

STANDARD TEN PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

Overview

The college provides information about itself, its programs and its people to students, their families, alumnae/i, friends and other members of the general public. The dissemination of information about Wheaton through print and electronic media is coordinated through the collaboration of several key departments. The Office of Communications, working with other offices such as Admission, the Office of the Registrar, and Student Financial Services, produces the institution's key documents.

Description

Wheaton provides information about itself through extensive electronic materials accessible via the World Wide Web while also maintaining many print publications. In the past ten years, the college's website (www.wheatoncollege.edu) has grown in breadth and depth, offering visitors an extensive array of information resources about the institution as well as multiple avenues for contact with members of the college community. In addition, Wheaton has continued to produce a full array of print publications, recognizing that multiple media are needed to reach all interested constituents. The evolution of this media mix has been informed by constituents' interest, as determined through focus group sessions and surveys of students, faculty and staff, prospective students and alumnae/i. In addition, online communication lends itself to measurement of constituents' actual behavior and the college regularly examines these data to evaluate its efforts.

Catalog

The college catalog represents the official "offer of the college" to students. Much of the information it contains is also presented in other publications and in other forms. The publication of the catalog, produced in a two-year cycle, involves collaboration among the Office of Communications, the Web Strategy Team and the Office of the Registrar, with contributions from many other areas of the college. Information from the catalog is used in a variety of other publications, from handbooks for parents and students to the college viewbook used in the admission process.

The growth of the web, however, has resulted in a major switch in emphasis in the publication of the catalog. The updating of content, which begins in the spring semester, takes place entirely on the web. Academic and administrative department heads review and revise the content for which they are responsible directly on the web, in a non-public production space set up by the Web Strategy Team. Once the updating is complete, and the catalog has been reviewed by the Communications Office and the Office of the Registrar, the online catalog becomes instantly available. Production of the print version of this publication requires another six to eight weeks to complete.

In each of the last several cycles, the college has produced approximately 18,000 copies of the catalog. About 2,000 are reserved for on-campus distribution to faculty members, administrative offices and incoming first-year students who will arrive in each of the two years that the print publication is in force. The remaining printed catalogs are mailed to interested students and their families and to high school guidance counselors and college counselors who request them. In this upcoming cycle, the college will produce only a limited number of printed catalogs for archival purposes and will direct users to the online version. This approach will make it possible to ensure that all users receive the most accurate information available.

For students and graduates who may need to refer to past copies of the catalog, the Office of the Registrar maintains past copies of the publication for use in responding to inquiries from former students and members of the general public. In addition, the Marion B. Gebbie Archives and Special Collections retains archival editions of the publication as well as all other major Wheaton publications for reference and research.

College Archives

The Marion B. Gebbie Archives and Special Collections is responsible for many of the records of Wheaton College. It serves faculty, students, staff, alumnae/i and the general public in obtaining information about Wheaton. It also is responsible for records and information management initiatives at the college in order to train and advise employees in the organization on the retention and disposition of records. Records and information management allows Wheaton employees to locate and provide information about Wheaton College to outside sources in a timely fashion.

The college's archival collections contain administrative records of Wheaton Female Seminary and Wheaton College; college publications; papers and manuscripts of the Wheaton family, as well as of several alumnae and faculty, including Lucy Larcom; photographs, scrapbooks and other memorabilia; audio and video tapes of Wheaton events; materials related to student organizations and academic pursuits; and the records of the Alumnae/i Association.

Particular strengths of the special book collections include the art of printing and binding, children's literature; travel; and women, family, and gender issues. Manuscript collections include papers of Wheaton alumnae/i and faculty, as well as diaries and papers of women, families and organizations unconnected with the college. Wheaton is the local repository for the records of SMCL (Southeast Massachusetts Consortium of Libraries), and the southeastern chapters of the American Association of University Women. The collections are non-circulating and are housed in closed stacks.

