

**Building on Excellence, 2010  
Academic Planning Document  
Committee of Division Chairs  
Whitman College  
April 7, 2010**

I. Purpose of the review

This report provides the results of a review of the Whitman College academic program conducted by the Committee of Division Chairs (CDC) over the course of the 2009-10 academic year. Its primary purpose is to indicate the principles we believe should inform comprehensive planning of the academic program over the course of the next five to ten years, and to offer recommendations about how these principles might be translated into practices that will contribute to the vitality of a liberal arts education at Whitman.

II. Premise of the review

When resources are limited, of necessity, some measure of tension will be engendered by the multiple and often competing claims of various key components of the Whitman academic program. These tensions will often require that we make difficult choices about the allocation of finite resources. That noted, we believe that vigorous debate about our priorities, aimed at achieving whatever measure of agreement we can secure, is key to determining the character of the liberal arts education that Whitman College will offer in the coming years.

In addition, this report is predicated on the conviction that, no matter how vigorous our disagreements on other matters, we share the belief that Whitman is a liberal arts college; that a liberal arts college is a distinctive form of academic institution; and that, as such, Whitman offers a uniquely valuable form of education to its students. The purpose of a Whitman education is suggested by the College's mission statement: "Through the study of humanities, arts, and social and natural sciences, Whitman's students develop capacities to analyze, interpret, criticize, communicate, and engage." As this statement indicates, the purpose of a Whitman education is not, first and foremost, to train its students for specific vocations; nor is it, first and foremost, to render our students experts in specific disciplines (although it may facilitate these ends). Rather, first and foremost, a Whitman education seeks to cultivate in students certain virtues that we consider inherently valuable. These include but are not limited to the capacity to engage in critical inquiry about received wisdom; the capacity to draw connections between apparently discrete domains of knowledge and experience; and the capacity to communicate in diverse modes of expression.

Consistent with this mission, we affirm our conviction that any transformation of the Whitman College academic program in the coming years must remain consistent with its status as a liberal arts college, and must remain congruent with the educational purposes that distinguish a liberal arts college from other institutions of higher learning.

III. Generating this review

To initiate this process, early in the fall semester of the 2009-10 academic year, the CDC invited department chairs and interdisciplinary program directors to submit statements indicating their curricular aspirations as well as the staffing and any additional requirements necessary to fulfill them. In preparing these statements, the CDC asked that chairs and directors think carefully about the relationship between their respective departments or programs and others in their own division as well as in other divisions; that they consider creatively how their specific curriculum may enhance the larger academic program of the College; and, finally, that they indicate how their priorities are congruent with and contribute to the core values articulated in the college's mission statement.

These departmental and program statements were submitted to the CDC in late November; and, shortly thereafter, based on its review of these statements, the CDC began work on a draft of the present document. Over the course of the 2009-10 academic year, the CDC met with the individual academic divisions, as well as with Whitman faculty as a whole, in order to discuss the draft document as it evolved over time. In April 2010, in light of these exchanges, the CDC prepared its final report.

#### IV. "Building on Excellence" Revisited

The faculty last engaged in a sustained effort to establish its principal priorities for the Whitman academic program in 2004. The results of that review are included in "Building on Excellence: Continuing the Development of the Academic Program." In addition to several conclusions, that document offered four recommendations. The CDC offers the following assessment of the current status of each of those four recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** *Academic support programs should be upgraded by (a) increasing key budgets and (b) adding important staff appointments.*

What follows is an update on the current status of the *budget areas* to which **Recommendation 1** called special attention:

1) Professional development (e.g., ASID)

*Update:* Between 2005-06 and 2009-10, the ASID budget increased by \$102,300. In addition, in 2008-09, a two year pilot program was initiated in order to establish Professional Development Accounts. Under that program each tenured and tenure-track, Forensics-track, and full-time continuing member of the instructional faculty not supported by start-up funds, contract travel, or income from endowed chairs is provided with an account of \$2,000 each year to support teaching and research.

2) Student-faculty research (e.g., Perry and Abshire awards)

*Update:* In 2006-07, a new budget of \$30,000 was created in order to supplement existing endowed student research funds. In addition, in 2009-10, a budget of \$8,000 was added in order to support travel and other expenses associated with senior thesis and research projects. Finally, in 2008-2009, a parents' fund was

created in order to support student-faculty collaborative research. To date, gifts to that fund total approximately \$103,000.

