

Ideas and Opportunities for Strengthening Whitman's Academic Program (Revisited – April 2004)

The following is a progress report on a planning paper written by the Division Chairs Committee during the summer of 2000. Significant progress has been made on most of its recommendations in the four years since it was written (though much always remains to be done). It is noteworthy that this progress was accomplished during a time when budgets were tight because of the weakness of the overall economy, and in particular, because of poor returns on endowment investments.

The Division Chairs Committee's report contained eight recommendations which have helped guide our planning. They were not listed in order of importance.

Recommendation 1: Develop our programs in life and environmental sciences to reflect the growing importance of and interest in these fields, and the opportunities represented by the geographic location of the college.

Recommendation 2: Provide students and faculty with the equipment and support necessary to apply appropriate information technology to their fields of study. Develop curricular areas related to information technology, such as the use of multi-media in the arts, and film studies.

Recommendation 3: Develop those aspects of the curriculum dealing with issues of multi-culturalism in American society, while increasing the percentage of faculty from traditionally underrepresented ethnic groups.

Recommendation 4: Continue to develop traditional areas of the liberal arts and sciences, paying particular attention to enrollments, class size and availability, strengthening general education, the Core, and interdisciplinary study, minimizing the use of temporary and adjunct faculty appointments, and addressing the staffing needs of small departments.

Recommendation 5: Upgrade the facilities supporting the curricular and co-curricular programs of the college. Areas of particular concern include:

- (a) Ensuring that the Science Building renovation and expansion meets the needs of the next generation of Whitman students and faculty.
- (b) Improving facilities for the arts, especially Harper Joy Theatre, the Music Building and the studio art wing of Olin Hall.
- (c) Improving facilities for athletics, fitness and recreation.
- (d) Increasing the supply of office and classroom space.

Recommendation 6: Enhance other forms of support for the academic program, including expanded funding for student/faculty collaborative research, faculty professional development, equipment and capital expenditures, and academic support personnel.

Recommendation 7: Enhance the curriculum by gradually expanding the size of the student body to 1500, but not beyond this point.

Recommendation 8: Increase faculty accessibility, opportunities for individualized instruction, and the richness of the curriculum by lowering student-faculty ratios.

We now turn to a discussion of the progress made in these areas:

Recommendation 1: *Develop our programs in life and environmental sciences to reflect the growing importance of and interest in these fields, and the opportunities represented by the geographic location of the college.*

- A new position in neurobiology was created.
- A position in biophysics was filled.
- A new major entitled Biophysics, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (BBMB) was created.
- A major grant from the Keck Foundation was secured that promotes the study of genetics and integrative biology.
- A Conservation Biology class is now offered both semesters. This is required of all Environmental Studies majors.
- A position was redefined to include environmental philosophy.
- A new position in environmental humanities was created with temporary funding from a Mellon Foundation grant.
- The Semester in the West program was created, also using startup money from the Mellon grant.
- A “regional studies center” was created in the space formerly occupied by the Maxey Museum. The Museum continues to occupy space in the building, which now also houses a new Environmental Studies Center.

Recommendation 2: *Provide students and faculty with the equipment and support necessary to apply appropriate information technology to their fields of study. Develop curricular areas related to information technology, such as the use of multi-media in the arts, and film studies.*

- A new position in film studies was created. This adds classes in both film criticism and production to the curriculum.
- A new major in Rhetoric and Film Studies was created.
- A new non-tenure-track position in music technology was created.
- Two technology interns were hired with funding from a Rockefeller Brothers Fund grant. One of these positions was retained after the grant was concluded,
- The technological infrastructure of the college has continued to expand, especially in areas of new construction, such as the Science Building. This includes the addition of several “smart classrooms.”
- The possibility of a new position in digital art and time-based media is part of the planning for a new Studio Art Building.

Recommendation 3: *Develop those aspects of the curriculum dealing with issues of multi-culturalism in American society, while increasing the percentage of faculty from traditionally underrepresented ethnic groups.*

Multi-culturalism in the curriculum takes two basic forms: the study of non-Western societies and the study of underrepresented voices in American society. Some recent developments expanding multicultural educational opportunities (of both forms) include:

