cadre of faculty who teach this year after year, despite the fact that the institution prefers they only teach FYS every other year. Nonetheless, members of the community are clearly aware of the issues and are working to resolve them in their characteristically collegial fashion.

Student Services

Learning Center

Established with a grant from the Mellon Foundation in 2002, the Learning Center (located in the main library) serves as a resource to faculty and students. The Center has a two-part function: (1) to provide support to faculty in the implementation of the general curriculum and (2) to provide support to students in helping them meet the expectations of the curriculum. Governance of the Center is guided by two groups that oversee its mission and work, yet another example of the collaborative nature of academic life at Wheaton. To insure that the Center has the perspectives of faculty in developing the teaching and learning programs of the Center, the steering committee is composed of the eight faculty chairs of the committees implementing the curriculum. A group of administrators from a variety of offices, programs, and centers coordinate their activities and the Center's activities "in support of a rich and stimulating academic life for the students."

Filene Center for Work and Learning

Created in 1986, the Filene Center offers unique programs and services that help students explore the link between a liberal arts education, internships, jobs and volunteer or service learning experiences. Referred to by one administrator as "a career office on steroids," it is a place where advisers and peer mentors help students develop an individualized plan that connects their out-of-class activities with their academic interests. Supported by a variety of grants, scholarships, and fellowships, the Center works with students to provide customized out-of-class learning experiences that can be both domestic and foreign. Faculty and staff reported the opportunities are only limited by the student's imagination. A review of the various programs that are coordinated through the Center provides insight into the depth and breadth of its services.

- **Research:** Students have the opportunity to conduct research connected to their academic interests at a number of Boston area museums, colleges, and research institutes.
- **Internships:** Educationally-meaningful employment can be found by students on campus, in the Norton area, and in greater Boston. The internship program, which is coordinated through the Center, seeks to give students hands-on experiences during January break or over the summer.
- **Service:** A volunteer program is built into orientation for first-year students. Students wishing to remain involved with service experiences may arrange to volunteer as individuals or as groups. The Center, which serves as a clearinghouse for volunteer

experiences, aims to have students “gain insight into the lives of others, into complex social issues and into their own talents and aspirations.”

- **Fieldwork:** Students may arrange to complete fieldwork for academic credit through the Center. Credit is awarded by applying skills learned in the classroom in settings in government, business and the non-profit sector.
- **Fellows:** The term typically applies to graduate work, yet Wheaton has seven distinct programs to support students who are interested in doing graduate-level work. Students are asked to design educationally-meaningful placements that will help them explore their personal and career goals. Many of these awards are reserved for first-year students and sophomores to encourage early exploration of their interests.
- **Community/Trustee/Scholar Stipends:** Approximately two hundred students each year are awarded funding from one of these programs to support out-of-classroom scholarship and learning.

The Center also conducts a series of workshops throughout the year to help students refine their skills in career and life planning as well as resume writing, leadership skills, and job hunting. The use of Peer Mentors who perform student-to-student advising is another example of the students’ expertise playing an important role in the Wheaton community.

Initiatives in Support of Diversity

Global Programs

With the establishment of the Center for Global Education in 2002, Wheaton formalized its long-held belief that study in a foreign country is a critical learning experience. The Center is in a period of transition: “The fact that the Center now exists reflects a sentiment on the part of the faculty of the importance of international study.” Although foreign study programs existed at Wheaton before its establishment, “The Center gives permanence and focus to international study.”

Wheaton has taken steps to further enhance its commitment to global education. During our first visit, faculty members were planning a course to specifically address issues related to international study. A program to hire Teaching Assistants from other countries has been successful, with six being hired for this academic year. Finally, Wheaton is looking to establish its own programs without having to affiliate through other schools. This approach will provide for a greater link between academic programs. These efforts are designed to continue to find ways to demonstrate that “international study is an extension and an enhancement of Wheaton’s overall academic program.

Multicultural Initiatives

Using an approach similar to the process it used in developing a gender-balanced curriculum, Wheaton is developing a multicultural program that is infused into the life of the

campus. While stating that it came to multiculturalism late, faculty and administrators noted that Wheaton is embracing the concept through a self-reflective process that has an “earnestness about racial differences.” Community members described Wheaton as a very thoughtful place that did not approach this issue for reasons of political correctness but for “intellectual reasons.”

One example of this approach can be found in the curriculum and ways in which it is delivered. Several faculty members noted that the way the College addresses issues related to diversity have evolved from its commitment to gender balance. For example, in moving from serving only women students to serving both women and men, “There was a commitment to do coeducation differently, with a gender consciousness. Men are gendered, too. This set us up later to recognize that White people also have race.” Faculty described “working matters of race and class” into courses by adjusting content and “changing pedagogy so all learning styles are addressed.” These efforts were, in part, “a response to student concerns about diversity and multiculturalism.” In response, the College has provided “a strong statement to the students through the infusion of gender and race into the curriculum.” Several class observations attest to the use of gender and race examples during discussions of various theoretical and analytical approaches to the subject matter.

A unanimous faculty resolution to hire more faculty of color is one example of an outcome of this reflective process. The resolution is a statement of the faculty’s belief that having a campus that values difference is an important aspect of a liberal arts education. Through the self-reflective process the faculty affirmed that difference is best understood when difference is infused into every aspect of the curriculum and daily life. Six faculty of color have recently been hired; five are still on track for tenure. One individual left for reasons not related to the Wheaton environment. This fall the College brought nine new faculty to campus of which seven are from underrepresented groups. The Provost and Department Chairs have been very forthright with these individuals. They have been straightforward about the campus’ embarrassment at having so few faculty of color, and express commitment to listening to the new faculty to better understand how they can become permanent (tenured) members of the community. The College provides all new faculty members with a mentor support group. One mentor comes from the faculty member’s department and one from outside the department. In addition, the Associate Provost has made a concerted effort to connect with the new faculty of color. He has enlisted the assistance of the Director of Multicultural Center in this effort. One noted effort is a dinner early in the year that the Provost convenes and then leaves. Her message is that this is a time for you to learn from each other and then let her know how she can be helpful.

The new Multicultural Center is another way that the College is making a programmatic commitment to issues of difference. This is a Center for the entire campus, not a facility for the exclusive use of students and staff of color. The Center staff has developed programs organized around Wheaton’s strengths, including its collegial environment, balancing the past with new initiatives, and student empowerment. We learned about two white faculty members that led a session on educating students of color during the 1999-2000 academic year. This is yet another example of faculty collaboration geared toward improving the student learning process. This program drew on Wheaton’s faculty interest in engaging students in the world around them. Using this approach, the Center staff supports students’ efforts to develop programs to bring

about change at Wheaton. “It is a place that is receptive to change...the size of the place allows you to see the change.” The staff at the Center felt Wheaton would navigate the ever-changing world – “the moving target,” as one staff member said – of multicultural affairs.

Student Responsibility

Student Role in Governance

We were told, “Students are involved in many committees [at Wheaton] except AAUP.” Thus, “Students are involved in the life of the community. They’re empowered people making important decisions.” Wheaton has student representation on a variety of College committees. The Student-Trustee Liaison Committee, the Educational Policy Committee, and the Budget Advisory Committee all have elected student representatives as members. In addition students are regular members of search committees and task forces. Although most students believe that their voice matters in decision making, their committee service is generally in an advising capacity only.

This involvement was particularly evident in the important role that students played in creating and implementing a major curriculum revision. Students served on the major college committee (the Educational Policy Committee) that was charged with developing and implementing the new curriculum. The students who participated in the Educational Policy Committee meeting that we observed were actively engaged in that meeting. They were also articulate in their description of the curriculum and the importance of developing student awareness of the impending changes that the new curriculum would bring. These students also seemed to feel ownership in the newly revised curriculum. This ownership is also recognized by the Provost who said, “To some extent, this is the junior’s and senior’s curriculum.” A staff member said, “Wheaton allows students to take ownership and solve their own problems and that helps them develop.”

In addition to the students who served on the Educational Policy Committee, several Wheaton students serve on the “Education Council,” which is now working to ensure that students across campus are both aware of and informed about the new curriculum. During one of our campus visits, this group was in the process of developing games and events that would help the student body better understand how the new curriculum will function. They are also working hard to get faculty advisors involved in these events.

More broadly, there appears to be a campus ethos at Wheaton that “encourages students to find a passion and go to administrators or staff who will help them build a program.” This ethos works “top down:” administrators and faculty who form committees and working groups are certain to include students. It also works “bottom up:” students want to work with the faculty, staff, and administration to accomplish things. A student commented, “Wheaton goes to great lengths to include the student voice.” Another said, “It’s not just a pseudo voice. You feel a real, active part of the campus.”

Honor Code

First enacted in 1921, Wheaton's Honor Code is the thread that weaves together academic integrity, maturity, and trust within the student community. The Code addresses honor in academic work and social interaction. There is no disagreement among community members that the Code is well respected in the academic arena. Each student is asked to sign the Honor Code at orientation, but awareness of the Code starts before orientation. Students reported that it factored into their decision to attend Wheaton. For students the Code represents trust and an important link between students and faculty. "It's important that Wheaton sees we're adults," was the feeling of one student who went on to say that the Code is a big step in the relationship between professor and student. One junior student summed it up by saying, "I am going to be a responsible adult if you treat me like a responsible adult."

It is clear that the Honor Code permeates every aspect of the student's academic life. Non-proctored exams represent trust. The trust helps build an important link between the faculty and the students. A senior reported that a fellow student would not sign the attendance sheet for a peer who was absent from class as it violated the Honor Code. This trust appears to help open the door for faculty and student research and collaborative projects. For the faculty, it seems that the issue of academic integrity is one that they know the students will manage. The trust that the faculty members extend to the students on this issue is cherished by students. One commented, "I would never do anything to break that trust."

All issues related to the Honor Code are administered through a branch of the Student Government Association (SGA). The College Hearing Board, composed of four students, two faculty members and the Dean or Associate Dean of Students, hears all violations of the Code.

