

## STANDARD TWO PLANNING AND EVALUATION

### Overview

Thorough planning and thoughtful evaluation are fixed firmly in the campus culture. Our last self study noted that Wheaton's emphasis on planning is rooted at least in part in the comprehensive preparation "that structured our transformation to coeducation 20 years ago...." A number of developments during the past decade have reinforced this approach. For example, the college's current strategic plan identifies assessment ("demonstrate success ... providing evidence of institutional effectiveness") as one of the college's three strategic priorities. In addition, the Wheaton Curriculum includes an explicit commitment to the assessment of students' learning outcomes and ongoing curricular improvements informed by evaluation. The need for the integration of planning and evaluation, in all of the college's activities, is well understood by the campus community.

The college's planning activities range from institution-wide, multi-constituency initiatives, such as the strategic plan *Wheaton 2014: Transforming Lives to Change the World*, completed in 2006, to collaboration for interdivisional program development and department goal-setting. Broadly consultative planning also is evident in ongoing work, such as the annual budget process and the allocation of technology and information services for academic and administrative purposes. The college's assessment activities are equally multi-faceted, including evaluation of the curriculum, academic and co-curricular programs, administrative operations and a formal personnel performance review process. While we have not achieved the full potential of a robust culture of assessment, we are in a very different place in our understanding of its importance and in working actively toward the realization of this aspiration.

### Description

#### Strategic Planning

During the past decade, the college engaged in substantial institutional and programmatic planning while simultaneously evolving a campus-wide commitment to embedding evaluation and assessment in all areas of the school. Wheaton College conducted two institution-wide planning initiatives that involved broad outreach and consultation with members of the college community. The first planning process, *Wheaton 2005: Connections to the Future*, took place in 2002 following the institution's 1999 reaccreditation, the successful completion of the Campaign for Wheaton on June 30, 2000, and the realization of the strategic objectives outlined in the 1993 plan, *Excellence and Equilibrium: Wheaton in the 21st Century*. The Board of Trustees approved *Connections to the Future* in October 2002, following a comprehensive consultation process with faculty, staff, students, alumnae/i, parents and friends of the institution. As its name implies, the plan's timeline was intended to guide developments at the college for a relatively short period of time, which coincided with the final years of President Dale Rogers Marshall's leadership.

President Marshall also initiated several structures to strengthen cross-divisional communication in order to enhance planning capabilities and outcomes across the college. Senior managers met regularly to share information about current and proposed programs, and a set of stakeholder lunches took place every year so that academic departments, faculty committees, student governance structures and staff programmers could share information about their plans for the semester and year.

The second institution-wide planning initiative, *Wheaton 2014: Transforming Lives to Change the World*, got underway following the arrival of President Ronald Crutcher. A representative committee of students, faculty, staff and alumnae/i was charged by the president to lead a comprehensive review of the college's mission and goals; its strengths; and the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead. In addition to regular meetings of the steering group, the President's Coordinating Council (PCC), the process also included town-hall-style meetings with on-campus constituents and focused discussions with alumnae/i, parents and friends.

An all-day faculty retreat as well as a trustee retreat reviewed and revised initial documents. The Board of Trustees approved the plan in October 2006. Since then, annual meetings of the PCC and routine reports and discussions during board meetings facilitate ongoing reviews of our goals that add to the impact of this plan and ensure that it is a central part of campus thinking.

The process was comprehensive not only in terms of participants but also in scope. It involved revisiting and re-visioning Wheaton's mission statement, creating "Vision 2014" for a transformed Wheaton to coincide with the date of our 180th anniversary and establishing the strategic priorities and institutional goals that have shaped priorities for most programs and budgets over the past several years. Major institutional goals include enhancing intellectual excellence and engagement while and through expanding diversity; renovating and building needed facilities; and supporting creativity and innovation among students, faculty and staff, and alumnae/i.