Wheaton's Web

As the importance of online communication has grown enormously over the past ten years, Wheaton's web has provided visitors with a broad array of information about the college—from updated tuition and fees and admission deadlines to the course requirements for every major and campus housing options. An integrated calendar of events allows users to stay abreast of upcoming events. All departments at the college maintain websites that provide information, and in many cases services, to students, faculty, staff, alumnae/i, parents and friends. For example, users can search the HELIN catalog, encompassing our library's holdings as well as the collections of our partner institutions, and access many other electronic resources from the library home page. The Office of Alumnae/i Relations now offers our graduates specialized services to promote community, including an online directory of alumnae/i and a career networking space that is linked to online services that the Filene Center for Academic Advising and Career Services provides to students.

The college's electronic communication efforts now extend well beyond the institution's website to embrace external social media sites and services, such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Wheaton has an official "home" on all of these services and is making increasing use of these channels of communication; surveys and focus groups indicate that our constituents spend an increasing amount of time in these spaces and welcome the chance to connect with the college. For example, the Admission section of the website offers prospective students and their families the opportunity to watch videos of campus life, prepared by students. As this self-study report was in its final stages of drafting, the Admission Office held a trivia contest among the incoming Class of 2013 in which daily questions were posted on Twitter along with regular updates on the progress of the competition.

The college's Web Strategy Team collaborates with the Communications Office and Library and Information Services to facilitate ongoing maintenance and the development of new services. Key institutional information on the web, such as the top tier pages of the site, are maintained by the Communications Office and the Web Strategy Team. In addition, the Web Strategy Team and the Library and Information Services division provide support to academic and administrative departments in the design and maintenance of individual department websites. Their work together is informed by consultation with key constituent groups, and collaboration with campus planning committees such as the Library Technology and Learning Committee (LTLIC), and it includes management of key web-based services such as the Blackboard and "onCourse" learning management systems used by faculty in delivering course content.

The college's public website is maintained through the Frontier Content Management System. In addition, the college uses the Luminis platform portal system to deliver personalized web services to students, faculty and staff and the open source blog platform, WordPress, to manage the college's news information services and to offer blogging tools to students and faculty. The college's web search is powered by a Google Mini Search Appliance. The production servers are maintained by college staff; the entire public site is hosted off-site to ensure redundancy and faster response to information requests.

Handbooks

The college publishes a selection of material from the catalog as well as departmental sources for parents and students each year. The parent handbook is produced by the Office of Student Life in collaboration with the Office of Communication and includes contributions from a variety of administrative sources at the college. The student handbook was published annually until roughly two years ago, when it became an online-only publication.

Admission Materials

The college publishes a collection of printed materials designed to provide information to students and their families during the college search process. The principal publication in this series is the viewbook, which describes the major features of Wheaton's curriculum in detail and offers illustrations of students' educational experiences at the college as well as offering a brief description of all programs, from study abroad to residential life offerings.

Other publications produced for student recruitment include a preview brochure that abstracts vital information about the college, an annual profile of students that offers a largely quantitative view of the student body and a bi-annual newsletter that offers a look at current events on campus as well as recent accomplishments of Wheaton students.

Appraisal

Wheaton's publications, print and electronic, are updated regularly through a comprehensive process to ensure accuracy and consistency.

The college has made a commitment to demonstrating its success, thus making much information about itself available to the general public. Wheaton has acted on this commitment both through its own print and electronic publications, and through collaboration with nonprofit associations and with the mass media. For example, the annual results of Wheaton's participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement are posted on the college's website for use by prospective students and other interested members of the public. The college has also shared these data with public information sources, most notably *USA Today* (which publishes this information online) and through the U-CAN initiative of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU). In a departure from this practice, the college has not provided *US News & World Report* with its NSSE data, due to the college ranking guide's plan to use only some parts of the data for additional rankings. Wheaton declined to participate, believing that isolating NSSE data ignores the empirical value of the instrument as a whole.

Key information about Wheaton can be found easily in the college's publications and on its website. The process for updating print publications is generally well understood and managed. The maintenance of online information remains an area of challenge for the college. The majority of Wheaton's website is maintained using a basic content management system developed by college staff. Shortcomings of the current system include its inability to facilitate review and approval of information prior to publication, to distribute standard information to multiple locations on the site, or to remind content providers to review information (so-called expiration-dated content).

