

STANDARD SIX STUDENTS

Overview

An essential part of the educational experience that Wheaton offers students is directly related to the institution’s residential nature. We believe that each student’s growth is enhanced greatly by living and learning among peers who share intellectual curiosity and an enthusiasm for discovery. Further, we are convinced that students learn from academically talented classmates who bring a range of experiences and perspectives to the classroom, the residence halls, the campus center and student organizations. Finally, we are committed to the idea that knowledge comes not only from the classroom but can also be cultivated through athletics, community service, intercultural experiences, the appreciation of difference and from accepting the challenges of leadership.

Wheaton’s programs and services, indeed all interactions with students, are guided by the understanding that the fundamental benefits of the liberal arts transcend boundaries, that skills gained in one context can be applied in many other situations, that knowledge depends upon the ability to think critically about one’s experiences and the perspectives of others. The college has acted on this philosophy in myriad ways that have enriched campus life, enhanced student learning and strengthened community—from its successes in enrolling a diverse group of intellectually curious and engaged students to the expansion of student health programs in ways that embrace the whole individual. While we see room for continued improvement, we believe the principles that have guided the college over the past ten years will serve us well in navigating the challenges that lie ahead.

PART I: ADMISSION AND STUDENT FINANCIAL SERVICES

Description and Appraisal

The Admission Office has been more than successful in the ten years since Wheaton's last reaccreditation visit. Virtually all admission measures—volume, quality and diversity—have improved. The most important gains are represented below.

Table 1: Admission Trends

	1997	1998	1999	2007	2008
Inquiries	16,567	16,070	15,980	13,545	13,473
Conversion (%)	14	15	15	28	28
Applications	2305	2417	2461	3833	3827
Selectivity (%)	73	72	72	44	43
Accepts	1681	1731	1762	1703	1653
Yield (%)	27	26	25	26	26
Deposits	462	457	447	451	427
Opening Day	438	435	427	422	420
Deposit Retention (%)	95	95	96	93.5	98

Growth in the applicant pool has been the key to other successes in the last ten years. It enabled Wheaton to become more selective, leading to an increase in Wheaton's popularity. Increased popularity brought with it more applications, which, in turn, prompted greater selectivity, creating a positive cycle. The biggest single-

year increase in our applicant pool came in 2000, for the class of 2004. The size of the applicant pool gave the college the confidence to eliminate non-binding Early Notification, resulting in an increase in the Early Decision applicant pool. By increasing the Early Decision pool, we were able to secure a larger percentage of the incoming class, allowing us to become more selective in the Regular Decision process. The subsequent addition of an Early Decision II option provided another avenue for students to commit to Wheaton as a first choice, enabling us to improve selectivity as illustrated above.

Yield has remained fairly consistent over the last ten years. While an even stronger yield continues to be a goal, it remains impressive that we have held our own, even as applicants have become much stronger and we now compete more directly against schools with much higher rankings and prestige. Also noteworthy is Wheaton's rate of converting inquiries to applications. Relative to our competitors, the applicant pool is derived from a much smaller base of inquiries. While this efficiency is cost-effective, the significant improvement in our ability to convert inquiries to applicants in the last ten years suggests that we could increase our applicant pool even more by growing our inquiry base. As mentioned, the growth in our applicant pool fueled other successes, the most exciting of which relate to academic quality (Table 2) and diversity (Table 3).

Table 2: Academic Quality of Applicants

	1997	1998	1999	2007	2008
Applicants submitting SAT (%)	26	23	25	47	55
SAT verb/reading	600	600	600	605	630
SAT math/quant	580	585	590	595	620
GPA	3.05	3.05	3.05	3.1	3.5

Soon after growing the Early Decision pool and reducing the rate of admission in the regular pool, we experienced gains in average GPA and SAT scores. Improved selectivity and quality changed the conventional view of Wheaton from that of a “backup school” to that of a desirable option for bright students. Winning the first of three Rhodes Scholarships, a British Marshall, and a series of Truman Scholarships early in this decade contributed significantly to our positive external image. These national awards underscored Wheaton's academic quality, and they enhanced the college’s reputation among academically talented students.

Despite fluctuations from year to year, the overall trend for the most important diversity measures has been positive during the last ten years. Wheaton has attracted significantly larger pools of students of color, men, legacies and candidates from outside New England. The table below shows that the general direction of our enrollment results has improved.

Table 3: Diversity of Applicants

	1997	1998	1999	2007	2008
Male/Female (%)	37/63	32/68	34/66	33/67	34/64
Students of Color (%)	65	64	56	93	72
West Coast	24	34	31	42	44
Legacies	40	27	38	25	47

The recent gains in ethnic diversity are likely the result of increased engagement by the Wheaton community and its efforts to attract students of color (SOC). Wheaton's participation in the Posse Foundation leadership

scholarship program has generated increased interest among a diverse range of students from New York City and has infused the campus with bright and talented leaders, many of whom are students of color. A new publication and an open house program emphasizing diversity, both launched in 2005, have been well received and correlate with increases in the applicant and enrolled SOC numbers. In addition, the representation of SOCs in important campus leadership positions, many of whom are Posse Scholars, may well have made Wheaton attractive to prospective students of color and to majority students interested in diversity.

Geographic diversity improved as admission staff increased recruitment efforts outside the Northeast. Improved results from the West Coast correlate directly with the opening of a western regional branch of the Admission Office in 1998 (Table 3).

In addition to the measurable improvements listed above, the Admission Office has been successful in the following ways:

- Developing publications that effectively portray the values embodied in the college's mission statement, such as collaboration, intellectual curiosity and diversity. In the last ten years, admission publications have portrayed SOC and majority faculty-student research partnerships, student academic initiatives, internships and study abroad.
- Using new technology to streamline admission operations. The Office of Admission now receives the majority of its applications online and downloads them directly into our information system, thus bypassing data entry steps. In addition, students are able to view the status of their application and any missing credentials online. Finally, admission decisions are delivered electronically.
- Using new technology to market the college. Online chats, blogs, virtual campus tours, online registration for tours and open houses are among the many ways that admission has improved its communication and outreach to prospective students.
- Promoting opportunities in Boston and Providence. Our location between two desirable cities is a great attraction for prospective students and we have effectively capitalized on this selling point through online and print communications.
- Communicating core messages that reflect institutional values. By working with Jan Krukowski and Associates, we have fine-tuned a set of messages about what Wheaton offers and values. These messages have been portrayed consistently in our publications.
- Assessing our success. As this report clearly documents, the Office of Admission, by its very function, is committed to assessing its results annually. The office prepares an annual report capturing the most important data and trends from the previous year. In addition, the Office conducts matriculant/non-matriculant research almost every year, using the New York firm Kane, Parson Associates. Periodically, the Office of Admission engages the services of Jan Krukowski Associates to help in framing market research questions. Finally, the offices of admission and student financial services work collaboratively with Steve Brooks of SHBrooks every year on econometric modeling of the first year class. Research and data inform the strategic decisions of the office yearly.