Although some students reported the Honor Code seeps into everything that they do in a very quiet way, other students felt that a student's social life "is their own business." Students shared stories of how the Honor Code affected their day-to-day lives. When several benches were broken on campus, signs went up that said, "Stop vandalizing my home;" within one week the vandalism stopped. However, the student chair of the College Hearing Board has created a task force to determine how to bring the Honor Code back into the social lives of students. In typical Wheaton fashion, the task force has examined this question from an intellectual standpoint. A group of faculty and students recently attended a conference on integrity. The findings from the conference have been used to "ignite" a debate on campus about the Honor Code.

NSSE BENCHMARKS OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Based on our interviews and observations during the site visit and our examination of relevant campus documents, we gained the sense that a variety of factors, often interrelated, seem to account for student engagement at Wheaton. We describe our impressions in terms of the five NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice.

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance. Examples include high effort to prepare for class, working harder than you thought to meet your professor's expectations, amount of assigned reading and writing, and classes that emphasize analysis, synthesis, applying theories, and making judgments.

Items from NSSE that illustrate academic challenge speak to the amount of time and effort students report spending on (1) studying and other academic work, (2) preparing for class, (3) reading assigned books and books not assigned, and (4) writing reports and papers. Academic challenge also addresses the extent to which students engage in activities that require analysis, synthesis, applying theories, and making judgments, as well as the extent to which students feel they work harder than they thought possible to meet an instructor's standards or expectations.

Overview of NSSE Results

According to NSSE, Wheaton provides a moderate level of academic challenge for first-year students and a stronger level of challenge for seniors. Wheaton's score on the level of academic challenge benchmark for first-year students was at the 60th percentile compared with other Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts colleges and at the 80th percentile for seniors. However, after taking a number of Wheaton's institutional characteristics into account, its scores on this benchmark are actually slightly below what is predicted for first-year students and slightly above what is predicted for seniors.

Wheaton's first-year students were somewhat more likely than students at comparable institutions to report coming to class without completing readings or assignments and also more likely to be asked to memorize facts, ideas or methods from courses and readings. These data, which appear to be inconsistent with the practices we describe below, might result from the fact that first-year students at Wheaton often enroll in one or two relatively large introductory classes.

At the same time, both first-year students and seniors reported being asked to read more textbooks, books, and book-length packets than did students at comparable institutions. More

notably, students at Wheaton reported being asked to write more – both short and long papers – than did students at comparable institutions.

Two Levels of Student Engagement?

Overall, the students and faculty we interviewed described a level of academic challenge that is consistent, on average, with Wheaton's NSSE scores. However, our student interviews highlighted two clusters of students with regard to their perspective on academic challenge and engagement. On the one hand, we spoke with a number of students who worked hard, but seemed to put their work into some perspective. As one theater major said, "We're busy, but it's stuff I like to do... There's not a lot of library work, but there is a lot of out-of-classroom projects." Another student added, "Overall, it's a lot of work, but it is not overwhelming." An upper-class student said he thought students typically had "1 to 3 hours [school work] a night, more in the sciences." The first-year students we spoke to varied considerably in their reports on how much time they spent doing homework, with estimates ranging from 2 to 8 hours a day. But they all agreed with one student who said, "Academic work does not cut into the weekends, not really if you manage your time."

At the same time, we also interviewed a number of students who appeared to be putting in an extraordinary effort both in and out of the classroom. One student said, "The majority of [students] wear a lot of hats and wear them in depth." Another added, "The administration, faculty, etc., give a lot of responsibility to students." This responsibility seemed to be welcome to this second, more academically oriented group of students. As one student said, "I love multiplicity. This morning I'm in a research group. I play on the tennis team in the afternoon, and I run the coffee house at night." Another student added, "Too much free time is a waste of time. We're here to get an education. I have the option of getting a great education so I'd rather do that than go to parties."

All campuses have students who engage at different levels, but this dichotomy seemed more prominent at Wheaton than other DEEP institutions. The academic community acknowledges that the dichotomy has existed and has made a strategic commitment to raise the level of academic rigor in the student admissions process and the classroom. In the past five years, for example, the percent of admitted applicants has dropped from 72 percent to 43 percent. At the same time, faculty members are committed to meeting students where they are academically and taking them to the next level.

Creating Expectations for Academic Challenge in the First-Year Seminar

One interesting source of academic challenge for Wheaton students is the First-Year Seminar (FYS), which has already been described in some detail elsewhere in this report. There are a number of features of the program that may foster an atmosphere of high academic expectations for new students. The seminar is focused on socializing new students in the academic values of the institution. First-year students begin by reading a book during the summer before they arrive on campus. For example, a recent incoming class read E.O. Wilson's *The Future of Life*. In addition to reading a common book, incoming students also have access

to a very structured website¹ that contains essays written by Wheaton faculty in response to the assigned text, as well as essays written by other scholars. The website also contains a variety of other useful information. The assigned readings, faculty responses, and the website combine to introduce incoming students to the ways an academic community engages an issue. The summer reading clearly sets the tone for the fact that the college experience is much different than high school. Students commented on the difficulty of the summer reading and the fact that it created high expectations about the level of academic engagement and challenge they will face once they arrive on campus. As one faculty member said, “We want students to become young intellectuals.”

The content and structure of each First-Year Seminar is created by the faculty instructor for that section. According to the Wheaton College website, each section of the First-Year Seminar:

... focuses on a topic from current events or history or within one of the traditional areas of academic study which has generated controversy among the scholars, policy makers and others who have grappled with it. The role of controversy in shaping human understanding and motivating social and political action is the common theme which unites all sections.²

Topics in FYS range from “*Discipline and Punishment*,” to “*Frankenstein, Dracula and Mephistopheles*,” and “*The new genetics, promises and problems*.” Regardless of the subject matter of a specific section, the syllabi are consistent in requiring a substantial amount of reading from a wide range of original sources. The syllabi also make clear that faculty place a strong emphasis on discussion and writing. Indeed, taken as a whole, faculty employed a truly extraordinary range of writing assignments including in-class writing assignments, field notes, one page papers, 3 to 5 page papers, PowerPoint presentations, service learning logs, reading logs, 15 page seminar papers, and drawing exercises. Regardless of the reading, discussion, and writing assignments in each section, it is clear from the syllabi that the First-Year Seminar is a serious, academically challenging course.

The student preceptors who work with each section of the First-Year Seminar appear to further enrich the content of the course by setting up discussion groups, panel discussions, or other events that link different individual sections of the course. The student preceptors also encourage different faculty to participate in these discussions. Each First-Year Seminar has a small budget to support these and other kinds of out-of-classroom activities.

The variability in the requirements, topics, experiences, and assessments across the sections of the First-Year Seminar create some concerns among the faculty that the course provides an uneven academic experience. They are aware of these and other tensions in the course and are addressing them, including the problem of resource allocation. However, it was clear that the course was “alive” in the sense that faculty are actively considering shortcomings in the course and attempting to address them. Overall, the faculty who teach FYS, including Wheaton’s Provost and President, seem to have arrived at a “sweet spot” of combining constructive disagreement with a commitment to continually improving the course. This year, for

¹ <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/Catalog/FSEM/FutureOfLife/>

² <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/Catalog/FSEM>

example, the College experimented with connecting a few sections of FYS with learning communities in the living units. There are also ongoing discussions about how to make the course more challenging.

The students we interviewed had nothing but praise for their First-Year Seminars. One student said, “You’re not pulling your hair out with the workload, but you really have to think.” Another added, the FYS are “definitely challenging courses because you have to think and write and rewrite. It was a great introduction to the College.” Others commented that the course helped them “...develop a sense of unity with students and faculty” and instilled in them a “sense of confidence that you can discuss things.” According to one preceptor, “The whole First-Year Seminar experience is vital for your transition to college, to forge connections with faculty, students, staff, and upperclassmen. It becomes your safety net.” Overall, the first-year students we interviewed identified the seminar as one of things they “would not change about the college.”

Senior Capstone Experiences

A number of the students we interviewed described challenging senior projects and capstone experiences. A review of Wheaton’s 2001-2003 catalog indicates that there are a variety of ways that departments across the college create challenging experiences for their senior majors. The Anthropology and Political Science departments both have senior seminars that are designated as “Writing Intensive” and appear to include formal projects and/or theses. One senior said that she was in the midst of writing a seminar paper that would probably be over 60 pages long. The French department has a “Senior Concentration Course” in which a student designates a senior-level course as a “Concentration Course” and thereby substantially upgrades the requirements of that course to include more oral reports or more frequent writing assignments (this is similar to the idea of “Enhanced Courses,” described below). The Physics department has the option of a “Senior Honors Thesis.” Capstone experiences were described by a student as “saturated experiences” that “replicate early graduate training.” There has been variability across departments in the capstone experience. However, the new Wheaton curriculum recognizes the importance of the capstone experience and, thus, requires it of all departments, regardless of major.

Enhanced Courses

One program that might increase academic challenge at Wheaton is the enhanced courses. These are regular introductory courses that students can “enhance” by working on additional and more advanced materials or in independent study. Students enroll in the regular course and then upgrade the course to an enhanced section after the first class meeting. Students who propose the idea generally end up in independent studies with the faculty member. The faculty reported that they find this approach preferable as it allows them to better tailor the work to the student’s interest. Introductory courses that may be enhanced are listed in the course schedule. We heard a number of students referring to these courses during our visit. Indeed, they told us that enough students signed up for these sections that enrollments had to be limited. However, our review of the Fall 2003 and Spring 2004 course schedule indicates that the same three courses (i.e., physics, chemistry, and art) are scheduled courses each semester.

Faculty Research and Classroom Work

One of the themes that emerged during many of our student interviews was the connection that a number of students made between their performance in class and their faculty member's scholarship. After describing how interesting it was to take a course with a faculty member whose scholarship was so closely connected to the course material, one student said, "If the teacher is committed to the work, then I'll be committed to it." Another added, "You don't want to let the teacher down. If they've written a book on something you don't want to let them down and bomb a quiz."