While the two strategic plans developed in the past decade have differed in some respects, such as the process by which broad consultation was facilitated, the two plans shared a number of critical similarities, particularly the overarching theme of enhancing academic and co-curricular programs and improving campus facilities in ways that would make the most of the innovative Wheaton curriculum. For example, the 2002 plan called for the establishment of a global education center to embrace the complex and interconnected world in which our students will work, live and lead. The center's mission was to address this need through the creation of expanded study abroad opportunities and by assisting faculty in broader integration of global perspectives in teaching. The Center for Global Education opened the same year, and it has introduced a plethora of new study-abroad options for students, including a growing list of short-term, intensive courses taught abroad by Wheaton faculty in January and in the summer. The current strategic plan pushes that impulse further by setting an explicit goal of realizing the full potential of Infusion, a signature effort to incorporate scholarship on race, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality and culture in teaching and learning throughout the curriculum. The college has pursued this goal through its effort to enhance the diversity of faculty, staff and students, and it has demonstrated that commitment in supporting the Summer Institute for Literary and Cultural Studies, which Professor of English Paula Krebs founded with a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Both planning efforts also included a review of the campus master plan, facilitated with the expertise of consulting architects. These efforts identified areas for future development of the "built environment" and focused on several core facility needs, including expanded residence hall space and upgraded and expanded science teaching and research space. The campus planning led by the firm of William Rawn Associates encouraged all segments of the community to think broadly about how we use the campus facilities and environs, about how traffic flow affects our ability to communicate and complete our business, about our current and future academic and housing needs, and about how we can preserve beauty and enhance efficiency. This process flowed into the development of plans for a new science center, which had been the subject of study since the late 1990s. Planning for the new Science Center has included substantial work by science faculty, along with staff, administrators, alumnae/i, and trustees, all of whom worked with the architect to establish our basic needs and our aspirations for the renovation of the current building and the construction of a new one. While economic constraints have dictated a building plan that varies somewhat from that envisioned by the campus master plan, the proposed Science Center project adheres to the spirit of the master plan and will transform the campus, linking academic space with social and athletic space in ways that will extend campus learning environments. The project includes the construction of a new building, as well as renovation of the existing science facility to make the most of the college's resources. This approach also reflects the emphasis on sustainability, which has been integrated into the design of the entire effort. Detailed construction drawings for the new building have been completed, but although ground was broken and building infrastructure development proceeded during fall 2008, the project is currently on hold owing to the economic downturn, the resulting budget pressure and the market cost of credit.

A consistent feature of Wheaton's strategic planning since 1995 has been a faculty salary plan that linked faculty salaries to college revenues and to our competitive position with other similar institutions in the

Northeast. The commitment was “to make progress, when possible, in achieving more competitive compensation for faculty and staff.” The plan utilized an innovative and carefully crafted approach and transformed what had always been a confrontational issue to one that emphasized mutual interests and incentives: as resources improved, so would salaries. While no longer formally in place, the plan was followed through the 2007-08 academic year, and the spirit of the faculty salary plan continues to guide decision making when possible. It worked effectively because it built upon our strength in overall financial planning and coincided with the expansion of our financial base. However, this matter is another example of how the economy challenges our collaborative ideals, as efforts to resolve this issue will continue in the fall of 2009.

Financial planning across the college is guided by the use of various financial models that have been developed at Wheaton and through work with outside consultants. These models enable us to manipulate a complex set of institutional variables and thus to project forward using different income and expense assumptions, and to make sound decisions about resource use and development. Although no one anticipated the extent of the current financial crisis, our financial planning abilities led to the fairly efficient work of Task Force One, an *ad hoc* group consisting of elected members of faculty standing committees along with staff and student members. The task force was convened to make important short-term budget decisions for dealing effectively with the initial phase of anticipated budget shortfalls. In addition, the task force was charged with facilitating community-wide input, which it encouraged through a series of open town meetings, presentations at faculty meetings and the creation of a blog that allowed for online dialogue. As a result of its efforts, the task force examined the recommendations of college officers and explored suggestions from the community to achieve \$2.5 million in budget cuts for the 2009-2010 fiscal year.