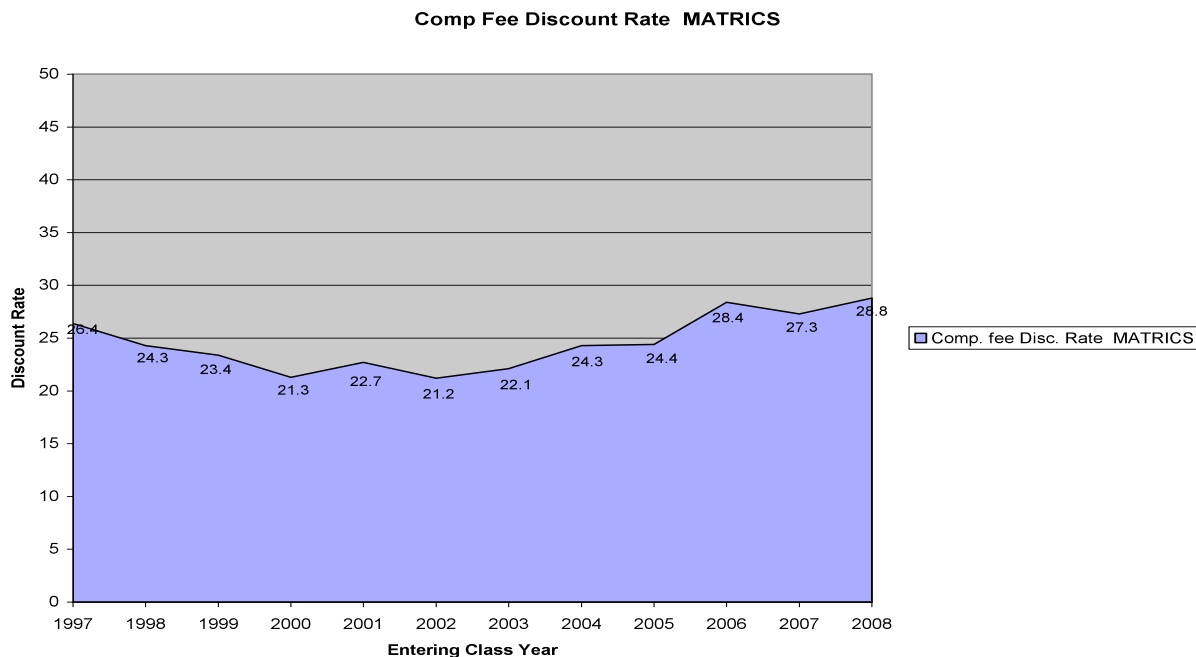
Student Financial Services

Wheaton's financial aid program is a key component of our recruitment success. The merit scholarship and need-based financial aid programs support the institutional goals of improving the diversity and quality of our enrolled students.

In order to meet competing demands of controlling escalating financial aid expenditures while improving student quality and diversity, financial aid policy has focused on yielding a more even distribution of students across all income levels. In the mid 1990s, Wheaton was faced with a growing discount rate at a

steep upward trajectory. The college made two significant decisions. The first was to merge the front-end customer services of the Bursar's Office with the Office of Student Aid and College Financing and to house the new organization (Student Financial Services) within the Admission Division. This reinforced the role of the unit as dedicated to the enrollment services of the college. The second was to employ the services of an outside consultant using econometric modeling to evaluate the college's use of financial aid dollars.

Figure 1: Comprehensive Fee Discount Rate for Matriculants



The goal of this modeling was to target our financial aid resources more efficiently and effectively in support of college goals. The newly restructured Division of Admission and Student Financial Services worked with consultant Steve Brooks, of SHBrooks, Inc. to develop strategies that would more effectively leverage our financial aid dollars. As a result of strategic leveraging and the opportunities afforded by excess capacity, Wheaton's discount rate dropped significantly in the years between 1997 and 2002 (Figure 1). Since 2003 we have experienced an increase that began as modest movement upward, but in recent years has risen more dramatically.

A number of factors contributed to the increase in discount rate over the past five years. As the college reached its targeted enrollment, the flexibility afforded by bringing in a larger class ceased to exist. Competition from our overlap schools in the merit and need-based programs has become significant as the college's academic profile has improved. We now compete more broadly for students. At the top of our applicant pool, we compete with the most selective private liberal arts colleges that award full-need packages to admitted students, often without any loan component. At the mid-range, we continue to compete with many strong colleges with more significant merit scholarship programs. In light of these challenges, we have been very successful.

Some of the upward movement in the discount rate has been intentional, fueled by an increased commitment on the part of the Board of Trustees to need-based aid through Project Scholarship. Launched by the Board of Trustees in 2006, Project Scholarship brought expendable bridge funding to the financial aid programs in order to significantly reduce, if not eliminate, gaps in need-based financial aid packages. This funding, \$6 million over five years, was intended to address the gap identified in 2006 between our awards and students' demonstrated need. It is to be replaced by increased endowment for financial aid being raised by the college in its current comprehensive campaign. Thus, the Board of Trustees made it a priority to improve need-based aid packages as a recruitment and retention strategy.

While Project Scholarship provided a positive boost for student financial aid program, the current economic downturn is increasing pressure on the institution. The college is experiencing an increase in the percentage of applicants applying for financial aid. Without any excess capacity to offset the increased aid packages, we control the discount rate by controlling the percent of students receiving institutional funding and reducing the average award through increased capacity to pay in our applicant and admitted populations.

Projections

While there is much to celebrate from the admission and student financial services perspective over the past decade, Wheaton faces many significant challenges ahead. Institutional and market forces are converging in ways that threaten to erode many of our recent accomplishments. The most significant challenges appear to be:

Demographics: Though the number of U.S. high school graduates is projected to grow, the increases will not come in Wheaton's traditional markets. Despite recent success in attracting a more geographically diverse student body, we predict that the majority of Wheaton students still will come from the Northeast, an area that will see average declines in high school graduates of about 10 percent per state. We can target our efforts in parts of the country where high school graduates are projected to surge, but the anticipated increases will be largely first-generation, immigrant, urban populations in states that typically retain their college-bound population. Certainly, we may be able to attract some students from these areas (South, Southeast, and Southwest). However, Wheaton's cost, climate, admission profile and location will make significant gains unlikely. Instead, we expect to penetrate current markets and look internationally to emerging markets like China and India. Wheaton's percentage of international students is still modest enough to allow for growth.

Financial aid/Wheaton's endowment: Wheaton's relatively small endowment limits its ability to meet the financial need of many desirable candidates. Wheaton is caught between the lower tier schools with larger merit awards and top-tier schools whose endowments allow them to meet the full financial need of all accepted students, many without loan as part of a financial aid package. As a result, high-talent, needy students who prefer Wheaton often end up at more prestigious competitors because of better financial aid awards. Conversely, less strong students whose Wheaton aid awards include gaps tend to choose lower-prestige schools that gave them substantial merit awards. Annual modeling on the value of Wheaton merit awards shows that the only way to increase the yield on merit recipients substantially is to raise the award level. After years of growth in our Early Decision pool, we have seen a general downward trend since 2004 that appears to be tied to families' concern about committing to Wheaton before seeing financial aid awards from other schools. If the Early Decision pool continues to shrink, it will be almost impossible to maintain recent selectivity levels.