Many institutions strive to create a strong link between research and teaching, and the same is true at Wheaton. What is interesting, and perhaps unusual, is to hear students articulate the importance of that connection. Early in the students' academic career, the faculty socialize them about the intimate relationship between research and the institution's teaching mission. Annual events highlighting student work, such as the Research Fair and the Academic Festival, expose students to the feasibility of their research involvement. A professor stated, "The ethos here is that any student can get a taste of research – even an enthusiastic 'B-' student."

Increasing Selectivity vs. "Meeting Students Where They Are"

In some of our conversations with faculty we heard concerns that Wheaton's level of academic challenge was, to some degree, limited by the quality of students that Wheaton attracts compared to its aspirational peer institutions (e.g., Mt. Holyoke, Bates and Connecticut College). In response to the question, "How hard is Wheaton?" one faculty member said, "There is a huge range of students – some are great, some who struggle." He added, "But even the kids who struggle are making an effort." But this kind of comment was typically followed by a second comment that referred to Wheaton's increasing selectivity. For example, one faculty member said, "For a while, the bottom layer of the students we were getting was lower than we wanted. Now we're getting more selective and we have a greater number of academically talented students. We have less 'dead wood.' We have fewer students who are at risk."

A number of students and faculty echoed these comments about Wheaton's improving selectivity. There was clear pride across all constituencies in the fact that Wheaton is becoming more selective.³ Furthermore, this change in selectivity is accompanied by a widespread desire for the institution to increase academic challenge. For example, one goal that was mentioned is to make the curriculum "more rigorous and challenging, but more open and exciting."

We were struck by the frequency with which faculty, and a few students, mentioned the importance of increasing selectivity of the institution as a necessary step towards increasing the level of academic challenge in their courses. According to several faculty members we interviewed, the desire to get a more selective student body was important even if it hampered Wheaton's efforts to maintain and build a more diverse student body. This was surprising given Wheaton's strong commitment to and success at diversifying its faculty. During the second visit

³ Data on Wheaton's increasing selectivity are outlined *Vital Signs, A Wheaton College Factbook*.

it was determined that Wheaton has increased selectivity and maintained its commitment to diversity. This year's first-year class is comprised of 17 percent students of color.

Indeed, one of the by-products of admitting a much more selective student body is that increasing levels of academic challenge and accomplishment may result more from the kinds of students who go to Wheaton than anything else. To some extent, we can already see the effect of this phenomenon by the fact that Wheaton's above-average scores on this benchmark for first-year students and seniors (60th and 80th percentile respectively) are reduced to "what would be expected" given the characteristics of entering students. Of course, there are many institutional benefits to selecting an increasingly elite entering class, not the least of which is the prestige of the institution.

Assuming that the faculty are also interested in the development of their students, why then is there a sense that a more elite student body is a necessary precursor to increasing academic challenge? One reason could be a theme that we encountered in a number of our interviews of "meeting students where they are." We heard this phrase used by both student affairs staff and faculty. As one faculty member said, "We work with each student based on where they are. We allow students to progress at their own rate." In response to the question of how well students are supported on campus another faculty member said, "Every way they need." We heard similar comments from students. "The experience is tailored to students. Inside the classroom, outside the classroom, you create your own niche." Another student added, "When you get to Wheaton, there's a whole lot of hand holding, helping you understand what you want to do, and helping you find your own space."

Although a nurturing and supportive environment is critical for fostering student development, it is possible that in some circumstances the orientation towards providing nurturing support and "meeting students where they are" can conflict with creating an academically challenging environment. One administrator indicated concern about the issue of grade inflation "because the practices that we've developed in our supportive nurturing way will harm the extent to which we challenge students." It is clear that if the faculty have truly adopted an ethos of "meeting students where they are," then increasing "where they are" by raising selectivity seems a natural thing to do. The question will remain as to whether an institution is modifying its practices so that it provides a more challenging experience for its students, or simply admitting more elite and actively engaged students. This is a very academically talented faculty, most of whom reported during the second visit that they feel the more elite student enables them to do better job at what they do. The fact that the range of students at Wheaton has narrowed, thus reducing the number of low end admits, enables faculty to meet the students at a higher point and take them even higher. Faculty are enthusiastic about the change. One professor exclaimed, "We love to be pushed by the students. That's why we want to increase selectivity even though we love helping the less-prepared student see the light. I have a far easier time defining the culture of the classroom with brighter students." Perhaps the long-term challenge for Wheaton is to foster this kind of intellectual environment while maintaining, as the President put it, "...an environment where we work together to see what the students' possibilities are rather than promote a 'survival of the fittest' culture."

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.

Survey items that compose NSSE's active and collaborative learning benchmark address the extent to which students have: (1) asked questions in class and/or contributed to class discussions, (2) made class presentations, (3) worked with other students on class projects in or outside-of-class, (4) tutored other students, (5) participated in a community-based project as part of a course, and (5) discussed ideas from readings or classes with others (e.g., students, family members, colleagues) outside-of-class.

Overview of NSSE Results

NSSE results indicate that Wheaton students are actively engaged in their learning. Scores of first-year students were above both the peer and national norms. While the scores of Wheaton seniors were just below the peer average, they were above those of the national NSSE sample. For example, the Wheaton students surveyed were more likely to make class presentations and work with other students on projects during class. Furthermore, when adjusting for specific institutional and student characteristics, Wheaton performed better-than-predicted on this benchmark among both seniors and first-year students.

The qualitative data we collected also reflect a high degree of active and collaborative learning among Wheaton students. This section will highlight the effective policies and practices we observed related to this benchmark. These will be organized around the following themes: students as colleagues, classroom initiatives, and student ownership and involvement.

Students as Colleagues

The spirit of collegiality that pervades the campus lends itself to an atmosphere where students are active participants in their learning. This is not a model where students are seen as empty vessels to be filled by the all-knowing expert at the front of the class. Rather, students have thoughts and ideas to bring to the table, and those ideas are encouraged and valued. Indeed, there was a real sense that everyone at the institution is considered as learners, and learning is a genuinely collaborative process. A junior summed up the collaborative nature of the learning process at Wheaton as follows:

So it's kind of a two-way street here... We'll call our professor if they're wrong, and we'll definitely let them know if we don't agree. And so I think that gives them a stronger academic authority and gives them new perspectives as well.

A sense of respect in the classroom, a lack of hierarchy, and the idea that students can teach their professors was how students characterized their learning experience. "You're here to do your

own thing, but you're also here to teach others," said a junior. A staff member emphasized that faculty are interested in engaging students on campus both locally and globally and want to be partners with students in the process. Some faculty members use the bond they have developed with students to push their students to take a more active role in their learning. One faculty member said, "Faculty have learned the value of collaborating with students. We learn techniques from our conversations with each other." A theater professor told us, "Work must be a collaboration, students must be involved." As one professor said, "We ask students to bring stuff to the table. I don't want students to say, 'Tell me what to do.' I want them to tell me how they are thinking about things...I want to hear student perspectives rather than tell them what to think." Many faculty also carefully utilize out-of-classroom interactions to facilitate collaborative learning among students. According to one faculty member, "We also emphasize community. Students can learn more from each other than they can from me."

Indeed, this collegial, collaborative relationship flows not only between students and faculty, but from student to student as well. A student noted, "I learn from my peers...Students work with each other to set up a production or do a scene for class. After students pull it together, they go to the professor for tweaking." In speaking with various students, the respect they held for many of their peers was obvious as they bragged about one another's accomplishments. "Everyone here is special," proclaimed one student about her peers. Another described a fellow classmate as "an amazing force on this campus." Still another informed us that his peer was "being modest about his accomplishments." It would seem natural that this level of respect would translate into a learning environment where students feel comfortable speaking their minds and sharing their views without fear of being ridiculed or looked down upon. Classroom observations revealed that students do feel comfortable in both large and small classes sharing their thoughts and ideas. In one seminar that we observed, students taught the class. The faculty member provided support and feedback but it was the students' ideas that led the class. Similar observations were made in other classes.

Classroom Initiatives

The classroom pedagogy at Wheaton also facilitates active and collaborative learning. On the one hand, there seemed to be a significant number of large classes for such a small school (e.g., one class was reported to have 195 students). On the other hand, there was frequent mention of the use of undergraduate teaching interns who help to lead smaller discussion groups. For example, one student told us that her women's studies course, which had 50 students, was broken down into discussion groups of 5 to 10 students that were led by a senior majoring in that area. This seems to be beneficial not only for the students in the class, but also for the undergraduate teaching interns who are getting valuable experience in engaging their peers in the learning process. Indeed, observations of a seminar class revealed two well-prepared students teaching, with the faculty member serving in a coaching role. The professor added to the overall discussion by adding insights and additional facts that informed the topic without attempting to outperform the student instructors. It appears that the learning practices have evolved over time. They have been tried by faculty at different points in Wheaton's history and moved into the mainstream as the practices have been successful. In addition, the new general education curriculum will allow the institution to cap more courses and provide more options for all students. As with many Wheaton initiatives, the drive for this type of pedagogy begins at the

top. The Provost was explicit about the value she places on active and collaborative learning activities:

Ten years ago I can't imagine valuing a group project that students do as much as their own individual work in the library,...and now I do, because I know that their ability to think together is going to be as important for them- not more important- but as important for them as their ability to think by themselves.

According to a junior, 50 percent of her classes at Wheaton have had less than ten students and no tests. She appreciated the fact that so many of her courses were seminar-based and "you can bounce ideas off one another." Others informed us that group projects and presentations are required in almost every class. One student described his public policy course in which the entire class conducted a simulation on national park services. Each student played a real-life role, such as a lobbyist, budget analyst, etc. This provided them with a forum to apply their learning in a very real way. An upper-class student spoke about a project she did for her class entitled "Violence Against Women" that, she said, "embodies everything the new curriculum is supposed to do" (i.e., infusion and connection). The project, which gave students the option of doing either a service learning or a research project, allowed this student to connect her course requirements with her internship in the Student Life Office. For her project she planned and implemented programming designed to educate men on how they can serve as allies in combating sexual assault. The entire class was scheduled to conduct a Violence Against Women symposium this past April, which was intended to involve people from both the College and local communities. Again, this allowed students to directly apply course material and collaborate with others to serve real life problems. The idea of "intellectual engagement," that is sharing one's work with others, is a growing expectation of the Wheaton culture.