3) Equipment needs (especially in the fine and performing arts as well as the natural sciences)

*Update:* Between 2005-06 and 2009-10, there was no increase in the \$40,000 Humanities Capital Expenditures budget. The Science Equipment Replacement Fund budget was reduced from \$69,000 to \$65,550 in 2009-10.

4) Information environment (e.g., “smart” classrooms as well as financial support for journal subscriptions and databases in Penrose Library)

*Update:* Between 2005-2006 and 2009-10, the number of “smart” classrooms increased from 41 to 88. In addition, WCTS has installed standardized equipment in “smart” classrooms in order to provide a uniform user experience. Finally, in the last two years, control panels for data projector/sound systems in 28 of the existing “smart” classrooms were upgraded. With respect to Penrose Library, between 2005-06 and 2009-10, material expenditures increased by 3%, while the average cost of periodicals published in the United States increased 34%.

5) Post-graduate fellowships and scholarships

*Update:* In 2005-06, the Fellowships and Grants Office was created and staffed by a full-time director as well as a part-time administrative assistant.

What follows is an update on the current status of the increases in *staff support* to which **Recommendation 1** called special attention:

1) Information environment (specifically, creation of an Information Technology support position in Maxey Hall; provision of additional staff support for Geographic Information Systems; the addition of a Visual Resource Curator; and the hiring of an Information Literacy/Reference Librarian as well as an Electronic Resource/Metadata Coordinator)

*Update:*

An Information Technology support position in Maxey was created and filled effective July 1, 2008.

Geographic Information Systems: In 2006, a 12-station GIS lab and teaching classroom was created. Since that time, three faculty-IT teams have been sent to NITLE GIS training classes; seven additional IT staff received training to support faculty; a NITLE GIS team was invited to campus in Spring 2007 to conduct a workshop for faculty; in May 2007 WCTS conducted a four day CwTI workshop on GIS; and, at the end of 2009, the GIS lab was upgraded.

Visual Resource Curator: The digitization of the Art History slide collection largely eliminated the need for this position. The title of the Sheehan Gallery Technical Assistant was changed to Exhibitions and Collections Manager in the Spring of 2007, and the position was increased from 70% to full-time.

Information Literacy/Reference Librarian: In 2006, this position was created. Although currently filled on a temporary basis, it is anticipated that the position will be filled again on a permanent basis in July 2010.

Electronic Resources/Metadata Coordinator: Redefined as a Digital Services Librarian, the Director of Penrose Library will seek approval to fill this position when the college's financial conditions improve.

2) Technical support position for the Psychology Department

*Update:* No permanent provision has been made to meet this recommendation.

3) Part-time piano technician

*Update:* No permanent provision has been made to meet this recommendation.

4) Intern positions in the arts

*Update:* No permanent provision has been made to meet this recommendation.

5) Community-based learning coordinator

*Update:* In 2009-10, using funds from an HHMI grant, the position of Outreach Program Coordinator was created to facilitate education in the natural sciences, but no broader community-based learning coordinator position has been created.

**Recommendation 2:** *Three curricular areas should receive particular attention: (a) multiculturalism and international studies; (b) the life sciences; and (c) the fine and performing arts.*

*Update:* Of the eighteen tenure track positions created between the 2005-06 academic year and 2009-10, the following contribute to the curricular areas specified in "Building on Excellence (2005)":

a) Multiculturalism and international studies

Chinese: position currently held by Donghui He

Economics: position formerly held by Raechelle Mascarenhas

History: position currently held by Jacqueline Woodfork

Japanese: position currently held Hitomi Johnson

Sociology: position currently held by Gilbert Mireles

Spanish: position currently held by Alberto Galindo

b) The life sciences

Biology: position currently held by Leena and Tom Knight  
Biology: position currently held by Tim Parker  
Chemistry (organic): position currently filled by Marcus Juhasz  
Chemistry (bioanalytical): position currently vacant

c) The fine and performing arts

Art (Studio): position currently held by Michelle Acuff

Art (Studio): position currently held by Ben Bloch

Theatre: position currently held by Cindy Croot

In sum, of the eighteen tenure track positions created since 2005-06, a total of thirteen contribute, in whole or in part, to the curricular areas identified in “Building on Excellence.” The remaining five positions were added to the following departments: Economics; History; Mathematics; Politics; and Psychology.