### **A Practice of Planning**

Ongoing planning is a natural part of the fabric of Wheaton College. The president and officers hold semi-annual planning retreats, and each college officer submits an annual divisional report that assesses progress toward divisional and institutional goals and establishes the priorities for work during the coming year. Intra-divisional planning is very much reflected in and driven by this annual process. The Budget Advisory Committee (BAC), which includes representatives from all constituencies of the college, makes recommendations to the president based on budget parameters and institutional priorities. A re-invigorated faculty Advisory Committee began, during this past year, to meet regularly with the president to improve two-way communication for enhanced shared governance. The provost’s monthly meetings with faculty department chairs offers another forum for this ongoing dialogue.

Responsibility for the curriculum rests with the faculty who, along with Provost Susanne Woods, undertook a major curriculum review and the resulting transformation between 2001-2003. The review process was all-inclusive, built as it was around a multi-task-force structure that involved a substantial number of faculty members. It also included a two-day faculty retreat, during which the final shape of the proposal was developed. Lengthy debates about details occupied several faculty meetings and resulted in a 91-3 vote in favor of the new curriculum, a remarkable outcome considering the major curricular changes involved.

The Educational Policy Committee of the faculty engages in planning as it is mandated to evaluate and review our general education curriculum, although it can be distracted by the need to focus on “must-do” tasks such as new course approvals, evaluations of student-initiated connections, and various business generated by academic departments. The committee has relied on several sub-committees, which emerged from the task-force structure of the curriculum review process, to help it track and evaluate developments across several areas of the current curriculum. It also encourages departments to maintain their commitments to our general education curriculum alongside their primary focus on the majors. As part of its renewed commitment to planning, the Educational Policy Committee has established a process for accumulating a library of data-based reports. For example, it now receives from the registrar a series of annual reports that facilitate the committee’s work in assessing how well curriculum requirements are working.

While the faculty, through the Educational Policy Committee, develops academic policy, the provost's office works to implement its policies. The provost is a member of the Educational Policy Committee and also convenes the department chairs and the Provost's Advisory Committee monthly for advice about academic programs and faculty development and growth. The provost also serves as on the President's Council and as the president's "second in command." All these structures enable coordinated academic planning to proceed collaboratively. Since the arrival of President Crutcher, the provost has a plan and budget for all academic departments to undergo reviews by outside evaluators on a regular basis.

Additionally, over the past decade Wheaton combined the library and information technology functions of the college. This consolidation has enormously enhanced our ability to plan for academic and administrative technology needs and to provide the kinds of LIS services that enable faculty, students and staff to do their work and thereby fulfill their educational and research goals. The college librarian and associate vice president for Library and Information Services, working closely with staff and faculty through the Library Technology and Learning Committee, developed and revised several plans for technology growth and development over the past decade, including faculty development programs in the use of technology for teaching.

Wheaton sustains itself by enrolling classes filled with qualified and diverse students. As such, careful, creative and visionary admission planning is a crucial part of our annual and strategic planning processes. Led by the vice president and dean for admission, and sometimes using research generated with the assistance of outside consultants, the college has engaged in thoughtful planning that has expanded the applicant pool and enabled greater selectivity in admission decisions. The analysis of our admission and financial aid areas illustrates the positive results of planning in these areas.

A relatively new but already important structure for planning at Wheaton is the President's Action Committee on Inclusive Excellence (PACIE). Created in 2005 by President Crutcher as the President's Advisory Committee on Inclusive Excellence "to oversee the process of achieving educational excellence through diversity and of achieving a truly multicultural community," as was proposed in our Strategic Plan, PACIE generated a comprehensive framework plan as part of its 2006 annual report. As a result of this plan, the committee, transformed into an action committee in 2007, began to implement as well as engage in the ongoing planning necessary to achieve Wheaton's goal of inclusive excellence. PACIE has surveyed faculty and staff as well as students over the past two years, generating data that it has used to begin and sustain campus-wide dialogues, through dialogue action teams, about race and ethnic diversity at Wheaton.