First-year students at Wheaton also seemed to engage in a high level of activities, such as group projects and presentations, which facilitate active and collaborative learning. While the extent of this type of pedagogy seems to vary within the first year curriculum, all first-year students with whom we spoke provided us with examples of their engagement in active and collaborative learning. Several first-year students said that their First-Year Seminar (FYS) had no lectures or exams. One student talked about a FYS on Modern Drama that required a different group to present a play by a modern playwright each Friday. Another woman commented that she noticed a marked increase in the amount of group discussion and group project requirements from her first semester to her second. A self-proclaimed "shy" student, she said that the level of class participation required in her FYS encouraged her to speak out in class and helped to "instill confidence" in her. A junior echoed this sentiment: "Wheaton teaches and encourages students to be assertive." Finally, the Provost summarized the benefits of this approach to learning: "What we do in the classroom is not practical learning. But, having a flexible mind and being able to think on your feet has practical application."

Student Ownership and Involvement

Active and collaborative learning at Wheaton is also demonstrated through various applied learning opportunities that occur outside the classroom. The collegial campus ethos seems to lend itself to an environment where students feel a sense of ownership within the

community and are compelled to get involved and apply themselves. According to a junior, Wheaton “engages students at a level where they’re interested and they want to be there” and allows students to “create their own niche.” A senior, who had just been accepted for graduate work, echoed these thoughts:

[Wheaton] gives students the responsibility that a lot of other institutions don’t...I’ve seen students take charge of work in the admissions office or plan orientation programs or work with the Dean of Students or the President...And now as I’m about to graduate I’m noticing just how valuable the inside and outside of a classroom experience is at Wheaton. Without it I really don’t know what I’d be doing next year.

Numerous examples of these opportunities were evident at Wheaton. One of the most salient of these was the involvement of students on the Educational Policy Committee, which is responsible for the design and implementation of the new general education curriculum, as previously described. Two students served as full members of this committee and provided their feedback in the shaping of the new curriculum. In addition, these students, along with other members of the student government’s Student Educational Council, were responsible for planning and conducting a two-week long academic challenge. The challenge, which was scheduled to take place this past March, was designed to introduce the new curriculum to the student body, demonstrate connections in the curriculum, and generate involvement from the entire community. Grounded entirely in the new curriculum, the challenge was planned to culminate with a “Survivor”-like competition where the MVP of each team competed for a trip to the Bahamas. In a more entertaining vein, the campus holds an annual “10-minute play” festival where student groups compete to perform their plays that are written according to prescribed criteria, for example, with Greek god and goddess characters, a pizza prop, etc.

According to a sophomore, “When a group of students get together and really want to do something- you can do it.” A senior also mentioned the element of faculty support that is critical in this process: “[Faculty] give us the opportunity to pursue what we want to pursue.” A psychology professor added credence to both of these statements: “I’ve seen so many students who get a passion and find faculty and staff to make it happen.” For example, one student obtained funding for a play that educated others about HIV. The “Smoke Free Campus Initiative,” another example of this applied approach to learning, was born out of a student’s senior thesis research on smoking. With the help of faculty and staff, the student brought information about smoking to the student advisory board and received funding from the student senate. As a result, all of Wheaton’s residence halls are now smoke-free, and the student/faculty/staff team plans to present their research at an upcoming conference. Most recently, students orchestrated a community response to a disagreeable change in a food service policy.

The collaborative efforts of students and faculty to ignite conversations on the campus Honor Code provides another example of students’ active involvement in campus issues. Finally, almost every campus committee involves students. Students were included in the hiring of a new psychology professor, and two students served on the search committee for Director of Student Life. According to the Dean of Students, Wheaton is a place where students can make a difference, and not just the positional leaders. Furthermore, the campus is small enough that

when you make changes you can actually see if they are working. This appeared to be the case, as students actively involved themselves in solving campus issues, applying their classroom learning, and collaborating with peers, faculty, and staff alike to affect change on the campus.

Student Interactions with Faculty

Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside of the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning. These include activities such as discussing grades or assignments with a professor, talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor, working with faculty on activities other than coursework, working with faculty on a research or service learning project outside of course requirements.

Items on the NSSE that address this benchmark include: (1) discussed grades or assignments with an instructor; (2) talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor; (3) discussed ideas for your reading or classes with faculty members outside-of-class; (4) received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance; (5) worked with a faculty member on a research project; (6) worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (e.g., committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.).

Overview of NSSE Results

Wheaton students gave their institution strong marks on the student-faculty interaction benchmark. Overall, first-year students and seniors placed Wheaton above the 70th percentile among Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts colleges on this benchmark. Even after statistically adjusting for a variety of institutional qualities, Wheaton's scores on the student-faculty interaction benchmark are higher than predicted.

Among the individual items on this NSSE benchmark that stand out for Wheaton are as follows: students are more likely to report talking with faculty members or advisors about career plans and they are more likely to discuss ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside-of-class than at other comparable institutions. The same is true of participating in research projects outside of course or program requirements; this was especially true for first-year students.

Close, Collegial Student-Faculty Interactions

A sense of collegiality and community across constituencies was apparent from the moment we stepped on campus. According to one staff member, Wheaton is "...a really upbeat place. There's a lot of longevity because it's a happy and enjoyable place. There's real stability. People don't go through a revolving door here."

This collegiality clearly extended to the way that faculty and students interacted with one another. Faculty-student collaboration inside and outside the classroom is a key element in

shaping the student experience at Wheaton. Rooted in the original research conducted by students in the late 1950s, the concept was given physical permanence with the construction of the new science building in 1968. According to one science professor, what draws students to Wheaton and drives science is student interaction with faculty: “I still learn all 74 names of my students in a lecture.” It is important to note that collaboration has also existed in the social sciences since the same era. Now, “When we hire faculty, they are expected to work closely with students. It counts toward tenure.”

Relationships between students and faculty are a focal point of the campus view book, and many students told us that they chose to attend Wheaton because they knew they would be able to work with faculty one-on-one. Forty of the 135 faculty members are featured in a section entitled, “Introducing some of the professors you will get to know very well.” Other sections of the view book have testimonials from individual students about specific faculty members. The message is designed to appeal to students whose anticipatory socialization predisposes them to the importance of student-faculty collaboration. There appears to be a very even exchange between students seeking opportunities to work with faculty and faculty seeking students to conduct projects.

Students told us that they meet with professors in many different venues outside of the classroom. We were told, “Professors meet with students at games, over dinner, etc.” Another student indicated, “They are really available outside of the classroom.” Various departments host “teas,” another afternoon out-of-class opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to gather and converse. According to a theater major, “Faculty are available” at Wheaton. “We’re constantly with the faculty. I have one production in the fall and two productions in the spring.” Another theater major said, “Professors across campus are open to dialog. They want you to think about things. They are collaborative.” A graduating senior stated, “I couldn’t imagine better faculty. They are so supportive. They know your name and they know who you are.” This remark was confirmed in a number of classroom visits where it was noted that professors routinely call students by their first names.

Faculty expressed similar feelings. According to one senior administrator, Wheaton has a long tradition of being student-centered. “The student-centered ethos is very strong here.” This ethos was evident in a number of our faculty interviews. According to one faculty member, “We expect and value contact with students about academic and non-academic items. We have a lower teaching load because we are expected to work with students. Another professor said, “We’re really close to our students.”

Student Involvement in Courses

Another locus for student-faculty interactions at Wheaton is student involvement in teaching. For example, students serve as preceptors in the First-Year Seminar. The preceptors are typically nominated by faculty, and serving as a preceptor for the first year courses is seen as a significant campus leadership opportunity. Preceptors are trained during the week before school begins, and senior preceptors help train the new preceptors. The preceptors meet with the faculty member who is teaching their section of the FYS in the week prior to class, and throughout the semester. In a limited number of cases, students serve as discussion leaders in

breakout sections of large introductory courses and as TAs in laboratories. Peer writing tutors are also trained via a half-credit course to provide invaluable help to first-year students. The campus is exploring this same model for the development of a cadre of math tutors. The two undergraduates we observed teaching had both undergone extensive preparation. They had discussed the topic with the faculty member and with fellow students outside of the classroom. In addition they had completed additional research on the project outside of the class requirements. The classrooms were clearly collaborative. The use of students as junior colleagues is a particularly educationally purposeful practice, considering the impact that peer interactions can have on the learning process.

The deep involvement of Wheaton students with faculty in campus governance – discussed in other sections of this report – creates another interesting layer of student-faculty interactions. This layer is important because it extends those interactions beyond the sphere of academic subjects, in which the faculty member may be seen as having some precedence, to a sphere in which students and faculty are more likely to interact as peers and citizens in the Wheaton community. In short, the normal course of campus governance at Wheaton involves students and faculty in common work, and thereby creates a fertile bed for rich student-faculty interactions.

Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program. Experiencing diversity teaches students valuable things about themselves and other cultures. Used appropriately, technology facilitates learning and promotes collaboration between peers and instructors. Internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge.

Activities and conditions that comprise the enriching educational experiences benchmark include: (1) serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than one's own; (2) serious conversations with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, and values; (3) using electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments; (4) participation in internships or field experiences, foreign language study, study abroad, community service, independent study, a culminating senior experience; (5) participation in co-curricular activities; and (6) an institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Overview of NSSE Results

NSSE data indicate a high degree of involvement in enriching educational experiences for both first-year students and seniors. Wheaton students were significantly more likely than their peers at other liberal arts colleges and in the NSSE sample to report: foreign language coursework; intent to, or experience with, study abroad; and engagement in serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own. The following elements of this benchmark were addressed in our interviews and in the following sections of this report: (1)

participation in co-curricular activities, (2) community service, and (3) interactions with students from different racial, ethnic, social, economic, and/or religious backgrounds.

