

## **STANDARD THREE ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE**

### **Overview**

The intensely personal nature of the Wheaton College community depends upon a system of governance in which constituents understand their roles, fulfill their responsibilities, act with integrity and perceive that they have a voice in shaping the institution. Wheaton's formal organization—outlined in the Statutes of Wheaton College and in appropriate sections of faculty legislation, staff and student by-laws and practices, and by-laws of the Alumnae/i Association—is designed to foster this broad participation in the management of the institution.

Beyond formal organizational charts and statutes, however, the college's system of governance is supported by a community norm structure that has evolved throughout the history of the institution. These norms play an important role in sustaining the uniquely collegial nature of the Wheaton community. The character of the community has been consistently identified in strategic planning as a critical factor in delivering the interdisciplinary and individualized education that is the college's hallmark.

Wheaton's system of governance, in both its formal organization and its informal structure, allow the institution, consistent with its mission, to establish, evaluate regularly, and meet its goals effectively and with integrity. All components of the college community, including trustees, administrative officers, faculty, staff, students and alumnae/i, periodically review, evaluate and revise the procedures by which they operate and collaborate in the governance and the overall success of the institution.

### **Description**

#### **Board of Trustees**

The Statutes of Wheaton College, revised in 2008, charge the Board of Trustees with fiduciary responsibility for the institution. In this capacity, the board makes key policy and financial decisions related to the college's quality, integrity, distinctive mission, physical assets and fiscal solvency. Its purview includes approval of the general operating and capital budgets and the appointment of the college president, who is responsible for management of the institution and the creation and implementation of policies aligned with the board's decisions. Through its Executive Committee, the board, both formally and informally, reviews the performance of the president.

The board's membership includes alumnae/i and others in the fields of education, business and public service, and it reflects a variety of backgrounds, genders, ages, professional expertise, and perspectives. The board's roster currently stands at 29 members, nearly at its 30-member maximum. By statute, the board must include five alumnae/i trustees as well as the president of the college and the president of the alumnae/i association, who serve as *ex officio* members. On an annual basis, members of the board are asked to disclose any possible conflicts of interest that might preclude independent actions.

In keeping with historical practice, board members meet three times each year, in October, February and May. The board organizes its work through a set of committees that convene with each meeting, and in many instances, hold additional working sessions in between the official meetings. For more than a decade, these committees have included the following: Executive, Audit, Advancement, Board Affairs, Faculty and Staff, Finance and Facilities and Investment, as well as the special Student-Trustee Liaison Committee. Since the 1999 reaccreditation visit, however, the organization of the board's committees has changed in several noteworthy instances.

In 2003, the board renamed its Board Affairs Committee the Governance Committee and expanded the committee's charge to include responsibility for members' development and performance as well as review

of the work of trustees and recommendations on the election and re-election (or not) of Board members. The committee's establishment reflects the board's attention to evaluating and revising internal structures and practices to ensure that its oversight is appropriate, efficient and effective, and that its members understand and discharge their responsibilities with integrity. Among other outcomes, this focus has led to an annual review for each board member, to the adoption of a "Statement of Trusteeship and Responsibilities" for board members and the establishment of a board mentorship and orientation program, among other outcomes.

A new committee on Academic Affairs was established in 2007 to signal the board's interest in the critical academic work of the institution, teaching and learning. The purpose of the committee was to monitor the progress of the quality and effectiveness of the educational experience for students as well as for faculty. The provost, in consultation with the chairs of the Academic Affairs and Faculty and Staff committees, prepares the agenda for meetings in October and February. These meetings have routinely included faculty involved in curricular transformation and evaluation (Academic Affairs) and a meeting with the new members of the faculty (Faculty and Staff).

In 2007, the Board transformed the special Student-Trustee Liaison Committee into a standing Student Affairs Committee. This change was intended to signal the board's commitment to providing the student body with a permanent voice in its deliberations; as an expression of its dedication to broad consultation in the governance of the college; and as recognition of students' fundamental, long-term interest in Wheaton's well-being. Membership on the committee includes three students from the Student Government Association's executive committee. Student members of the group and the Dean of Students Office set the agenda for these meetings. The officers of the SGA and the student senators work diligently to discover and articulate student concerns.

In addition to these committee changes, the board has also recruited members of the college community with special expertise to participate as non-trustee volunteers in specific committee assignments. At present, the board has four volunteers serving in this capacity, three of whom are involved in the Investment Committee and one in the Facilities Sub-Committee.