The Economy: As the economy has weakened, building the pool of applicants with capacity to pay all, or even most of the cost of a Wheaton education has become more challenging. As more of our applicants qualify for need-based financial aid, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain our discount rate without compromising on some other strategic goal. Retention of current students will require a particular sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs created by extraordinary economic times.

Employment Opportunities for Students: Work performed by Wheaton students supports a broad range of programs and services on campus, provides opportunities for significant curricular and co-curricular learning, and provides a modest but significant source of income to pay for incidental expenses of college. We anticipate greater demand for employment by students, both those who have previously chosen not to use the work portion of their need-based financial aid awards Federal Work-Study program, and those who do not qualify for need-based awards. Identifying work opportunities for these students is a pressing task, one that teams our staff with that of the Filene Center for Academic Advising and Career Services.

Financial Literacy: The staff of the Office of Student Financial Services has paired with the Student Government Association (SGA) to develop and deliver financial literacy programming to students. As college costs increase, more students need to learn about budgeting strategies and money management.

Loan Market Contraction: Students and parents may find themselves having more difficulty securing financing in the coming months or year(s), as even more private education loan lenders exit the market. Lending criteria have become more stringent, and ultimately, a family with significant economic distress through job loss or other major unexpected events may find itself without the credit necessary to finance the expected family contribution (EFC). Moving quickly as the FFELP and private loan markets changed in 2007, Wheaton got ahead of the issue in 2008 by converting from the FFELP loan program to Federal Direct loans, which assures student and *qualified* parent borrowers a source of capital.

Budget Modeling: As we move forward in a weakened economy, we will need more than ever to re-evaluate the models we use to estimate anticipated financial aid needs for returning students as well as the new class. Our experience with the Class of 2012 alerts us to anticipate an increase in the percentage of the applicant pool expecting some sort of tuition discount, either merit or need-based. Through inflation we have witnessed a significant decline in the real value of our merit scholarships; protecting yield among no- and low-need scholars will require us to bolster award amounts. Recent events have shown us that, while we have held an annual contingency in funds for financial aid, it may not be enough when an economic downturn is as significant as what we are now experiencing. The matter of how to rebalance funds available and “on reserve” to hedge against expected and unexpected changes must be revisited.

All these factors contribute to a climate of uncertainty. Wheaton can weather these challenges for a period of years based on its improved position over the last decade, but the interconnectedness of the demographic and fiscal picture is likely to force the college to recognize the possibility that it may compromise gains in selectivity and quality measures. It will become increasingly challenging to enroll high-caliber students in an environment where Wheaton cannot compete on financial aid against well-endowed institutions. And troubled economic times alone will likely force institutions like Wheaton to dig deeper into their applicant pools to enroll classes.

However, the platform from which Wheaton looks forward is solid, based on its gains in the past ten years. A broader national reach and reputation, the success of its graduates, the strength of its faculty, and its commitment to excellence and diversity will help the Office of Admission to promote, cultivate and enroll strong students to assure Wheaton’s future success.

Table 4: Profile of Admitted Applicants

	1997	1998	1999	2007	2008
Percent Applying for Need-Based Aid	66.8	67.7	67.9	64.2	68.2
Med. Income (Comp FAR)*	59,663	60,607	65,966	88,123	94,135
Avg. EFC (Comp FAR)**	18,055	19,524	22,849	33,984	35,200
Avg. Need (Comp FAR)	13,471	13,831	13,392	19,611	20,550
Avg. Grant	4,925	5,031	5,453	9,218	10,792
Percent on grant	53.3	52.3	53.2	61.2	65.3
Percent merit only	16	14.6	18.8	31.4	31.8

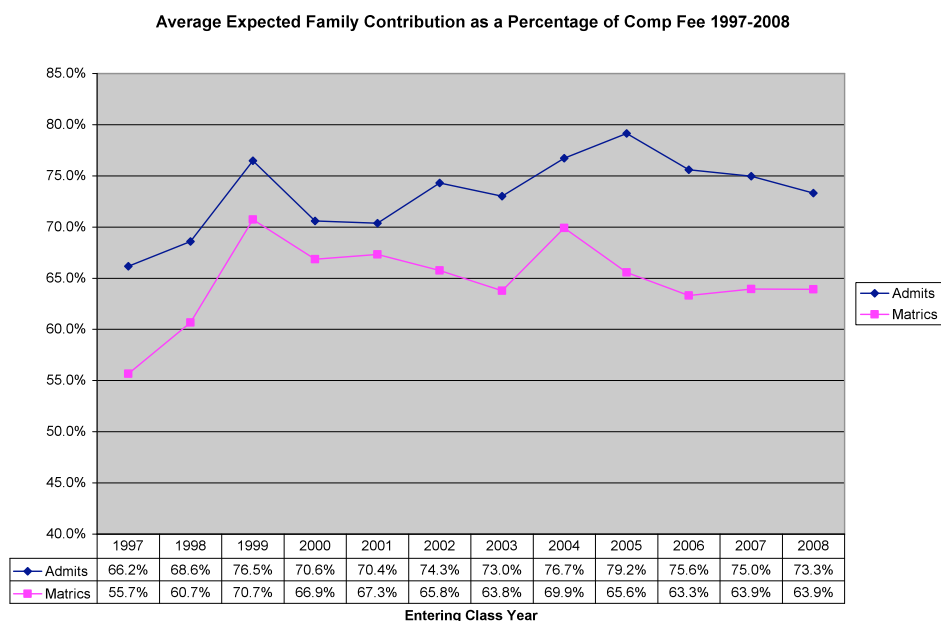
Table 5: Profile of Enrolled Applicants

	1997	1998	1999	2007	2008
Percent Applying for Need-Based Aid	70.2	67.8	66.1	67.9	72.0
Med. Income (Comp FAR)	53,576	55,093	63,059	76,571	79,488
Avg. EFC (Comp FAR)	15,194	17,270	21,134	28,984	30,686
Avg. Need (Comp FAR)	15,586	15,307	14,647	22,135	23,030
Avg. Grant	7,204	6,908	6,987	12,393	13,832
Percent on grant	66.4	63.6	61.1	68.1	65.2
Percent merit only	9.3	12	13.5	19.2	13.9

* Comp FAR: Completed Financial Aid Requestor. This term is used to distinguish data that report all aid requestors from data reporting on those who completed an aid application and had their eligibility for financial aid determined by Wheaton staff.

** EFC: Expected Family Contribution, as calculated by Wheaton staff, based on data submitted by the applicant.

Figure 2: Trend in Expected Family Contribution



PART II: DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Description

It has been propitious for this self-study process, particularly for Standards Six and Four, that Wheaton underwent a major outside assessment review as part of project DEEP. That study, based on NSSE data and two in-depth campus visits, identified many important strengths that emerge from Wheaton’s holistic approach to education, our collegial campus environment, our underlying commitment to gender balance, and our spirit of innovation and responsiveness to changing social contexts. While we are fully aware of the current issues we face—many of which were identified as we prepared to search for and hire a new dean of students between 2007 and 2009—we are confident that our foundations in student affairs, indeed all across the campus, are adequate to the task of rebuilding, remodeling, and building anew.