Co-Curricular Involvement

Anticipatory Socialization. We were told that students come to Wheaton having “experience with engagement, and they expect even more” from college. Admissions materials include profiles of current students to “send the message early on” that Wheaton students “are involved in internships, research, and so many other types of engagement.” An administrator commented, “We’re sending messages about what type of place this is, even before they arrive.”

In fact, students can become involved in internships and with faculty “before they ever take a class.” April events bring prospective students and faculty together to establish ongoing e-mail relationships to discuss academic and research issues over the summer before the students enroll. Admissions staff add personal, hand-written messages to students’ letters of admission, encouraging them to continue their high school involvement in college, and providing suggestions about how to do so. Moreover, faculty members send e-mails and notes to highly recruited students. In addition, postcards sent from admissions to admitted students invite them to volunteer as “Freshman Ambassadors,” a group that hosts overnights for prospective students, does telethons, and helps to answer questions in the lobby of the admissions office as prospective students and their families wait to go on tours. The purpose of these and other such efforts is “to build ideas in their minds about what they might get involved with” when they move to campus.

Campus Life. A senior asserted, “As soon as you walk on campus, you hear ‘Get involved’ – in internships, organizations. It’s part of life here.” Students find a variety of avenues for extra- and co-curricular involvement through either student organizations or programs in the Balfour-Hood Student Center. The SGA administers the student fee budget that funds over 70 student clubs and the student sports clubs. Clubs linked to academic pursuits in literature and theatre are quite prevalent on campus.

The Balfour-Hood Center Student Center appeared to be a beehive of activity. On one trip through the Center, we saw students in line for food at the cafeteria; another area hosted information tables for student organizations and a band, composed of Wheaton students, played very loud music. Located near the center of campus, the Center appears to be fulfilling its mission as the “living room” of the campus.

Wheaton students also celebrate several traditions that link the College’s past and present, while also fostering student involvement. In the middle of the academic quad is a depression in the ground called the Dimple. It is the site of graduation and other events. One event occurs on rainy days when the sides of the dimple are slick and the bottom of the Dimple is filled with water. Students slide or throw themselves down the sides into the water in a ritual called “Dimple diving.” Spun off from this event is a campus comedy group called the Dimple Divers who hold auditions and perform in the local area. Other traditions abound such as “star spinning” and orientation chapel greetings by upper class students. Only senior students may sit on the front steps to the library. In the same vein only senior students may enter the chapel via

the front door. It is a tradition on campus that all students must take a swim in the duck pond before they graduate.

One faculty member noted the down side to recruiting highly involved students to a college that emphasizes involvement: “By the time they’re juniors, they’re swamped. They’re spread so thin.” A senior concurred: “I overspent myself.” Reflecting on her final semester at Wheaton, she says, “I just quit” involvement in all but classes and “being with my friends.”

Athletics. At both the intercollegiate and intramural levels Wheaton provides a host of opportunities for students to participate in athletics. At Wheaton, athletics are considered to be part of a well-rounded education. Thus, students can participate in intercollegiate sports, use the fitness centers in Balfour-Hood and Haas or play intramural or club sports.

Wheaton participates in NCAA Division III; this, student athletes said, “means we’re playing because we want to be here.” We were told that the goal of athletics at Wheaton is “to continue the student’s education outside the classroom.” In addition, athletics “provide motivation to be a successful college student and a sense of direction, an anchor for other aspects of college.” The Athletic Director reports to the Dean of Students, a strategic relationship that helps to reinforce the notion that athletics are a part of the students’ lives. Effective communication seems to exist between the athletic staff and the academic staff. We were told it is common for faculty members to call coaches about athletes missing class or other academic problems.

Our interview with athletic staff and students echoed other conversations about collegiality at Wheaton. “What is different about Wheaton is our ability to communicate. The people here make the difference; there’s a vision of service, service to students. We have direct links to admissions, financial aid, student life, and the faculty. We have open doors here – and that starts with the President. We work together here, and that also comes from the top down.”

Wheaton adheres to a policy of employing only full-time coaches, although some have academic assignments on campus. Coaches are seen, therefore, as teachers. Students commented that this practice “makes a huge difference” in addressing problems of student athletes. Coaches make it a point to attend events on campus that are sponsored by students and faculty. They recognize the importance of being an integral part of the campus life.

Students noted that at Wheaton, “Academics come first, and sports come second.” Also, “Wheaton shows a tremendous amount of faith in its student athletes.” For example, students have “a tremendous amount of responsibility” for hiring coaches and faculty. Student athletes described themselves as “the best-organized people in the world,” but “so many support systems are here to make you a better athlete and a better student.” The Wheaton Athletic Mentor (WAM) program was established to help students cope with the stresses of college life. Mentors are upper class student athletes who serve as a connecting point for younger athletes. These individuals, chosen by their peers, help the teammates with issues of diet, training, study skills, and personal adjustment.

Experiential Learning Opportunities

Internships. The Filene Center for Work and Learning, described elsewhere in this report, provides many resources for enriching opportunities. According to an administrator, the Center's founding in 1986 was "the institutionalization of the premise that what you experience in the classroom has meaning in the world and vice versa" and was an effort to "put careers in the minds of liberal arts students." To that end, the Center "seeks to engage students in their learning outside the classroom." A "reflective component" is built into all of the Center's programs so students "can make clear connections to their experiences in class." A faculty member summarized the work of the Center: "it's part of students' engagement" at Wheaton.

When asked why she decided to attend Wheaton and why she stayed, a senior stated, "The Filene Center really sold me." She attributed her interest in a career in environmental sciences to her internships: "No one ever encouraged me in the sciences before." This student had internships every semester, spring break, and summer of her Wheaton career, with the exception of one semester of her junior year abroad. And, although she is "extremely unique" in the extent of her internship participation, she noted that all Wheaton students could do what she has done.

Study Abroad. Opportunities for study abroad are plentiful at Wheaton. Junior Year Abroad (JYA) at Wheaton has a long history of engaging students and integrating international study into the liberal arts curriculum. As much as one-third of the Wheaton junior class participates in the JYA program. Members of the community used terms such as "integral" and "formative" to describe the importance of international study.

The previously described Center for Global Education serves to support domestic and international students, faculty, and visiting international scholars in achieving their goals related to global education. Support for the JYA program was especially apparent among our respondents. According to one administrator, "We've put our money where our mouth is." That is, the College provides institutional funding to pay for education abroad, even if a student attends a non-Wheaton program. In addition to a student's regular financial aid, the College has a fund of \$350,000, half of which students may access for international study or other types of internship experiences. While these funds are not exclusively for international study, they may be used to support every aspect of study and research in another country.

A key to the success of JYA is the campus community support it receives. Study Abroad Peer Advisors, dubbed by the Center staff as "junior professionals," work with students planning for and returning from an international experience. Two peer advisors are assigned to each returning student to help them re-enter the Wheaton culture in their first semester back on campus. JYA students told us that it was very easy to navigate the study abroad process in terms of the application and registering for classes. Furthermore, the pass/fail system encouraged many students to branch out and take classes that were outside of their comfort level. To pursue an international study experience, a student must have a 2.67 (B-) grade point average and will have typically completed two years of foundational study on campus.

Faculty and staff also serve as a strong support for JYA students. A senior French major (and finalist for a Fulbright fellowship) said that her professor encouraged her to study abroad for one year, rather than just one semester. Another student's advisor encouraged him to study abroad, insisting that the experience would be a "perfect" complement to his double major in psychology and religion. This same student said that his athletic coach was also supportive of his decision to participate in JYA, even though it meant that he could not compete in athletics that semester. The students told us that the study abroad staff made a special effort to maintain contact with them while they were away. One told us that about two weeks before he was to arrive home he began receiving e-mails from the JYA staff about programs on campus that could assist him in the process of becoming acclimated to campus life again. The staff is also making efforts to increase opportunities for faculty to travel to the JYA sites in order to enhance their support and buy-in.

The Center for Global Education also has developed two courses for students, one for pre-departure students and one for returners, which cover such topics as culture shock and intercultural communication. Students reported they earn a half credit for these courses; while not mandatory, they are highly encouraged. The returning JYA peer advisors offer an additional element of support; the professional staff considers their assistance very important: "We'd die if we didn't have them!"

In addition to JYA, Wheaton students can pursue international study during the summer and January breaks. Students, working with a faculty member, link various study experiences to enhance their international study experience. A student may take a series of science classes to prepare to work on a specific science-based project when they are overseas. They may also use an internship in the United States to prepare for their international study experience.

The students we interviewed were unanimously positive about their study abroad experiences. One student's comments were typical: "It was life changing. I saw how the majority of the world lives. It's all about education." As a result, Wheaton students seem to care about the world around them. "Students really want to appreciate what other cultures have to offer them in their educational experiences," suggests a senior. A junior talked about the power of this experience for the entire campus community: "Every student who goes abroad and comes back has a story about a different culture- and that story *resonates*."

Undergraduate Research

It is very clear that Wheaton places a high value on student involvement in research and scholarship. When we toured the science building, we found that the walls were covered with posters from student/faculty presentations. This sends a very powerful signal to students that the faculty values such work. The College has created a website on student-faculty research that is connected to its main “Academics” page. The website contains a short description of past projects and current research teams that students can join. The science webpage also highlights eleven different ongoing student-faculty research projects, as well as a number of different meetings and events that foster student-faculty research.

The website also contains a description of the Wheaton Research Partnership, a program in which faculty can use work-study funds to hire research assistants. These positions are posted at the College's annual research fair in the fall. Students who take on these jobs help on a variety of tasks that include entering data, conducting library searches, reading and discussing articles, collecting data, and refining measurement instruments. This is a particularly innovative way of repackaging aid so that it can facilitate a practice that leads to rich student-faculty interactions.

The Research Partnership seems to spread the practice of student-faculty research. There were 10 Research Partnership jobs available in 2001, seventeen in 2002, and 24 were available this year. Faculty members from across the College, not just the sciences, are using the Research Partnership Program.

