

Fulfilling Whitman's Aspirations: An Agenda for the Next President

Whitman's vital signs are exceptionally strong. The quality of its faculty and academic programs, its selective admissions, its financial strength, and the remarkable sense of community and shared purpose that characterize campus life make it one of America's leading liberal arts colleges. But Whitman's trustees and faculty are not resting on their laurels but looking to the future. In the words of Whitman faculty, the next President should be someone "passionately devoted to the college," with "a restless ambition to make it even better." A balanced approach has served Whitman well in recent decades by improving the College across the board. Faculty compensation, student achievement, campus infrastructure, endowment per student, town-gown relations have all prospered. Part of the next President's job will be to sustain this momentum and to nurture the college's valued traditions. The next President will have the rare opportunity to lead the College in becoming (and being recognized as) one of the few national liberal arts colleges that exemplify residential undergraduate education at its best. In pursuit of this goal, he or she will have the benefit of existing short- and intermediate-range planning, but will doubtless want to work with the community to create a broader strategic plan for Whitman's future. Among the issues to be addressed in this plan are the following.

Enhance the College's national character and reputation

The new President will be expected to help Whitman become even more national in its outlook and reputation, and do so without sacrificing the College's powerful regional identity and its distinctive liberal arts niche. Although the College has earned a position among the leading national liberal arts institutions, its admission profile remains heavily weighted toward the Northwest, and its academic excellence is not as well known outside the region as it should be. Enhancing Whitman's national stature would enrich the critical mix of students and faculty on campus and would attract qualified students and faculty from a broader spectrum of locations and influences. This, in turn, would help graduates as they establish careers elsewhere in the country. A more national character and more national recognition might also broaden sources of funding. One way to strengthen the College's prominence and to affirm its national standing would be to play a prominent role in national debates over the future of liberal learning. Whitman is well placed to do so. Because of its history as a center of liberal learning in the West, especially the Pacific Northwest, it brings a distinctive and much-needed voice to such discussions.

Increase the diversity of the College

Whitman aspires to be a diverse and inclusive community with regard to its members' race, gender, nationality, religion, culture, geographic origins, sexual orientation and economic standing. Its commitment is rooted in the belief that the richer the mix of participants, the more stimulating an educational environment is likely to be. Similarly, it is important to prepare Whitman graduates to work and live in an increasingly global economic and multicultural environment. To increase the diversity of Whitman's faculty, staff, and students, the next President will provide leadership in strengthening recruitment and outreach efforts, assuring that the college remains financially accessible, providing social and cultural support for those historically underrepresented on the campus and in the region, and collaborating with the faculty to engage the curricular and scholarly ramifications of diversity.

Continue to build the College's financial strength

Whitman's endowment has grown substantially and alumni participation in annual giving (53%) is impressive. Moving forward, the College aims to enhance its fundraising efforts to become more competitive with other leading liberal arts colleges such as Amherst, Carleton, Pomona, Swarthmore, and Williams. To realize its aspirations, the new President will be called upon to provide leadership in studying the feasibility of a substantial capital campaign and, if warranted, planning and executing one.

Further strengthen Whitman's faculty and support the enhancement of the academic program

Whitman's faculty are intellectually vital scholars who are dedicated wholeheartedly to teaching undergraduates. This culture of commitment to students and to teaching is one of the College's defining characteristics. Because the College and the faculty have grown in recent years, a larger-than-usual proportion of faculty members are relatively new to Whitman. Supporting them in the challenging years before and just after the tenure decision, and helping them acculturate to Whitman's traditions and values, will be a critical part of the next President's work. It will be important to sustain recent gains that brought Whitman's faculty compensation to the median of its ambitious comparison group, and to maintain Whitman's generous program of sabbatical leaves. In close collaboration with the dean and the faculty, the President will also have the opportunity to identify, give precedence to, and invest in new curricular programs or emphases. Current initiatives include interdisciplinary studies of several types, the role of technology, and further development of the new center for teaching and learning.