The Project DEEP final report of December 2003, which provides important outside assessment of our student-centered approach to education, noted something important about the campus culture, namely, “...

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.” 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.’”

We see this inclusiveness as integral to our community identity, and we believe this is truer today than it was in 2003. Recent campus debates and discussions—some triggered by this very self study process, others by our perennial review of ourselves as an Honor Code community—have elicited expressions of concern by students that their opinions, views and desires about social issues are being ignored or devalued. For example, this perception emerged as staff members sought ways to make workable an alcohol policy that upholds the law while remaining committed to the Honor Code of respect for student integrity. We anticipate that this debate will continue to provide a healthy context in which we can work on these issues together.

The dean and student affairs staff members work to ensure that students realize that being part of the Wheaton community “involves making an active commitment to a life and a community that matters.” The Dean of Students Office ensures the qualifications, experience and overall competence of the staff. A special Hewlett grant provides for professional development and training. Staff members contribute to our students’ development outside the classroom, providing them with a truly co-curricular education. Inclusion and diversity are prominent themes in all programming, with special attention given to the cultivation of leadership development and civic engagement.

Growth and change have been at the core of student affairs over the past decade. The Office of Student Life was created in the 1990s, integrating the separate staffs of Student Activities and Office of Residential Life into a single administrative unit. Wheaton created a new position of associate dean for academic and campus life, with dual reporting to the provost and dean of students, to provide leadership for campus diversity, inclusion efforts and the new Marshall Multicultural Center, which opened in 2001 and dedicated during this same period. The center was recently transformed into the Marshall Center for Intercultural Learning, to better reflect its evolving mission. The director of student life position was enhanced and transformed into the associate dean of student life in order to recognize the increasing responsibilities of that office. With the retirement of a long-term director of student health services, we expanded and redesigned that area into the Office of Health and Wellness with an associate dean of health and wellness/director of student health services to guide our new programs and services. We created a new Office of Service, Spirituality, and Social Responsibility to coordinate growing needs for leadership and program development in these areas, and hired a new associate dean for service, spirituality and social responsibility. And finally our long time dean of students and vice president for student affairs, Sue Alexander, who led this division creatively and steadily for over 20 years and who guided our successful transition to coeducation, retired in 2008. Senior Associate Dean Jack Kuszaj served as interim dean during 2008-2009 while we searched for a new vice president and dean of students. Lee Williams joined Wheaton in that position on July 1, 2009.

The Office of Student Life organizes its work under four separate goals: creating a safe, secure, and well-maintained environment; empowering students to engage in a living learning community; serving as a valued and respected campus resource; and developing leadership opportunities and training for students. Each goal encompasses several objectives related to student activities, programming (general and multicultural), housing and residential life, leadership development, club and organization advising, management of the campus center, and general operations.

Housing and Residence Life

For students, the sense of community begins with the places in which they live. The vast majority of Wheaton’s students live on campus in one of the college’s 30 residences. The campus offers a variety of living options, from traditional co-ed and single-sex residence halls to living-learning residences and student-developed theme houses that enrich the community with programming on special topics. Despite the options available to students, however, housing for new and returning students continues to be a challenge at Wheaton College. For the past five years, the college has begun each academic year with nearly half of new

students housed in forced triples and quads. The crowding affects new and returning students because of increased demand on facilities and staff; inadequate space for study and socializing (many of the lounges have been used to house new students); and the prolonged discomfort of new students already struggling with transition issues. The college's ability to respond to requests for room changes is also hampered by the lack of space. Moreover, the size of the January class has had a direct impact on the number of room changes the college is able to make during the spring semester.

The following strategies for increasing housing space are currently being explored:

- Review current housing policies and practices in an effort to make more efficient use of existing bed spaces.
- Conduct an audit of existing campus bed spaces and reconcile Banner space utilization data and housing reports.
- Convert suitable existing space on campus to student bed space.
- Construct additional student bed space.

Creating and maintaining a vibrant learning community for students has been an ongoing priority at Wheaton. In 2005, theme houses were given new goals and evaluative criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the house activities and events. Job descriptions and a list of responsibilities for house presidents, as well as a system of rewards and recognition of success have also been developed. Houses have been able to sustain their themes over multiple years through increasingly effective programming.

Beard, Keefe and Gebbie halls have been the centers of the learning community. Over the years, the learning community model put in place in the late 1990s floundered and students began to communicate how little they understood about the intent of the program. In 2007, the student life staff evaluated the learning experience in Beard, Keefe and Gebbie through focus groups and informal surveys. As a result, the office formulated a new learning community model for Keefe and Gebbie. The new model includes a small group of first year and sophomore students participating in a year-long experience in Keefe and Gebbie residence halls. In addition, the new faculty-in-residence position plays a leadership role in reconceptualizing and implementing the learning community and helping to work with residents in Keefe and Gebbie.

Student Activities

The philosophy that students enhance their learning through campus leadership guides the management of student activities. Co-curricular activities throughout the campus are initiated and/or supported by the Office of Student Life, which provides programs that offer students a diverse array of experiences and challenges. Each year, through planning and/or advising, Student Life is involved with an average of 190 programs, and leads major institutional programs including Welcome Week, Homecoming, Spring Weekend, and Orientation. Students play a major role in planning these activities and running campus organizations. Additionally, student life staff members, working with a joint student/staff advisory committee, manage the Balfour-Hood Campus Center repurposing and refurbishing spaces as needs change. For example, the Rhodes Student Leadership Office, a center for clubs and organizations, opened in fall 2008 using space that was underutilized. Student Life continually works with students on event management through regular interaction, programming clinics, and training workshops.

Students are able to plan, organize and develop activities and events through student clubs and organizations; through the Programming Council of the Student Government Association; as programming interns for special themed months such as Women's History; or for venues such as The Loft and Lyons Den; and also by getting involved as Orientation leaders and assistants. The following examples illustrate collaborations between students and the college's staff, particularly the Office of Student Life:

- Since 2004, students, faculty and staff have collaborated on the Safe Zone program, developing training materials and educational sessions for issues related to the LGBT community. More than

150 students (not including some 80 resident advisors), have participated in the training since 2005, along with 72 staff and faculty members. The committee also provides services and information to allies, sponsors programs with the Counseling Center on coming out, and facilitates workshops.

- Student interns, working in partnership with professional staff, create programs and activities related to various theme months, such as Latino Heritage, LGBT Pride, Black History, Women's History, and APIMESA, ensuring every theme month/week includes multiple-identity programming, related to race, gender and sexuality.
- The student-run organizations BACCHUS and Programming Council collaborate with Public Safety, the Office of Health and Wellness, and Student Life in developing and presenting programs without alcohol, providing education about social hosting laws for students living off-campus and education for all students regarding drinking, driving, and making good choices.