In addition to this program, we learned of other ways faculty involve students in their research. For example, a science professor assembled a student research team composed of a first-year student, sophomore, junior, and senior who meet weekly to work on their research, which they have presented at conferences. Recently these students were asked at a conference where they intended to do their post docs; the high quality of their work led them to be identified as graduate students. The technique of using students from different class levels can also have benefits in terms of peer learning and mentoring, as well as maintaining a pipeline of research participants.

In the fall, the campus sponsors a Research Fair at which the faculty and students display the research projects they are conducting in order to attract new students to their research team. In the spring, an academic fair displays the outcomes of this and other projects. Faculty and students reported a mutual learning experience throughout the research process. The types of activities outlined in this section of the report provided a glimpse into Wheaton's intentional efforts – through policies and programs – to affect the student learning experience at their institutions. Additional examples follow in the next section that further illustrate how Wheaton marshals its resources toward facilitating student engagement.

Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups.

Conditions that foster the supportive campus environment benchmark considers the following: 1) the campus environment provides support students need to help you succeed academically and socially, as well as with non-academic responsibilities (e.g., work, family, etc.) and 2) quality of relationships with other students, faculty members, and administrative personnel and offices.

Overview of NSSE Results

Wheaton's 2002 NSSE scores on the supportive campus environment benchmark are high compared to the national and peer norms data for both seniors and first-year students. According to both quantitative and qualitative data, Wheaton students feel a sense of belonging and support based on the quality of their relationships with faculty, administrative personnel, and other students. The following section highlights specific examples of how Wheaton supports its students, organized around the following themes: a supportive campus ethos, First-Year Seminar advising teams, academic advising, support for diverse students, staff support, and residence life.

A Supportive Campus Ethos

Wheaton's roots as a women's college translate into a supportive environment for its students. Elements often commonly found in women's colleges – collaboration, nurturing, non-competitive interactions, and a supportive environment – create a student-centered environment where students are viewed by faculty members as colleagues and students view one another as colleagues. While the ethos of student-centeredness tends to be commonplace at liberal arts colleges, the Provost (who has worked at two other liberal arts institutions) believes, "Honestly, I've never seen so much [student-centeredness]...I immediately could feel the difference [at Wheaton]." She went on to say, "I have grown in my understanding of what's important, for students especially. I have always felt that students should be at the center of what we do." The President echoed this sentiment. She said that although the gender-balanced curriculum is important, Wheaton's key signature is "quality, individualized attention" for students. She asserts that when parents have visited other schools with their students, they often come to Wheaton and say that "it's different here" because they can sense this supportive ethos.

Students spoke positively of the supportive environment that they experience at Wheaton. One sophomore actually used the term "challenge and support" to sum up the culture of the campus. As we mentioned earlier, the students told us that there is a lot of hand holding when you first get to campus and that professors are intentionally accessible. They also said that they receive a lot of personal attention from their professors, who know their names and stay in touch with them, even after their class has ended. According to one student, Wheaton is a "family community." Others really had the sense that their professors' main job was to help them. Faculty members echoed these thoughts: "We help students get wherever they want to go."

Some of the students also spoke of the accessibility of the senior administration. They commented that it was not uncommon to knock on the door of the President's home, which is located on campus, to discuss an issue or problem with her. They also commented that she responds quickly, often with lengthy responses, to students' e-mail messages. A senior described the special relationship he has with members of the senior administration. He told us that the first person he went to see when he got accepted to graduate school was the President, who gave him a big hug and opened her office window so that he could yell the good news out to the campus. The second person he told was "Dean Sue," the name that most people use to refer to the Dean of Students. A junior said that when her level of campus involvement dropped, the President noticed and approached her with concern: "Kelly, I haven't seen you around much lately. Is everything okay?"

In addition to the faculty and administrators, students feel supported by the relationships they have with their peers. These close relationships are one of the things some first-year students said they would not change about Wheaton. Students described these peer connections as "special" and "close" and said that the interactions can "make your day."

First-Year Seminar Advising Teams: A "Freshman Family"

Wheaton's First-Year Seminar (FYS), described earlier, is another example of its commitment to providing both academic and social support for its students, particularly within the first year. Because of this wide level of buy-in from the campus community, many people from various sectors of the institution come together to support the students. Every FYS course, limited to 18 students, is assigned a "team" that consists of the following: the course professor, two student preceptors, a librarian, and an administrative mentor. The teams receive special training and work closely to assist new students with their college transition. Reunions (e.g., dinners, field trips) with the FYS teams and their students are a common occurrence, which provides a nice continuity for the students over their four years.

FYS Faculty. FYS professors serve as the primary academic advisor for the first-year students in their class. They receive training so that they are well-prepared to deal with the needs of first-year students. This includes a series of workshops that take place throughout the academic year.

Preceptors. Preceptors assist the FYS faculty by serving as academic and personal peer advisors for new students. Throughout orientation, new students will meet daily with their preceptors either individually or in their Advising Teams. After orientation and throughout the student's first year, the preceptors will work with the Faculty Advisor and Administrative Mentor to promote the development of the academic and life skills necessary for the success of each student. Preceptors are nominated by the faculty and must attend a week-long training before classes start. First-time preceptors must also take a half-credit summer class in which they learn about such topics as study skills, test taking, and disability issues. Every class is assigned both a junior preceptor and a senior preceptor so that the more experienced student can mentor the other. In addition, one of the preceptors lives in the residence hall with the students to facilitate close and frequent contact. Preceptors are trained to serve as Study Skills Tutors and offer workshops individually or in small groups in areas such as test taking, study strategies, time

management, and note taking. The preceptors also offer support and valuable words of wisdom for new students. For example, one preceptor said that she advises all her students to turn in papers early to receive feedback and then revise them.

Team Librarian. The team librarian acclimated students to the library services and assists students in using the library resources to complete their research projects and assignments.

Administrative Mentors. The use of administrative mentors, a practice that began at the urging of the President, adds an additional element of support for new students. These mentors, members of the administration that volunteer their time, meet with new students in their advising team meetings during orientation, attend or host social gatherings throughout the first year, and connect with new students individually and in small groups to talk about their experiences at Wheaton. These mentors serve as a valuable resource to students in helping them to “work through the system” (e.g., How do you deal with a financial aid problem, a roommate dilemma, or a need to go home early?). The mentors receive a thick training manual and meet monthly as a group to discuss issues related to helping the new students with their transition. The role of the administrative mentor varies depending on the time and interests of the staff member. Many attend and actively participate in class on a regular basis. Others assist with the research aspect of the class by reading student papers and helping with library training. In addition to enriching the classroom, having staff mentors also serves to create a connection between the staff and the academic community. This connection, in turn, facilitates the staff’s sense of ownership for the development of Wheaton students.

It was clear that this was a big commitment for the administrative mentors. One mentor who attended almost every FYS class session said “It just about killed me!” However, she said the year before she did not attend as many classes and did not feel as connected to the students. When asked why she would volunteer so much of her time in this manner, she replied that it was fun, she enjoyed the readings, and appreciated the opportunity to connect with students. She saw the role of the administrative mentor as an important one because the students often come to them with problems that they would not bring to their faculty advisors.

Reactions to the “Family.” The faculty with whom we spoke seemed to really appreciate the work of the administrative mentors and librarians, who they often viewed as “team teachers.” One faculty spoke of the value of having an African American mentor who modeled “otherness” for the students. Another professor emphasized the commitment of the staff to the FYS program and said that they need to be better rewarded for their work.

With one exception, the students with whom we spoke had positive things to say about their FYS course and said it was one of the things that they would not want to change about Wheaton. According to one student, “I loved my FYS. It’s like a family.” Another said FYS provided a “safety net. You step on campus and feel really comfortable.” A first-year student told us that her Spanish professor went out of his way to make sure that all students felt comfortable speaking up in class. “He just wanted us to learn and not be afraid to make mistakes,” she said. Students said that faculty members encourage them to stop by their office, and one student told us that she still stops by to speak to her FYS instructor. The students had the sense that faculty are concerned about the students’ well-being and want them to be happy.

One student told us that her FYS professor cried on the last day of class; obviously he had formed a special connection with his students.

The students also spoke highly of their FYS administrative mentors. One student told us that her mentor came to class every day and was an active member of class. “I’m really close to her,” she told us. They seemed to really appreciate having access to a different perspective from someone who was not their teacher. One student told us that his mentor gave all her FYS students handwritten cards before Halloween and winter break. Another said that while her mentor traveled a lot and could not attend every class, the mentor sent postcards to the class from each place that she visited. These little touches seemed to go a long way with the students who appreciated the intentional efforts to create a “freshman family.” Students who now serve as FYS preceptors said that the FYS experience is “vital,” “wonderful,” and “essential for the transition.”

Academic Advising

Every student at Wheaton college has an assigned advisor, whether a first-year advisor, a sophomore advisor or a major advisor. All faculty members are expected to advise students. The process for first-year student advising was described in the previous paragraph. Students are assigned a sophomore advisor if for some reason their first-year advisor was unable to fulfill his or her commitment to the student. Once students declare their major they are assigned a major advisor. In most departments, major advising is done by the chair of the department.

According to one psychology faculty member, advising loads are fairly low (about 25 students) so they really get to know all of their advisees. He also mentioned that his students tend to check in fairly frequently, not just when they need to obtain a required signature. This professor praised the support that the advising office provided to faculty members. He mentioned that the office provides all faculty advisors with a thick advising catalogue, and said they are always willing to answer specific questions over the phone that cannot be found in the catalogue.

Support for Diversity

Wheaton’s commitment to promoting multiculturalism translates into increased efforts to support the needs of diverse students on the campus. An administrator from multicultural programs frequently asks students of color for their feedback on how they perceive the climate for minority students on campus. While students commented that they are not sure how welcoming the Wheaton environment is for students of color and for students from the inner city, they believe the campus is moving in the right direction and feel the faculty and administration are responsive to their concerns about this issue. They acknowledge the various support and outreach mechanisms in place to address the issue of multiculturalism. Furthermore, many said that they would come back to Wheaton to visit for alumni events, which means the campus has been at least moderately successful in connecting with its students of color.