Nonetheless, the college has made strides in improving content management on the web. The Web Strategy Team and the Library and Information Services division are active in reaching out to academic and administrative departments to develop, maintain and enhance their web services. The provost's office has played an active role in reminding and encouraging faculty to update their personal profile pages on a regular basis with accurate information about their teaching and scholarly activities. The admission website also offers several pages of basic information that students and their families seek early in the college search process, as for example, the student-faculty ratio and the diversity of the student body.

One of the greatest improvements that Wheaton has made in ensuring easy online access to such vital information has been the implementation of improved web search services. The Google search appliance allows the college to feature the most relevant information sources for frequently sought-after data. As a result, the Web Strategy Team regularly reviews the actual search terms used by visitors to the website and then "tunes up" the search engine to ensure that frequently searched terms result in meaningful finds for the user. In addition, the current college home page, and a soon-to-be released renovation of the entire site, includes a "quick links" feature that allows users to browse among academic and administrative departments, college-sponsored programs and student activities within one click of the home page.

Nevertheless, key pieces of information are not always easy to find. For example, information on the college's graduation rate would be difficult to find by navigating links on the web. This information can be found in the Policies section of the website, in accordance with the Student Right-To-Know and Campus Security Act. While this information clearly belongs here, it also should be more accessible from other areas, including Admission.

Ensuring the accuracy of published information is of great importance, and Wheaton depends upon routine processes to ensure that information posted on the site is up-to-date. For the most part, key data points change on an annual basis, and staff members in critical areas, such as Admission, Student Financial Services and Institutional Research, update information as it becomes available. For example, the coming year's comprehensive fee is posted online in the Admission and Student Financial Services pages immediately after it is approved by the college's Board of Trustees in February. The Communications Office, the Web Strategy Team and the Academic Computing staff in LIS also assist in this process through ongoing review of web pages and support for other administrative and academic departments.

In advance of the publication of a new catalog, the Office of the Registrar reviews courses to see when they were last taught, and asks academic departments to forecast which classes are contemplated for the next year. In this way, courses that are no longer current can be culled from the catalog listing, which is produced both electronically and in print form. The course schedule always remains up-to-date as it is drawn from a database that reflects academic departments' current plans for the next semester and year.

Projection

Providing greater awareness among faculty and staff of Wheaton's standards for publication and the resources available for accomplishing these tasks would help ensure that the college's communications are consistent across multiple publications and media. The relevant departments, such as Communications, should establish an ongoing series of communications to ensure that faculty and staff are aware of these resources and tools. This will continue to be a challenge in the future, given the growth of media channels available. We know that individuals differ in their attention to electronic and print communications. Some faculty check their postal mail daily; others far less frequently, relying much more heavily on the web. At the same time, challenges using webmail lead some members of the community to check their email only when they are on campus.

An attempt to provide information about college publication standards was created by the Communications Office and is located online at <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/Tools/>. The site is named simply Tools and has had few updates or promotion in recent years. Ironically, the pages appear in a web template no longer used

at the college. The site should be renamed and updated to provide additional guidance and tools for departments across campus.

For online communication, the implementation of a new, full-featured content management system would help the college to standardize information more efficiently. In such systems, information is updated once and then is distributed to every page where it is needed. This type of centralized online publishing cannot be accomplished easily at present and so, often, is simply not done. The result places a greater burden on administrative staff to keep track of the multiple places where information may be contained. As a result, oversights can occur easily. The Web Strategy Team is investigating alternative courses of action to improve the toolset available to administrators and faculty members who are providing information and services on the web.

The college's Web Strategy and Communication teams are working to enhance ease of access to online information with an external consultant that is experienced in developing and renovating higher education web sites. The results of that work, which are expected to "go live" by early in 2010, should greatly improve the usability and consistency of the Wheaton website.

The rapid evolution of channels of communication and the variability at which these methods are adopted will continue to challenge the college over the next decade. Wheaton will continue to work at keeping abreast of new developments in communication to provide our constituents with information that is accurate, timely and appropriate to their needs. Ongoing attention will be needed not only to develop new communication channels, but also to ensure that individuals are aware of the available tools and know how to use them.