As described above the Student Life staff assumes primary responsibility for a number of programs, all of which are carried out in collaboration with other parts of the Student Affairs Division. Two key programs are summarized below.

New Student Orientation: The emphasis on building a student-centered learning community begins with New Student Orientation, which aims to assist new students in their transition to college through programs and activities that welcome them to the campus; prepare them for the rigor of the Wheaton academic community; and position them for success in the college residential environment. An Orientation Committee, consisting of students, members of the Academic Advising Office, and various student affairs personnel, is coordinated by the Office of Student Life, which bears primary responsibility for planning and implementing this institutionally important event. Over the last decade the intellectual and academic dimensions of orientation have been enhanced to ensure that faculty and students are afforded sufficient time for consideration and discussion of issues beyond routine advising and course selection. Faculty members who teach the First Year Seminar participate in orientation in several ways, and FYS advising groups are an organizational structure for many activities. Evaluations indicate that advising team meetings with student preceptors (FYS peer advisors), are consistently well received and students report feeling very connected to their preceptors by the end of orientation. In general, post-orientation evaluations, while indicating that we have a successful model in place, always lead us to tinker in various ways with both social and academic components of New Student Orientation.

With increasing January admissions in recent years, January Orientation, which began in 2005, continues to be a challenge. Ensuring that students entering in January have an experience similar to that of the students who arrive at the start of the academic year presents both financial and logistical concerns.

Student Leadership Development: In the fall of 2007, the college launched the Wheaton Initiative for Leadership Learning (WILL), a formal leadership training program for students. WILL is a collaborative project that brings together the human and financial resources of multiple divisions to develop opportunities for student learning and the practice of leadership skills. The WILL program philosophy is that the foundation for leadership development on the Wheaton campus must be built on the principles of partnership, collaboration, ethical decision making and cultural sensitivity. WILL incorporates an integrated approach to student leadership with the goal of developing culturally sensitive, globally aware student leaders able to sustain their organizations, deal with a myriad of constituencies, and manage the challenges of leadership in a dynamic community. We hope to help students build transferable skills to increase the level of sophistication and responsibility of student leaders. Programs include a student leadership conference, workshops on the social justice model of leadership, and a class for seniors entitled "Beyond the Bubble," which helps students prepare for networking, job interviews, and social business situations.

Wheaton operates on the philosophy that all of a student's campus involvements provide opportunities to lead. For example, our athletics program supports the belief that skills learned through athletics participation

are valuable personal, social, and recreational tools that can be used to enrich the lives of individuals in our society, and the Department of Athletics staff is involved in leadership development both inside and outside of athletics in numerous ways. As part of the WILL team, the associate director is involved in the Beyond the Bubble program, and the Department of Athletics helps fund that program. Similarly, the Peer Health Advocates (PHA) program brings a strong student voice to student health advocacy and promotion, encouraging leadership development through a number of activities that PHAs undertake as ambassadors and advocates.

Intercultural Learning

Wheaton's commitment to inclusive excellence is rooted in the institution's history as a women's college, and it distinguishes the college today from many other schools. The college has succeeded in recruiting a diverse student body (as noted above), and it has developed programs to help students make the most of the multicultural perspectives on campus and the intercultural emphasis in our curriculum. The Marshall Center for Intercultural Learning and the campus-wide President's Action Committee on Intercultural Education (PACIE) are evidence of, and contribute enormously to, Wheaton's commitment to enhancing excellence and diversity on campus. The existence of these programs and initiatives also helps in recruiting a diverse study body.

In 2001, the Marshall Center, a gathering space for students for a number of years, became a fully staffed center and began offering programs and services. The center operates under the guidance of the Office of the Provost and collaborates closely both with the Filene Center and with Student Affairs. On April 15, 2005, the center was dedicated to Dale Rogers Marshall, former president of Wheaton College. The center offers academic, cultural and co-curricular programs, including a two-day pre-orientation program to introduce students to the resources available to them at Wheaton; a variety of academic support programs, such as study skills and time management workshops; special programs for juniors and seniors that focus on planning for graduate and professional schools and careers.

The center works with the student life office to provide assistance with planning, financial support for and implementation of theme month and commemorative celebrations such as Latino Heritage Month, National Coming Out Week, Black History Month and LGBT Pride Week, among others. The Marshall Center is involved in leadership initiatives that support and supplement the WILL program. The Marshall Center staff also partner with faculty, with other offices and with student clubs and organizations to coordinate inclusive women and gender programming. These efforts at including students in the cultivation of diverse excellence are further reinforced by the President's Action Committee on Inclusive Excellence (PACIE), which includes student members. The committee has served as a catalyst for community-wide discussions about diversity and appreciation of difference by conducting surveys on the campus climate, holding focused group discussions and by initiating a dialogue action process.

Service, Spirituality and Social Responsibility

Wheaton's focus on intercultural learning also is reflected in the Office of Service, Spirituality and Social Responsibility (SSSR), which was created in 2005. As its name implies, this office works with students, staff and faculty to develop programs that address renewed student interest in spiritual exploration as well as community service and civic leadership. This renewed interest is seen nationally in higher education institutions of all types.

The overarching goal of SSSR is to educate students to be change agents on campus, in society and globally. SSSR's cross-divisional work is guided by an advisory council made up of faculty, staff, students and an alumna. Frequent articles in the student newspaper and other college publications, the regional newspaper (*Sun Chronicle*) and occasional national coverage, most recently of our bi-partisan voter education programs in the *Christian Science Monitor* and over *Voice of America*, indicate how active SSSR has become and the unique role that it plays.

Several grants have helped fund the wide array of programs and initiatives that the SSSR staff support, connecting faculty, administration and community partners to students and students to their own passions and talents. To date, the SSSR staff members have worked with faculty in over 20 departments to create programs ranging from artists-in-residence to one-time classroom lectures. The most successful examples of these connections include theme-based service components incorporated into a growing numbers of FYS classes through Season of Service; the Beyond Common Ground series, stressing the educational value of respectful engagement across ideological as well as cultural differences; and the coordination of post-partisan voter-education events that draw on faculty expertise to shed light on complex election issues. The office worked with others to coordinate Community Day, which brings representatives of more than 30 local agencies to campus. It reintroduced a service experience for our first year students in fall 2008 (Season of Service) involving 20 community agencies and over two dozen work sites during the past fall semester. SSSR has also revitalized Wheaton's long-time relationship with the HERO Program, a college access initiative at Brockton High School.

SSSR has developed an education-through-celebration model that invites the entire community to explore religious diversity on campus and experience holy day observances from various religious traditions. Working with religious and non-religious student groups, SSSR hosts observances from Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Wiccan traditions. Created at a time when the world seems polarized politically and religiously, SSSR consistently seeks opportunities to challenge assumptions about the politics of religion. For example, flying the rainbow flag from the front of the chapel during Pride Week and developing programs such as spirituality and gay family life provide opportunities for SSSR to support the college's policy on equal rights and mutual respect. Such activities also serve to illuminate the role religious people have played in the gay rights and other civil rights movements, while also providing a forum for more conservative students to ask whether Wheaton's passion for diversity and respect extends to the Right as well as the Left.