Multicultural Advisory Committee. The Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) has taken the lead on this issue through the development of a set of strategies focused on the “recruitment and retention of minority students, faculty, and staff; majority-group education; nurturing of curiosity and respect, interest and relationships between cultures; and minority-group support.”⁴ Faculty members, in a show of support for MAC’s efforts, unanimously passed a resolution to hire more faculty of color that can serve as role models and mentors for underrepresented students. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Wheaton was successful in hiring seven new minority faculty members within its most recent hiring period. Several administrators with whom we spoke expressed their pride in this accomplishment, although they acknowledged that the challenge will be to keep them here. One said that she hopes that Wheaton’s commitment to an open environment will create a climate in which these faculty members feel accepted and want to stay.

Posse. Wheaton’s affiliation with the Posse Foundation is another example of its efforts to recruit and support diverse students on campus. The Posse Foundation identifies, recruits, and trains youth leaders from urban public high schools and sends these groups to top colleges and universities in the country.⁵ The Posse teams are prepared, through an intensive eight-month Posse Training Program, to pursue their academics and help promote cross-cultural communication on campus. The Wheaton Posse cohorts typically consist of about nine students and were described as a “tight knit group” on campus. The students are assigned a faculty or administrative mentor during the summer before their first semester, attend a summer retreat, and attend weekly meetings for their first two years at Wheaton. According to a student from Wheaton’s first Posse class, “Posse is having your group of friends that you can relate to. It’s also about reaching beyond the group and bringing new awareness to campus.” A sophomore Posse student echoed this sentiment: “Posse is one way that we can cater to students and help them to have a voice.” A non-Posse senior reflected on the program as follows:

One thing that Posse has really done is educate the community about diversity issues...I come from Maine and so I really didn’t know much about diversity before coming to Wheaton...Wheaton established this environment where I wasn’t always comfortable to talk about race and class issues, but made it available...To have an institution that openly talks about race and class differences is worth so much.

So it appears that not only does Posse serve to support diverse students, it also enriches the rest of the campus community. The annual Posse Plus Retreat is another means of bonding students and employees from diverse backgrounds. Most view the event as an intense, revealing and remarkably successful way for 100 students and faculty to form allegiances with each other and with the institution.

The Multicultural Center. The Wheaton College Multicultural Center, which formally opened its doors in 2001, states the following as its mission:

[T]o provide a welcoming, safe and inclusive space for all members of the Wheaton College community; to serve as an academic, social and cultural resource for the campus;

⁴ Source: *Wheaton 2005: Connections to the Future*

⁵ Source: <http://www.possefoundation.org/>

and to work collaboratively with the members of our community in creating and supporting a diverse array of programs, services, events, and academic opportunities that meet the evolving needs of the college and curriculum, in a changing multicultural landscape.⁶

The Center staff members emphasize that they do not intend to provide for all the needs of diverse students, but rather, serve as a caretaker to introduce students to Wheaton's various services and resources. Among its services, the Center provides a multicultural orientation for first-year students of color, which is held just prior to the institution's regular orientation. They also conduct sessions on diversity for all students during orientation and conduct monthly lunches during the fall semester for first-year students. In addition, several student groups promote multiculturalism on campus including the African American and the Hispanic student organizations, the Global Interest Group, and the men's "Tree House" residential experience.

International Students. Wheaton College has about 45 international students that are supported by the Center for Global Education. An international sophomore student praised the interactions that she had with this office. For example, when she had trouble with her visa upon trying to re-enter the U.S., she called her international advisor at home who was happy to assist her with the situation. A three day international orientation before the regular orientation serves to further support this population of students.

Staff -Student Interactions

Wheaton's staff members work very closely with the student body. It was clear from our interviews that they – from the staff members in the library to the "groundskeepers who come to cheer at graduation" – take a great deal of pride in their work with students

For students, their connection with the staff begins in the FYS with their administrative mentor, as described above. Staff members, from student affairs to the Library, clearly enjoy working with Wheaton students. One member of the Technology staff stated, "Staff members are just as important as faculty." Another added that the staff clearly value the opportunity to work with students because, "it reminds us of why we're here." They also take their role in student development very seriously. One staff member said, "If we hear a student is interested in something, we find ways to help them achieve it... We find connections for students so they can find faculty, staff, etc., to do what they want to do." According to another staff member, "On-campus supervisors work with and mentor students and give students the sense that they are capable and they validate students' abilities." Overall, Wheaton's staff is extraordinarily committed to facilitating student development. As one staff member said, "Everybody takes time for the students. We really learn about who the student is and that's appreciated."

One theme we heard from staff members across campus is their feeling that they serve as an adult presence for students beyond what they experience with their faculty members. Furthermore, since they don't give grades to students, staff thought students might feel more comfortable talking with them about some issues than they do with faculty. In essence, many staff members – not just those in student services – see themselves as providing another layer of

⁶ Source: <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/multi/>

support for students. As one staff member said, “We fill in the cracks. We are there for conversation...to help students get stuff done in their lives.” Another staff member added, “Working with staff is a break in the students’ lives.”

One possible reason for the staff’s strong connection to the academic mission of the College is that the administration goes to extra lengths to integrate the staff into the College community. For example, Wheaton hosts a program called the “Learning Garden,”⁷ which is a kind of seminar/continuing education program for staff that is held in January and June. Faculty and staff teach a two to three week intense period of development courses. According to a number of staff members, the President has boosted the voice and presence of the staff in the College community. A staff member added, “It is good to have leadership that says working together and talking with each other is a priority.”

Residence Life

As all students are required to live on campus, the residence hall environment provides another means of support for Wheaton students. Indeed, we saw examples that demonstrated intentional efforts to connect with students via their living environment. For example, the Student Life department holds weekly meetings that include residence life and athletics staff, as well as a representative from the academic advising office. This approach makes it easier to identify students who may be in need of academic and/or social support, and provides a quick way to identify the most appropriate staff member to intervene in any given situation. Similarly, a hall director told us that she often sits in on meetings to assist students; because she lives with them in the residence halls, she can offer a unique perspective on their development. One such collaborative meeting included the Dean of Students, academic advisor, and the student’s parent. This same hall director told us that she invites students to her apartment each week to enjoy cookies (indeed, a sign hanging in one of the halls served to confirm this). She uses this time to chat informally with the students and connect them with campus initiatives.

The theme houses allow the students the opportunity to craft the living environment to their special interest as does the Beard Living-Learning Community. There is more support staff support for the students living in Beard. This is a new building and a new program, and the Residence Life Staff is working to find ways to link the living environment to the academic mission of the campus.

First-year students with whom we spoke seemed pleased with their residence life experience, which is often highlighted by floor dinners and door decorating contests. According to one student, “I like it a lot. My SM [student mentor] is the biggest sweetheart.” Another student said that she had to live in a forced triple (in a room built to accommodate two students) when she first arrived on campus, but was pleased with the way that Student Life resolved this potentially negative situation. “I totally respect everyone,” she told us. “It’s a great atmosphere.”

⁷ Source: <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/its/projects/public/oclg.pdf>

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Wheaton College's shift to co-education in the late 1980s could have been a disastrous decision. Instead, this event served as a catalyst for the campus community to solidify and reflect upon its mission and values. The result is a decidedly collegial campus environment that provides a quality liberal arts education, characterized by individual attention for all students, both men and women. The institution's commitment to providing a "gender-balanced" education has blossomed into an ethos that attends not only to gender, but to issues of class, race, and ethnicity within its curriculum and co-curriculum. In addition, while now co-educational, the College has held fast to the collaborative and nurturing values that often characterize women's colleges. These elements, blended with a spirit of innovation and creativity, serve to promote a student-centered culture committed to engaging students at high levels during their academic careers.

A testament to its penchant for innovation, the campus has recently been alive with a bevy of new initiatives to promote student engagement. For example, the Multicultural Center opened its doors in 2001, and the College Learning Center and Center for Global Education in 2002. Other recent initiatives include the new general education curriculum and the Beard Living-Learning Community. Staff and faculty involved in many of these programs were modest in estimations of their impact on student engagement; they were careful to point out that these initiatives have not been around long enough to be reflected in their most recent (2002) NSSE data. However, the ethos that supports these programs has been nurtured over a period of decades and thus, predates the NSSE data. Indeed, these cultural elements — collegiality and collaboration, student-centeredness, commitment to innovation, spirit of self-reflection, and gender balance "plus" — are at the heart of what drives student engagement at Wheaton.

Student engagement at Wheaton College is in large part promoted by a strong, cohesive student-centered campus culture. The institutional culture is rooted in the College's all-female history, which guides and shapes traditions and leadership, affirming and shaping student involvement in the campus community to an unusual degree. The campus mission, with its emphasis on "teaching women and men to live and work as equal partners," serves as the core from which these values are formed. A large number of respondents, including faculty, staff, and students, mentioned the concept of a gender neutral campus, thus punctuating its centrality to the campus culture. Senior leaders on campus have played key roles in perpetuating the mission and working to create a seamless learning environment that blurs the lines between student affairs and academic affairs. The multiple ways in which the faculty members are supportive of students is also remarkable and all too rare in American higher education today. As the report has suggested, faculty members provide academic and career support as well as role models of adults who care for and support students in a holistic way. Its cohesive culture, its many traditions and its deeply rooted unifying value of "service" help to generate strong institutional affiliation among students and probably accounts for Wheaton College's high retention and graduation rates as well.

Students at Wheaton are involved in many aspects of the life of the college. To some extent it may appear that they are overly committed. However, we did not encounter evidence of burn-out. This may be attributed to the level of contact between the students and the faculty and

staff. Serving a mentoring role, the faculty and staff seem to help the student monitor and balance their lives.

As the campus increases the number of students of color it will be important for Wheaton to continue its practice of recruiting and retaining staff and faculty of color to help provide role models. In addition, staff members in the Admissions Office and faculty members have had healthy discussions about maintaining the distinguishing characteristics of the institution and deciding what the institution is trying to achieve in terms of its student body. Agreement on a definition that captures Wheaton's functionality will be important. However, Wheaton's long history of dialogue before decision should serve them well on this issue.