In recognition of the responsibility to represent the college, the Board of Trustees maintains channels of communication with the Wheaton community and engages members of the college, particularly the faculty, in consultation on key institutional issues. For example, the board convened a presidential search committee upon President Marshall's announcement of her intention to retire. That group, which included faculty, staff and students as well as trustees and alumnae/i, managed a concerted outreach program to all college constituencies, engaging interested individuals in conversation about Wheaton's aspirations and challenges and the qualities its next leader would need. Additionally, the board's decision to divest from its endowment holdings any direct investments in companies identified as conducting business in the Sudan came about after nearly a year of dialogue among trustees and interested faculty and staff.

Many current faculty members, however, remember that in the recent past, under previous presidents, there were more opportunities for both formal and informal interactions between trustees and faculty. For example, the Economic Status and Workload Committee of the faculty would meet with the Executive Committee of the board regarding the salary plan, and a faculty representative from the Budget Advisory Committee would frequently be invited to meet with the Finance and Facilities Committee of the board. On a more informal basis, faculty members were regularly invited to have dinner with trustees in October or February, newly tenured faculty were invited to have lunch or dinner with trustees in February or May, and informal lunch interactions between trustees and faculty were often possible in the faculty dining room.

### **Administration and Faculty**

Under Wheaton's statutes, the president serves as the college's chief executive officer and as the presiding member of the faculty. The president manages the college, ensuring, through both annual and long-term planning, that the defined purposes and objectives of the institution shape its decisions, and that resources are

being allocated and used to meet these objectives and assess and communicate the effectiveness of institutional performance. Institutional resources are consistently and thoughtfully managed and used, both in times of plenty and times of scarcity; Wheaton's generally conservative investment policy helped cushion the institution during the recent financial downturn. The president and officers ensure the quality and integrity of all Wheaton programs, especially the academic program.

The president undertakes annual performance evaluations for each officer of the college. This evaluation process has been in place for some time and is generally deemed to work well. The Wheaton administration has a history of close working relationships between the officers of the college and the president, and among the officers. Along with their other responsibilities, the officers are expected to encourage and value inter-divisional communication and cooperation, ensuring that these values are understood and practiced by their staffs so that a shared commitment to institutional goals pervades the Wheaton workplace. Communication and cooperation across divisions works better at some times than at others, but recently some senior and other staff members have expressed concern that less attention is being paid to this community norm now than in the past.

The faculty's own robust committee system functions well, generally assuring that through its committees and faculty meetings, which involve both deliberative and legislative processes, faculty have primary responsibility for developing and approving educational programs. Such efforts include evaluations of departments and majors; revisions of curricular offerings; hiring faculty and educational support staff; faculty tenure and promotion decisions; and certifying that students have met the requirements for graduation. Indeed, the defined tenure and promotion processes outline a greater role for faculty at Wheaton than is the case at many other academic institutions. Through the Committee on Faculty Workload and Economic Status, faculty members have had a significant advisory role in developing a much-supported faculty salary plan, and as members of the Budget Advisory Committee faculty can request information and offer advice about the distribution of institutional resources. Most faculty members take seriously their responsibility to serve on committees; however, currently there is a perception among some senior faculty that there may be generational differences about the necessity for, commitment to, and meaning of a strong faculty role in governance. Junior faculty members report significant tension in their struggle to balance the demands of teaching and scholarship with the time that a commitment to institutional governance requires.

## **Staff**

As noted in our self study ten years ago, the (then relatively new) Staff Council contributes to increased staff participation in helping to shape college policy. The council meets regularly, runs annual elections, produces a staff newsletter, and convenes several all-staff assemblies each year. It is generally perceived by staff as effective in giving them a voice and more visible presence on campus. A Senior Management Group, which was created at the same time, worked well for a few years but then, due to staff turnover perhaps, tended to lose steam and died out. As a result of this self-study process, however, the Senior Management Group has started to meet again and appears to be functioning well; these direct contacts will help to revitalize cross-divisional planning and initiatives across campus.

## **Students**

Wheaton recognizes the importance of involving students in matters of institutional governance for multiple reasons—as an integral part of the college's holistic approach to learning, recognition of students as the college *raison d'être*, in service to the lifetime engagement that the institution seeks to foster among its alumnae/i. Through the Student Government Association, students take responsibility for allocating a significant budget for campus activities and programs. The college's Honor Code structures students' responsibilities to the community; students oversee the code's enforcement as the chairs of the Hearing Board. In addition, students are included on many faculty standing committees and all relevant institutional committees, such as search committees for the president, the provost and the dean of students, the Budget Advisory Committee, and the new Planning and Priorities Committee.

## Appraisal

Changes in leadership at the college over the past decade, growth in the number of faculty members, the changing nature of higher education, and changes within the faculty have raised some questions about a governance structure which, on paper and frequently in practice, works well.