Academic Support Services for Students

Although Standard Four provides detail about academic support services that, it is important to note here that all the offices in the Student Affairs division work closely with the staff of the Filene Center for Academic Advising and Career Services in program development and in meeting student interests. A holistic approach to the lives of students requires cross-divisional work. For example, when peer advisors in the residence halls have concerns about students with academic problems, appropriate steps are taken to work with the advising center staff or with faculty advisors. Career planning presentations and discussions are part of the learning outside the classroom to which student affairs personnel are committed. Staff members in SSSR, the Office of Health and Wellness, as well as athletics frequently work with academic deans and faculty in their program development efforts.

The Committee on Academic Standing reviews the academic standing of all students at the end of each semester and certifies good standing, assigns probationary status, suspends or dismisses students, based on their academic performances. It meets regularly to act on requests from students for exceptions to stated requirements, to consider and develop policies regarding class and examination schedules, the college calendar, degree requirements, credit for courses taken elsewhere, and other matters relating to academic policies. The committee determines criteria for departmental honors, Latin honors, and the Dean's List. (The committee has recommended raising criteria for several academic honors during the past four years; specifically requirements for Latin Honors and for the Dean's List.) This committee also reviews applications from students and graduates for scholarships and fellowship for summer school, and post-graduate work, awards Wheaton Foundation Grants to support undergraduate research, and determines whom the college shall nominate for national and international fellowships that require a college nomination.

Athletics

Wheaton's broad philosophy of education embraces athletics as an important and valuable part of the student experience. Athletics, whether it be at the intercollegiate, recreational or club level, offers students the opportunity to exercise their competitive spirit and sense of discipline while also developing leadership and teamwork skills. At Wheaton, the athletics programs are managed with a commitment to promoting scholar athletes, with a shared understanding that academics come first. As such, it is an important part of a well-rounded educational experience for our students, and it is an enormously successful program.

Since the 1999-2000 academic year, Wheaton has enjoyed unprecedented athletic success, winning seven NCAA national championships, nine ECAC titles and a combined 70 NEWMAC regular season and tournament crowns. In that time, the college has also sent 74 of its teams to NCAA championships. Individually, Wheaton has boasted numerous awards, including 63 national champion accolades, 249 All-America laurels, 616 all-conference honors and 202 academic all-conference qualifiers.

Equally significant is the all-around student involvement in athletics: 1,004 (63 percent) current students participate in varsity and/or club sports. In 2005-6, the first year intramural and club sport participation rates were combined into "Recreational Sports", there were 853 participants (55 percent). Last year, 2007-2008, showed the largest number of participants recorded to date: a total of 1,558, with some students participating in more than one sport.

The academic success of our student athletes has always been paramount in the continued growth and development of our coeducational varsity athletics program. The staff continue to work closely with the Admission Office to ensure that coaches are recruiting students who meet the admission standards of the college. Faculty representatives (FARs) play a major role in communicating the purpose of the athletics program to all faculty in collaboration with the provost's office. FARs meet on a regular basis with any student athletes who are having academic problems. Athletics also works closely with the provost, registrar, advising and institutional research on monitoring and remediation (when necessary) the academic performance/progress of individual athletes and teams. Coaches work with the advising center and faculty on individual student athlete academic concerns, and advising collaborates with athletics to deal with any student athletes who are on academic probation.

The athletics staff in conjunction with the Office of Student Life has worked with coaches to integrate athletes into the larger student population. Carolyn Wills April '05, a four-year member and starter on the women's soccer team, exemplifies the college's emphasis on supporting scholar athletes. April was named Wheaton's second Rhodes Scholar and is one of a number of student athletes who have won academic honors.

Wheaton's commitment to gender equity is embodied in its approach to athletics. The athletics department structures the funding for the athletic program to conform to the college goal of maintaining a 60-40 percent ratio of women to men to reflect the ratio of the overall student population. Comparable sports have comparable operating, recruiting and salary budgets. Our facilities are shared equally for practice and contests.

As noted earlier, the Department of Athletics staff is involved in leadership opportunities outside of athletics in numerous ways, particularly through the WILL program. Skills learned through athletics participation are valuable personal, social and recreational tools that can be useful throughout life. The values and concepts inherent in athletics participation are those of the college itself. Members of the Department of Athletics are held to the highest standards of integrity, ethical behavior and sportsmanship.

Health and Wellness

Wheaton approaches student health and wellness with the recognition that being well and doing well in college are inextricably linked. The college has taken numerous steps to promote student health through a comprehensive set of programs that include athletics and fitness facilities, as noted above, as well as a number of related offerings.

In 2005, following the endorsement by the President's Council of a revised strategic plan, the college reconceptualized its Health Services department as the Office of Health and Wellness (WHW) under the direction of a new associate dean for health and wellness/director of student health services. WHW demonstrates Wheaton's commitment to student health by balancing health promotion and education (proactive interventions) with health care provision (responsive health interventions). This broader platform allows a social-ecological model of campus health that links the health of individual students with the health of the college, acknowledging the complex influences in and around individuals, including their relationships, community and social factors. WHW further emphasizes a comprehensive health protection approach by matching individual student support with environmental management. Appropriately, WHW's operating principles include dependable access, professional and compassionate care, cultural competence, active partnerships on and off campus, advocacy designed to empower health-competent students, and alignment with Wheaton's mission and vision.

The Peer Health Advocates (PHA) program brings a strong student voice to student health advocacy and promotion. PHAs serve as health ambassadors connecting students to health-related information and resources, and they help do the grassroots work necessary to remove health barriers and enhance a campus support structure that encourage healthy living. Finally PHAs participate in service learning through real world experience in public health, health promotion and disease prevention.

In order to ensure student access to quality health care, Wheaton maintains partnerships with the Norton Medical Center, an on-campus health clinic available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with 24-hour triage via an on-call doctor, as well as partnerships with Mansfield Health Center, a walk-in clinic, Sturdy Memorial Hospital, a community hospital, and the Norton Emergency Medical Service.

Wheaton utilizes *MyStudentBody*, a web-based student health education resource, and WHW initiated the Health Services (HS) 101 Campaign, an ongoing series of resources, presentations and events offered to entering students and the rest of the college community, designed to orient the community to our college health information, health service providers, administrators and system components. The staff at WHW is guided by the Standards of Practice for Health Promotion in Higher Education and the standards of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) to ensure consistent, quality evidence-based health education and promotional practices. Wheaton collects quantitative and qualitative data to understand student needs for health services and health education.