Wheaton is facing a major transition as President Marshall will step down next summer. She and her leadership team have guided the campus through the middle and final stages of becoming co-ed and adopting the Wheaton curriculum. Her successor will face the challenges of further implementing the curriculum, continuing to raise the bar on admissions standards and finding the money to support the many fine and enduring traditions of Wheaton College.

Our time on campus confirmed that we made a good choice by including Wheaton in the DEEP project. Many other colleges and universities will benefit from learning about Wheaton's policies and practices along with those at other schools in the DEEP project. At the same time, even educationally effective institutions such as Wheaton have areas in which they can improve, and some of the schools in the DEEP project are using their Reports toward this end. Here are some examples:

- One institution included its DEEP Report as a part of their campus accreditation process.
- Faculty members at another DEEP school used the report to spark dialogue at a faculty retreat and generated recommendations for curriculum improvement and development.
- Governing board members and senior administrators at a third institution intend to combine the DEEP findings with NSSE and other institutional quantitative data to ignite discussion at their annual retreat. They believe this will give them a greater understanding of their students and how to best meet their needs.
- Another school plans to use the DEEP report to focus on inclusion strategies that will assist the institution in becoming a more diverse campus community and help it explore whether or not its institutional mission is clear and explicit in its diversity emphasis, and whether or not the campus enacts a commitment to inclusion.

Perhaps Wheaton can productively adapt one or more of these applications to further enhance the quality of undergraduate education. We would be grateful if you would pass along to us the ways the institution uses this Report or its NSSE data, now and in the future.

The data collection portion of Project DEEP has concluded. We intend to share what we have learned from Wheaton and the other 19 colleges and universities in national presentations and publications over the coming months. Again, we deeply appreciate the opportunity to visit and learn about effective educational practice at Wheaton College and trust you will be pleased with the way in which we portrayed your fine institution.

Appendix A: NSSE Information

The National Survey of Student Engagement

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is cosponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and The Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning. The NSSE project provides colleges and universities with valuable information about students' views of collegiate quality by annually administering a specially designed survey, *The College Student Report*.

The Report is a versatile, research-based tool for gathering information that will focus local and national conversations on learning-centered indicators of quality in undergraduate education.

The Report is useful in several ways:

- institutional improvement – as a diagnostic tool to identify areas in which a school can enhance students' educational experiences and student learning.
- benchmarking instrument – establishing regional and national norms of educational practices and performance by sector.
- public accountability – documenting and improving institutional effectiveness over time.

Designed by national experts, *The College Student Report* asks undergraduate students about their college experiences – how they spend their time, what they feel they've gained from their classes, their assessment of the quality of their interactions with faculty and friends, and other important indicators. Extensive research indicates that good educational practices in the classroom and interactions with others, such as faculty and peers, are directly related to high-quality student outcomes. *The Report* focuses on these practices.

The Report is administered each spring to random samples of first-year students and seniors at public and private four-year colleges and universities. It can be completed either via a traditional paper questionnaire or on the World Wide Web. A demonstration of the Web version and a copy of the paper version of *The Report* are available at www.iub.edu/~nsse.

The random sampling method ensures that the results are comparable, meaningful, credible, and usable for institutional self-study and improvement efforts as well as consortium comparisons and national benchmarking. After your institution provides a student data file and customized invitation letters, NSSE handles the sampling and all aspects of the data collection including mailing surveys directly to students, collecting, checking and scoring completed surveys, and conducting follow-ups with non-respondents. Guidance for the NSSE project is provided by a national advisory board comprised of distinguished educators and a technical advisory panel made up of experts in institutional research and assessment.

Summary of the NSSE Benchmarks of Effective Education Practice

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. A number of questions from NSSE's instrument, *The College Student Report*, correspond to three integral components of academic challenge. Several questions represent the nature and amount of assigned academic work, some reflect the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and several others ask about the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance. Specifically these questions are related to:

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing)
- Reading and writing
- Using higher-order thinking skills
- Working harder than students thought they could to meet an instructor's standards
- An institutional environment that emphasizes studying and academic work

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. And when students collaborate with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material they acquire valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college. Survey questions that contribute to this benchmark include:

- Asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions
- Making class presentations
- Working with other students on projects during class
- Working with classmates outside-of-class to prepare class assignments
- Tutoring or teaching other students
- Participating in community-based projects as part of a regular courses
- Discussing ideas from readings or classes with others

Student Interactions with Faculty Members

In general, the more contact students have with their teachers the better. Working with a professor on a research project or serving with faculty members on a college committee or community organization lets students see first-hand how experts identify and solve practical problems. Through such interactions teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning. Questions used in this benchmark include:

- Discussing grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside-of-class
- Working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)
- Getting prompt feedback on academic performance
- Working with a faculty member on a research project

Enriching Educational Experiences

Educationally effective colleges and universities offer many different opportunities inside and outside the classroom that complement the goals of the academic program. One of the most important is exposure to diversity, from which students learn valuable things about themselves and gain an appreciation for other cultures. Technology is increasingly being used to facilitate the learning process and – when done appropriately – can increase collaboration between peers and instructors, which actively engages students in their learning. Other valuable educational experiences include internships, community service, and senior capstone courses that provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge. As a result, learning is deeper, more meaningful, and ultimately more useful because what students know becomes a part of who they are. Questions from the survey representing these kinds of experiences include:

- Talking with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values
- Talking with students of a different race or ethnicity
- An institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments
- Participating in:
 - internships or field experiences
 - community service or volunteer work
 - foreign language coursework
 - study abroad
 - independent study or self-designed major
 - co-curricular activities
 - a culminating senior experience

Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus. Survey questions contributing to this benchmark describe a campus environment that:

- Helps students succeed academically
- Helps students cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Helps students thrive socially
- Promotes supportive relations between students and their peers, faculty members, and administrative staff

Appendix B: DEEP Research Team Member Biographies

Charles Blaich

Charles Blaich currently serves as the Director of Inquiries at the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts and the Daniel F. Evans Associate Professor of Psychology at Wabash College. He received his Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Connecticut in 1986. After a one year research post-doc, he served as an Assistant and then Associate Professor of Psychology at Eastern Illinois University from 1987-1991. Blaich joined Wabash College in the fall of 1991. In addition to teaching Psychology at Wabash, Blaich served as the co-chair of Cultures and Traditions for two years. Cultures and Traditions is an interdisciplinary year-long course for all sophomores at Wabash College. Blaich received the College's McLain-McTurnan-Arnold Excellence in Teaching Award and two National Science Foundation grants. He also received teaching awards from the University of Connecticut and Eastern Illinois University. In 2001, Blaich became the Special Assistant to the Dean of the College to manage the implementation of the College's Strategic plan.

Sara Hinkle

Sara Hinkle serves as a Project Associate with the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) Institute for Effective Educational Practice at Indiana University (IU). Previously, she worked as Assistant Director of the Office of Summer Freshman Programs and as a Judicial Officer in the Office of Student Ethics at IU. She received her B.A. in psychology from Gettysburg College, her M.S. in counseling from Georgia State University, and is currently a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at IU. Prior to coming to IU, Hinkle worked in various areas of student affairs at Oglethorpe University, Brenau University, Kennesaw State University, and Georgia State University, all in metro Atlanta, as well as with the Semester at Sea program sponsored by the Institute for Shipboard Education.

Bruce Jacobs

Bruce Jacobs currently serves as the Vice Chancellor of Auxiliary Services and Programs at Indiana University Bloomington. His areas of responsibility include housing, the union, campus transportation (bus, parking and motor pool), the auditorium, bookstore, campus ID card services, duplicating and photo services, conferences, and marketing. Jacobs has worked at six different colleges and universities: SUNY at Brockport, Dutchess Community College, Southwest Texas State University, Gettysburg College, Rutgers University and Indiana University (IU). He has worked in residence halls, student activities, Greek affairs, special events (athletics and homecoming), judicial affairs, student unions, and orientation. Jacobs also holds an adjunct Assistant Professor position in the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program at IU where he currently teaches an Administrative Theory class in the Masters Program. In addition, he has served as the coordinator of the HESA masters program at IU. His BS (political science) and MS (education) are from SUNY, Brockport, and his doctorate is from IU in HESA.

Mary Beth Snyder

Mary Beth Snyder currently serves as Vice President for Student Affairs at Oakland University, located in the metropolitan Detroit area. She also teaches occasionally in the higher education track of the counseling program. Oakland is a doctoral institution with over 16,000 students, including 4,000 graduate students.

Snyder earned her baccalaureate degree in English Literature from Western Michigan University and her Master's from The Ohio State University where she worked for seven years in student affairs. She completed her Ph.D. in higher education at UCLA, after which she joined the President's Office of the University of California for six years as the chief policy analyst on all issues that affected student life across the nine-campus system. Following that, Snyder served for a number of years as dean of students at Iowa State University where she also taught in the higher education program.

Elizabeth J. Whitt

Elizabeth J. Whitt is a professor in the College of Education at The University of Iowa, and coordinator of the Student Development in Postsecondary Education and Student Affairs Administration and Research graduate programs. She received the B.A. degree in history from Drake University, M.A. in college student personnel administration from Michigan State University, and Ph.D. in higher education administration and sociology from Indiana University. Whitt served on the faculties at Oklahoma State University, Iowa State University, and University of Illinois at Chicago. She also worked in residence life and student affairs administration at Michigan State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Doane College (NE).

Whitt is associate editor of the *New Directions for Student Services* monograph series, and served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of College Student Development*, the *NASPA Journal*, and the *Review of Higher Education*. She received the Early Career Scholar Award from the Association for the Study of Higher Education in 1995 and, in 1999, the Annuity Coepris Senior Professional Award from ACPA and the Robert H. Shaffer Distinguished Alumnus/na Award from the Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs at Indiana University. In 2002, ACPA named her a Senior Scholar for her contributions to student affairs research and practice.