Within the past five years Wheaton has welcomed a new President, hired a new Vice-President for Advancement, had several changes in provosts, and experienced the retirement of a long-serving, and rather iconic, Dean of Students. The sequence of these changes means that extra effort might be needed to create an effective leadership “team” that encourages cross-divisional planning and work. In the spring of 2008 at open meetings, both faculty and staff members raised questions about how deeply the President’s Council (President and Officers of the College) continued to embrace the idea that as a leadership “team” the officers need to establish and maintain the norm of working cross-divisionally for the good of the institution.

At recent open meetings of the faculty, faculty members have expressed concerns about whether their voices are really heard in faculty meetings, how well their own committee structure is meeting current governance needs, and how to return to regular interactions with members of the Board of Trustees, since such interactions appear to have diminished. At these open meetings, in regular faculty meetings and meetings of the AAUP, some issues have emerged that are particularly important to younger faculty, such as how transparent significant decision-making structures are, especially regarding the awarding of tenure. While most senior, junior, and untenured faculty members appreciate the strong voice that faculty have in the tenure process (and in the promotion process), the confidential nature of the work of these committees has raised a question about fairness, especially since the diversity we currently have on the faculty is not reflected among the senior faculty members who serve on these committees.

Staff members are appreciative and supportive of the staff governance structure, although the transient atrophy of the Senior Management Group had a negative effect on cross-divisional communication. The revival of this group has produced favorable responses. Some staff also felt that they have not been getting strong support for and encouragement of inter-division cooperation from the officers in charge of the different divisions.

The Student Government Association seems to be working better than ever. Newly instituted procedures for the Senate and a more active SGA Council, combined with the particularly dynamic leadership of recent SGA presidents, seem to have transformed the perception of student governance in a positive direction among faculty and staff members, administrators, and many students. For example, during the economic downturn in 2009, the SGA developed a plan to allocate some of its funds to help defray the cost of education for students through devoting resources for textbooks on reserve at the library, and providing support for experiential learning by directing funds for summer internship stipends.

The recent downturn in the economy, with its financial implications for colleges and universities, has resulted in some changes in the college governance structures. President Crutcher convened, on a temporary basis, a joint faculty, administration, staff and student group, called Task Force One, to work throughout the spring semester to identify and prioritize areas of possible savings and growth in college resources, in order to insure that Wheaton’s current budget would be in balance. This led the president to suggest the creation of an ongoing strategic planning group, something that everyone agreed was necessary, called the Planning and Priorities Committee. The PPC includes faculty, administrators, staff and students, with each constituency devising ways to regularly select members. This college committee will begin its work in the fall of 2009, making recommendations to the president, President’s Council and the Board of Trustees.

## **Projections**

The openness with which the above observations were shared by both faculty and staff members indicates that, while there currently may be some issues with institutional communication and cooperation, there remains a spirit of dialogue and cooperation on the campus which bodes well for dealing with current concerns. Any institution has to go through a period of adjustment to change, especially when that change occurs in the leadership structure of the college. Wheaton has had relatively well-grounded patterns of collaboration to see the institution through significant changes and cycles of hard times. New styles of leadership, shifting institutional goals, and sheer generational transitions mean that various areas of the college and different constituencies will be playing catch-up at different paces. The absence of consistent and continuing leadership in several divisions of the school has prolonged this period of catching up with each other. Once the leadership team of the college is stabilized, which should be by fall 2009, the president and college officers can address perceptions that the President's Council is not unified. The timing and mode in which information is shared should be considered carefully, as that communication may play a significant role in building support for the college's leadership. Since this collaboration has been the established norm at Wheaton, there is every reason to expect that it will be in place again.

Through their elected committees and various open meetings, faculty members will continue to work through their concerns about their role in the governance structure. A faculty that is significantly larger than it was just a decade ago may have to explore some creative ways of restructuring itself (or not) to ensure that faculty remain at the center of academic and related decision making that occurs at the institution. Since many faculty members have dealt with these issues together in the past, everyone expects that they will be able to do so again.

We have every reason to believe that the next decade will be a positive one regarding institutional governance. We have just completed two successful vice presidential searches for provost and dean of students. The search committees, made up of faculty, staff, and students, worked well with the president in completing these searches. This past year saw the revival of the central role of the Advisory Committee of the faculty, which now meets regularly with the president and should facilitate better reciprocal communication between the faculty and the president. Finally, the robust way that various constituencies have come together to define positive ways for Wheaton to go forward in light of changed economic circumstances indicates that cooperation and collaboration will be the hallmarks of the next decade of Wheaton's evolution.