We have regular processes in place for the evaluation of staff and faculty. Following guidelines provided by the Human Resources Office, staff supervisors complete comprehensive assessments of staff members, who themselves undertake to assess their own work and set goals for the coming year. This review process has been shaped by input from the Staff Council to make it as positive and development-centered as possible. Annual reviews of untenured faculty, described more fully in faculty legislation, also are built around thorough self-assessments in a regularized format designed to elicit information about professional activities and descriptions of the teaching, scholarly or performance work, and community service completed during the year, as well as plans for the future. These self-assessments are reviewed with all tenured members of a department along with department chairs, who add departmental comments, based on a review of student course evaluations, on classroom observation visits, and on a discussion of professional accomplishments. The untenured faculty member can add a response to the department comments before the annual review is sent to the provost for review and inclusion in the faculty member's file. The provost may meet annually with untenured faculty to review the assessments. Full professors are asked each year to submit a description of activities for the year. This is factored into decisions about merit pay in those years when merit pay can be awarded.

The college continues to administer student course evaluations in every course. These evaluations employ a combination of shared questions across departments, which are included in faculty legislation, as well as discipline-specific questions developed by departments. The college actively uses the responses to these

evaluations: faculty review their own evaluations, which are also a part of all tenure and promotion review processes. This process of engaging students in the evolution of their own education is woven into the fabric of Wheaton culture; student evaluation of courses have existed in one form or another as far back as 1929.

Finally, we encourage thoughtful planning in our students as a basic part of their liberal arts education. A reflective model of planning that begins with individual goal-setting and assessment underlies Wheaton's institutional emphasis on connections, experiential learning, and strong, collaborative academic advising. The faculty members who teach First Year Seminar courses are instrumental in laying the foundation for the reflective model of planning; they initiate advising relationships with matriculating students and introduce them to the resources available on campus.

### **Assessment at Wheaton**

Our institutional research capabilities have grown over the past decade, as we have enriched our institutional research staffing. Supported by a strong Library and Information Services staff, the director of institutional research reports to the provost but undertakes research across various divisions of the college. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment initiates and provides support for all manner of institutional research, including regular surveys, special questionnaires, and historical and *Vital Signs* statistical data to ensure that we can both plan effectively and monitor our progress in various areas through regular and careful assessment of programs and goals.

Evaluation and assessment take place in all areas of the college. As will be clear in the discussion of each of the standards, Wheaton generates and uses appropriate data to plan and assess the work of the institution. Whether it involves assessing our new general education curriculum, delivering student services and meeting the wide range of student needs, keeping up with evolving research and teaching technologies, maintaining our physical plant, or monitoring our financial health, we track our actions and programs and commit our scarce resources based on regular assessment of how well we are meeting our goals. We include a few examples here to illustrate that evaluation and assessment have become a regular part of our identity, but we call your attention to separate discussions within each section of this self study.

As indicated in the description of the strategic plan, the president convenes the President's Coordinating Council annually to track and evaluate Vision 2014 objectives and goals. As the breadth, depth and possible institutional impact of the current economic depression became apparent this past fall, President Crutcher convened an *ad hoc* task force to review the budget and make recommendations for how we could cut back on spending without affecting our educational goals and our commitment to personnel.

With the assistance of a substantial grant, Wheaton undertook a major evaluation project (1998-2002) that laid the basis for a culture of assessment to emerge in the academic area of the college and shaped both the process and substance of such assessment. While this project targeted experiential learning, it provided sustained interaction around assessment among faculty, administrative staff and students. Above all, this project "imparted a deeper understanding of evaluation," among faculty and led them to include assessment as an important component of our most recent curriculum review so that assessment is integral to its implementation. Since then, the Educational Policy Committee has formed an Evaluation Sub-Committee to gather and disseminate data about academic programs to ensure that faculty are informed and can take appropriate action. Both the evaluation project and the evolution of the current general education curriculum have helped the faculty understand the importance of ongoing formative evaluation in their teaching.

During 2003, Wheaton was part of Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice), sponsored by the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice. As part of that program we received a comprehensive, favorable report documenting our effectiveness in the realm of student outcomes. This study and report encouraged us to be more rigorous in assessment using both our own data as well as data generated by participation in the NSSE. This year we have also joined the pilot writing consortium of NSSE, which has allowed us to administer to students an additional set of questions related to their writing experiences at the college. Accordingly, we annually administer an entering-survey to first year students, a

mid-semester assessment of First Year Seminar students, and a survey of seniors right before graduation. This survey includes questions generated to help us evaluate particular Wheaton programs. In sum, the DEEP report contributed to our growing culture of assessment, helping us to be more proactive in monitoring student learning, leadership and other development outcomes.