Counseling Center

The Counseling Center provides individual counseling and therapy for students, and psychological education and outreach to the college community. The Counseling Center also assists students in dealing with their personal and emotional issues as they transition into college and experience the normal developmental issues of moving from adolescence to adulthood. The seasoned staff of the Counseling Center includes a licensed psychologist, three licensed social workers, a licensed mental health counselor, a counseling psychologist (who is available to test students for learning concerns), a substance abuse educator/counselor (responsible for the alcohol and drug education/prevention program). The center also provides access to the services of a local psychiatrist for consultation and monitoring of medications. The center employs four graduate students in doctoral psychology and social work programs in the greater Boston area, for which Wheaton serves as a training site. These internships increase the available counseling hours and provide more diversity, as well as allow the Counseling Center to do more outreach and psycho-educational programming. The center provides outreach and psychological education to the student body, including peer academic mentors (preceptors) and

resident advisors (RAs), through training and information on how to recognize common mental health issues, how to refer distressed students, and how to tackle challenging situations.

On average, 20 percent of the student body uses the Counseling Center for individual counseling and therapy, primarily around issues of depression, stress, anxiety, grief and loss, family difficulties, and other mental health/illness issues.

Student Safety

Wheaton's Public Safety Department is staffed with 18 full-time employees who provide round-the-clock protection and emergency services for the Wheaton community. Public safety officers receive extensive training in law, crisis management, crime prevention and investigation, fire safety and first aid, and other security issues. Several officers are certified as emergency medical technicians. Public safety conducts safety educational classes and offers Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) programs on a regular basis to students. The office posts, as required by law, the incidents of crime that occur on campus, making these data available for public review. Public Safety officers make themselves available to the College Hearing Board when needed and bring cases of social infractions of the Honor Code to the board.

The Dean of Students Office collaborates with personnel of the college Public Safety Department to ensure that Public Safety strives to facilitate the educational mission of the college, while fulfilling its mission of providing security and related services that assist community members in maintaining a safe and well-ordered campus environment. The dean, senior associate dean, associate dean for student life and the director of residential life, along with others, meet weekly with the director of public safety to review the record of campus incidents and discuss the issues and problems revealed by these incidents.

In response to the disturbing events that have taken place on college campuses over the past decade, Wheaton has devoted considerable time and resources to planning for critical incidents. The college's Critical Incident Response Team was established in 2002 with the participation of key administrative leaders from across the campus, including the dean of students, the director of public safety, the director of business services, the associate dean for health and wellness and others. This group has developed emergency response plans, which are reviewed regularly and amended as necessary. The college has collaborated with local emergency officials in mock disaster training sessions, including a pandemic emergency exercise hosted at the college in 2007. Most recently, in 2008, the college implemented an emergency alert system capable of generating instant text, voice and email messages to all members of the campus community. The system is tested regularly and adjusted based on response results.

Services for Students with Disabilities

Wheaton is committed to ensuring equitable participation in all programs and activities of the college, and, as a recipient of federal assistance, works to prohibit discrimination in the recruitment, admission and education of students with disabilities. We recognize that students differ in their needs and learning styles and strive to respond accordingly. Our goals include providing appropriate accommodations and support services to students with disabilities on a case-by-case basis based on their documentation, educating the Wheaton community on the rights and needs of students with disabilities, ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for students with disabilities, and complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, amended in 2009. The Academic Advising Center has clearly posted statements of the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities, institutional rights and responsibilities, and expectations for faculty members. We have also posted a clear statement of the grievance procedure under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While all members of the college community strive to do well in this area, not merely what is legally required, the age of our facilities has posed huge challenges. In 1989, only three of our buildings could be considered accessible. Planned retrofitting since then, as well as compliance in all new construction means that all academic buildings are totally or partially accessible, along with many academic and student affairs

facilities and offices, and a number of residence halls. But we still have important work to do, and funding for accessibility projects has not kept pace with needs. For example, several important buildings that are not fully accessible include the Office of Student Financial Services and parts of the library.

Denyse Wilhelm joined us in August of 2008 in the full-time position as the assistant dean of academic resources and disability services, and has substantially upgraded our online presence in this area. Dean Wilhelm is working with Senior Associate Dean Jack Kuszaj to ensure that funding for accessibility projects is part of annual budgets. She also has met with a number of academic and administrative departments to broaden campus understanding about these programs and to initiate new collaborations.

Student Perceptions

Through several open meetings with the Senate of the Student Government Association, and in conversations with officers of SGA, the administration and staff have endeavored to ascertain student views about the student affairs area. Obviously, the student body is not homogeneous, and the opinions we elicited are therefore limited to those students convened by the senators, to the senators themselves, and to the SGA officers with whom we spoke. Some of the views we heard expressed are more widely shared than others. Students appear uniformly satisfied with academic life at Wheaton. The SGA report states, “There is nearly universal praise for the quality and availability of courses, the accessibility of faculty, and the transformative power of the curriculum. In particular, the faculty are viewed as credible, caring and personally and intellectually welcoming. Most students view academics as the single most valuable part of Wheaton.”

Reported here are the views students expressed about the staff and offices in the Student Affairs division. Students express favorable views of the positive campus culture that the division helps to create and maintain, including what they see as a culture of attentiveness and nurturing. They view positively their roles in campus governance, especially through student government structures and staff and faculty committees. They appreciate the support for individuality and for the kinds of accommodations that are tailored to different kinds of student learners. Many students value the strength of the athletics program, the Marshall Center programs, and the support and programs provided under the auspices of the Office of Service, Spirituality and Social Responsibility. They count these as unique assets. As the president of SGA so aptly put it, “We ought also to recognize that our strength as an institution lies not in our ability to speak to all students with one voice, but rather to speak to different students with the right voice.”

Students also express a number of concerns, including many related to the current housing situation. They aptly identify as major issues in their lives the roommate tensions, lack of good study space in the residence halls, and the general deterioration of the campus social climate that come with overcrowded residence halls and diminished common and private spaces. Concerns about the Office of Student Life were also widely expressed at senate meetings. Students appropriately recognize that by default the office functions as the “creator of forced triples and enforcer of the unpopular alcohol policies,” and students are willing to step back and understand that these are difficult roles to play. Their dissatisfaction seems to stem more from the interpersonal interactions and the subtext of messages transmitted through those interactions. In general, students find the Office of Student Life, despite its roles in supporting student programming, to be “inaccessible and uncooperative.” Students ask that the office help them deal with “service” complaints such as those related to heating issues, bathroom repair issues, and so on, and report that they find little support when these complaints are raised. And in its role in enforcing residential hall policies and the alcohol policy, the office is seen by some students as reluctant to communicate, to engage in dialogue or to understand different views. As some of the officers of SGA put it: “In a community defined by flexibility, transparency, and dialogue, the Office of Student Life stands as an unacceptable enclave of untenable rigidity.” These are dramatic words, perhaps, but they seem to have been expressed in the sincere hope of bringing about change.

Appraisal

The persistent pressures created by crowding in residence halls undermine our goals of learning outside the classroom and enhancing campus culture. It is difficult to address student resentment about crowded living conditions, which tends to erode the progress in retention that is achieved through enhancement of programmatic changes and support services. Overcrowded housing continues to compromise our ability to provide for basic student needs, and it undermines our efforts to provide high quality developmental experiences for students.