- The number of tenure-track faculty appointments held by individuals from traditionally underrepresented minority populations has risen to 10 (out of 104 such positions).
- A position was redefined to specialize in American ethnic literature.
- A new position in the Sociology of Race and Ethnicity was created. So far, it has not been filled.
- A new major in Gender Studies was approved.
- The Dublin Award in multicultural studies was created with temporary funding.
- Two African-American scholars have been appointed as Arnold Professors. During 2002-04, a visiting faculty member from Africa taught classes in biology and environmental studies.
- The Associate Dean of the Faculty has assisted as a resource person for search committees by helping expand applicant pools to include more qualified candidates who are members of underrepresented populations.
- Whitman joined the Consortium for a Strong Minority Presence in Liberal Arts Colleges, which is administered by Grinnell College. It refers minority members for pre- and post-doctoral appointments at member institutions. During 2003-04, we had our first appointment under the program. We are interviewing candidates for another such appointment next year.
- A position was redefined to specialize in Latin American cultural anthropology.
- A position was reallocated to Politics and it was used to create a new position in Latin American politics. There are now six tenure-track faculty members with expertise in Latin American Studies.
- A new position in Asian Art History was created, which was supported by a grant from the Luce Foundation. There are now seven tenure-track faculty members with expertise in Asian Studies.
- The Whitman Summer Language Program in China was created.
- A grant from the Freeman Foundation will support visits by scholars from Asia to Whitman's campus, together with field experiences by our students in the scholars' home countries.

- A new position in Middle Eastern Religious Studies was created.
- A position was redefined to specialize in Islamic history. There are now three tenure-track faculty members with expertise in either the Middle East or Africa.
- The History Department is using its Core-replacement position to increase its offerings in African history.
- A review of the Critical and Alternative Voices class was conducted that was supportive of the offering.
- A new set of distribution requirements was approved for the general education component of our graduation requirements. This includes an area (also called Alternative Voices) consisting of offerings that are meant to expand our students' cultural horizons.

Recommendation 4: Continue to develop traditional areas of the liberal arts and sciences, paying particular attention to enrollments, class size and availability, strengthening general education, the Core, and interdisciplinary study, minimizing the use of temporary and adjunct faculty appointments, and addressing the staffing needs of small departments.

- As mentioned previously, there is a new set of distribution requirements.
- A major goal was realized for the First-Year Core: Staffing is now sufficient for each section to have 15 students.
- Several interdisciplinary programs have been strengthened: Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, Environmental Studies and BBMB have all benefited from new faculty appointments.
- Progress has been made on the staffing needs of small departments. Art History and Visual Culture Studies, Religion and Rhetoric and Film Studies added third faculty members. There are other small departments that still feel the need for additional personnel.
- The academic program continues to make extensive use of non-tenure-track faculty appointments. There are many strong individuals in these positions, but the degree of our dependence on such appointments is questionable.

Recommendation 5: Upgrade the facilities supporting the curricular and co-curricular programs of the college. Areas of particular concern include:

(e) Ensuring that the Science Building renovation and expansion meets the needs of the next generation of Whitman students and faculty.

- The renovation and expansion of the Science Building has been successfully completed.

(f) *Improving facilities for the arts, especially Harper Joy Theatre, the Music Building and the studio art wing of Olin Hall.*

- The basement of the Music Building has been successfully renovated. A new Studio Art Building is being planned. Nothing has been done for Harper Joy Theatre, which needs upgrades to its classroom and office space.

(g) *Improving facilities for athletics, fitness and recreation.*

- A new fitness facility is being planned, as well as the renovation and expansion of Sherwood Center.

(h) *Increasing the supply of office and classroom space.*

- The Science Building project has created new offices in that area. The recently occupied Boyer House has provided space for eight additional faculty offices. Renovation of the basement of the Music Building has created office space for adjunct faculty members in that department. The Environmental Studies Center includes five new faculty offices. Renovating the existing Studio Art wing of Olin Hall after that department moves to a new building could create significant additional space for faculty offices and classrooms.

Recommendation 6: Enhance other forms of support for the academic program, including expanded funding for student/faculty collaborative research, faculty professional development, equipment and capital expenditures, and academic support personnel.

- Funds for faculty professional development (ASID) have been significantly increased.
- Funds for start-up budgets in the sciences are now part of the overall college budget and are now very competitive with those offered by other elite institutions.
- A new academic support position was created for the Studio Art Department.
- A new technical support position was created for genetics/integrative biology/BBMB using funding from the Keck Foundation grant.
- A new technical support position was created for the Physics Department.
- A new IT-support position has been approved for the Science Building.
- A new academic support internship was created for the multi-media lab.

Challenges remain in this area. Significant needs for additional support personnel remain, such as a curator for the visual resource collection. One-time funding sources for student-faculty research in the sciences are drying up. Capital expenditure and equipment funding remains a challenge, especially in the Science Division and in the fine arts.

Recommendations 7 and 8 are related to the size of the college and are adequately addressed in data presented elsewhere. A significant increase in the size of the student body will clearly depend upon the construction of an additional residence hall.