## **Appraisal**

Wheaton has done an excellent job using multiple *ad hoc* and ongoing structures for planning and assessment over the past several decades. Each college division and many departments are actively engaged in assessing and anticipating curricular, faculty development, and student needs as they assess progress and plan for the short-term future. The Educational Policy Committee undertakes continuing short-term planning on its own and through its various sub-committees whose work enables the Educational Policy Committee to maintain its broad curricular and learning-outcomes focus.

The strategic planning process that was initiated by President Crutcher in 2004 has been continued annually as we have assessed institutional progress toward both the strategic goals and the annual milestones. The success of this process has confirmed our need for a permanent planning structure as have current economic and demographic trends, which indicate that we must reconsider the way we do what we do while preserving the strength of our college community. In May, as a result of the work of Task Force One on financial planning, and based on our need to have a permanent strategic planning structure in place, the president, President's Council, and members of the faculty created a Planning and Priorities Committee, comprising administrators, staff, faculty and students. The PPC will review and make recommendations on long-term sustainability of the college to the president, President's Council and the Board of Trustees. This advisory committee will provide cross-divisional coordination in planning and assessment as it looks beyond the exigencies of any particular fiscal year to plan for a continuing and vibrant future that will keep Wheaton in a proactive rather than a reactive mode of decision making.

Not only have we used the results of curriculum evaluation to improve and inform educational planning and allocation of college and outside resources, but we also have disseminated our work, especially regarding curriculum development and assessment, through conferences and networking. We anticipate that Linda Eisenmann, our new provost, in addition to doing broad institutional planning, will want to explore how best to meet our need to monitor, continue to develop, and see to the implementation of assessment instruments for our current and future curricular offerings.

We want to continue to more broadly share and use data across divisions to facilitate planning and assessment. For example, the Educational Policy Committee, and indeed all faculty, should regularly review the data generated by the senior survey to evaluate how well students think our curriculum meets their needs, or how they experience our advising system, or perceive the learning environment on campus. Additionally, financial data should continue to be regularly available to various constituencies across the campus.

Finally, as a result of preparing this self study, we realize that we have some gaps in data collection—in particular when it comes to tracking alumnae/i graduate education and career paths. Only recently, Wheaton has engaged in an annual survey of the classes returning for reunion; five years will be required before a thorough sample of alumnae/i has been examined, but the process is started.

In short, we have much strength in planning and a growing culture of assessment on campus. In order to enhance what we do, we should strengthen communication across divisions including the sharing of data as broadly as possible.

## **Projections**

Wheaton will have in place a new, ongoing strategic planning structure that will begin to function during the 2009-2010 academic year when the Planning and Priorities Committee initiates its work. This advisory committee will keep the college looking ahead to anticipate and adjust to changes, with all areas of the college “on the same page” when it comes to institutional priorities. We anticipate that these priorities will be mission-driven, enabling us to retain our commitment to enhancing excellence through diversity, and that the work of this committee will lead to transparent and systematic sharing of data across the campus. One issue that looms large, once financial recovery seems established, is the development of a faculty/staff salary planning framework that recaptures the cooperative spirit of the previous faculty salary plan.

Annual planning and evaluation will continue within each division as college officers continue to work with their staffs to assess progress routinely, establishing yearly goals that can inform the planning and priorities process. These goals will be based on the work of both the President’s Council and the various advisory committees. Along with the Planning and Priorities Committee, the Budget Advisory Committee and Educational Policy Committee will continue to be part of the ongoing assessment and planning processes. Indeed, we expect that the work of all major committees will both contribute to and be enriched by the emergence of a planning and priorities structure on campus.

We will enhance inter-divisional communication to coordinate planning across divisions and enrich our commitment to assessment and evaluation. Assessment will be a normal and regular part of all of our activities.