Wheaton's ability to shape campus life toward recognizing and responding to the learning opportunities that arise with increasing diversity has been enhanced over the past several years. This work should continue to infuse the campus culture and programs. We need, perhaps, clearer coordination and clearer focus for diversity and meeting diversity goals.

Campus accessibility issues remain institutionally important. The experience and learning of students with disabilities are diminished when significant parts of the campus can only be utilized with great difficulty, if at all. We have made great progress, but we cannot let that progress lull us into thinking that we have met our moral and legal responsibilities. A more detailed account of campus accessibility efforts can be found in the electronic reading room.

Changing the culture in the student life area should be a priority goal. Students hope that the Office of Student Life will become an ally of the student body in their roles as teachers and service providers. Although increased student feelings of entitlement may provide the driving force behind the critical student perceptions, student complaints would appear to be deep and genuine. Staff members' ability to carry through their roles as educators may consistently be undermined by this resentment.

Campus newspaper articles, focus groups and comments from the Student Government Association all indicate that SSSR has become an integral part of the Wheaton community in a remarkably short time and is poised to make even more significant contributions toward creating the civic engagement and inclusive excellence that are central to our strategic plan. SSSR ends its third year facing challenges of structural instability as the economic downturn resulted in a reduction in staff and a need to coordinate a coherent approach to community partnerships.

Today's students come to college needing counseling support services in greater numbers than in previous generations. Staffing and space have become an issue as the center is currently operating at full capacity. The Counseling Center is limited by its physical size and shortage of full-time staff members. The number of students that use the center increases annually. On average, a student will visit 5 to 7 times per year. Given the growth, the center is at capacity. Additionally, counselors are part-time employees of the college, with the director/psychologist and the administrative assistant serving in full-time roles. The current half-time staffing arrangement allows for student access to a more diverse group of counselors.

Various challenges face the athletics department. First, recruiting student athletes who meet academic standards and can compete on the playing fields has become more challenging because our financial aid packages are often less competitive than those of peer institutions. Also, our varsity programs have had no operating budget increases in 12 years. Club sports are funded through the Student Government Association but are supported by athletics. Finally, club sports do not have adequate fields for practice since they are unable to use varsity fields due to scheduling. Club sports cannot continue to grow and maintain quality programs unless a dedicated recreation field is built. Programs that have enjoyed growth are beginning to experience the limitations imposed by space and practice time constraints, making it increasingly difficult to remain competitive.

Projections

Over the next decade we will work to ensure that all outside-the-classroom environments remain vibrant parts of our learning community. We will alleviate residence hall overcrowding by improving the efficiency by which rooms are allocated and building new living spaces. This is a key factor in student satisfaction, as crowded living conditions inhibit successful programming and are enormously important to retention. Addressing this problem must be a priority of the college.

Our athletics program has consistently contributed to our recruitment efforts, to student engagement, and to overall student satisfaction. It is time to renew our commitment to this program with thoughtful planning for ways to sustain it through the resources, staffing and facilities that it needs. We hope that a task force, created over the next few years, will develop a plan to phase in the enhancements needed to keep this area a vital part our commitment to excellence.

With a new dean of students and vice president for student affairs in place, it is time to rethink divisional organization, structures and programs. We expect that the next five years will see important changes that will enhance work within the division and students' connections to the strengths that the division has to offer.

PART III: RETENTION

Description and Appraisal

Retention has been a long-standing institutional concern and one of the areas to which NEASC reaccreditation reviews have consistently directed our institutional attention. Since the last reaccreditation review, we have had a measure of success, with a few recent dips, in increasing both male and female one-year and two-year retention rates. We achieved a high of 89 percent one-year rate for men with a range over the decade between 79 and 89 percent, and a high of 92 percent one-year rate for women with a range between 83 and 92 percent. Two-year rates for men reached a high of 84 percent with a range of 72 to 84 percent, and 87 percent for women with a range of 75 to 87 percent. For students of color the range for one-year retention over the decade has been between 78 and 92 percent; the two-year range has been from 73 to 88 percent. The comparable one-year range for white students is from 82 to 89 percent and the two-year range for white students is from 78 to 85percent. Our total four-year graduation rates have ranged from 67 to 77 percent, with five-year graduation rates ranging from 70 to 81 percent.

We maintain excellent data on retention and graduation rates by gender, race and ethnicity, but it has been difficult to sustain or increase the highest retention rates we achieved. Some of the problem might stem from our inability to develop the right kind of administrative structure to help us work on retention. Cross-divisional, joint faculty and staff work has at times been very successful, but at other times, due to personnel changes and institutional distractions of various kinds, we have not been consistent in mobilizing the campus-wide focus that sound retention efforts require. We know that crowded residence halls, dissatisfaction with the town of Norton, complaints about social life and a variety of other issues are identified on internal surveys as contributing to student dissatisfaction. No unique factor can be singled out; what is certain is that efforts to enhance the experience of the 86 percent of students who persist (the average retention one-year retention rate over the past seven years) will also affect the choices of students who choose to leave the college. We also know that as college costs rise and the economy and demographics become more challenging, Wheaton's retention is a point of vulnerability.

In an effort to focus carefully on the experience of students in their first years, in 2008-2009 the interim provost and interim dean of students created First Year Experience and Second Year Experience workgroups. These committees include a wide range of representatives from the academic and student affairs areas. Both are charged with building upon programs that already exist, as for example, the First Year Seminars, residence hall learning communities, and the January program for sophomore students. Both workgroups,

under the guidance of an umbrella group of administrators, have defined academic and social learning outcomes and have started to identify and plan for the specific objectives that can engage students, each at their own level of interest and concern. It is individual engagement and individualized attention that will ultimately provide the best experience for our persistent students and help to retain those who might otherwise leave. In specific targeted work, the First Year Experience group has developed a First Year Learning Communities project that is focused on Leading with Connections, with the goal of enhancing the connections that first year students begin to establish with each other, with the curriculum, with campus and off-campus activities, and with the institution as a whole. The Second Year group has concentrated on addressing the special academic and developmental challenges of the sophomore year to create a unique rhythm for the second year student experience. This will include a Sophomore Symposium at the beginning of the spring semester with extensive workshops to focus on concerns of the challenging second year.

Projections

Although at a disadvantage with competitors with regard to financial aid resources, Wheaton has taken extraordinary steps in the past decade to enhance funding resources for students and to use these resources wisely to attract students. We must continue to do so. Over the next decade, we also need to develop a better understanding, particularly given current financial pressures, of the role of financial aid in retention, so that we can use our resources as fairly and generously as possible to respond to changing family circumstances.

The college will develop and utilize a cross-divisional group to study retention and develop a comprehensive retention strategy, under the leadership of Linda Eisenmann, our new provost, and Lee Williams, our new dean of students. We will set realistic targets for increasing our retention rate and maintaining improvements. Retention is everyone's responsibility, but policies must be monitored and managed through a central structure that includes the student affairs, provost, and admission areas. By our next reaccreditation review we will have sustained the rise in retention that we achieved in the early 1990s and we will have achieved retention rates that are competitive with our peer institutions.