**Recommendation 3:** *Tenure-track faculty appointments should be added to (a) internally replace sabbaticals; (b) upgrade long-standing temporary appointments; and (c) strengthen key programs.*

*Update:* Of the eighteen tenure track positions created between the 2005-06 academic year and 2009-10, four represent upgrades to tenure-track status of long-standing temporary appointments, and three represent the creation of internal sabbatical leave positions. The remaining eleven represent net additions to the tenure track instructional resources available to the academic program.

**Recommendation 4:** *The College should evaluate and, where appropriate, upgrade the following facilities: (a) Harper Joy Theatre; (b) Maxey Hall; (c) the current Studio Art wing of Olin Hall; and (d) Hunter Conservatory.*

*Update:*

a) Harper Joy Theatre: A proposal to renovate Harper Joy Theatre was approved by the Board of Trustees in February 2010 (contingent on achievement of the College’s fundraising goal and final approval of the project bid). The primary elements of the proposed renovation include the following: six new offices; a new black box theater; a new above ground costume shop/classroom; conversion of the existing black box to a classroom/student experiential theater; upgrades to mechanical and electrical systems; a new rigging system for the main theater; new auditorium seating in the main theater; an expanded lobby and entrance; and an elevator to all levels.

b) Maxey Hall: The most significant changes made in conjunction with the renovation of Maxey Hall, which will be finished by the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year, include the following: creation of 19 additional office spaces, including offices designated as workroom/research spaces for Sociology, Economics, Anthropology, Politics and Environmental Studies; five new classrooms, including those suitable for high enrollment

courses; two new small seminar spaces as well as a new video-conference ready classroom; a remodeled Psychology research/experimentation area on the third floor, including a new animal test room, equipment teaching spaces, and a new child development center; three new student study areas; a remodeled main office and faculty lounge; and refurnished bathrooms in the new wing as well as remodeled bathrooms in the old wing. All classrooms in Maxey will now have “smart” technology, many with new computer/media workstations. Finally, the computer lab has been remodeled.

c) Studio Art wing of Olin Hall: In 2008, the 38,000-square-foot Fouts Center for Visual Arts facility was completed. The Center provides space for the College’s growing visual arts program, including painting, sculpting, drawing, digital arts, welding, instruction, and exhibits. Following completion of this project, in 2008-2009, the east wing of Olin Hall was renovated. The primary changes include the following: 18 new faculty offices; seven new "smart" classrooms of varying size; two outdoor classrooms; expanded work and storage space for the Sheehan Gallery; landscaped Japanese-style gardens in the walkway; enhanced breezeway and fountain; climate controlled storage and study spaces for the Davis Collection of Asian Art; a state-of-the-art Japanese Tearoom; and numerous informal study areas of various sizes. The renovation project also involved changes in the "old Olin," including upgrades of Olin 160; the conversion of the old darkroom and slide library spaces into seminar rooms; the transformation of Olin 157 based on current pedagogical uses; some modifications in the architecture of the Olin computer lab; and technology improvements in Olin 130.

d) Hunter Conservatory: Work on Hunter Conservatory, including the distribution of space in this building, remains in transition. The principal elements of its transformation include the following: In 2005, the Multimedia Digital Lab was moved from the fourth to the first floor in order to create WCTS office space; a Film Studies laboratory was created on the first floor; and the audio-visual equipment in Kimball Auditorium was upgraded. It remains desirable to enhance the academic use of the building by converting additional spaces into faculty offices and teaching classrooms, and by refurnishing the lobby for “informal learning” use by students.

#### V. The current academic program

In this document, the CDC is chiefly concerned with the academic program at Whitman College. As such, unlike the 2005 iteration of “Building on Excellence,” this document does not concentrate on the need for additional material resources or additional staff positions to support the academic program. The CDC nonetheless affirms the College’s continued need to consider

the resource and staffing issues that were emphasized in that earlier document, but have not yet been addressed.

In addition, the current document does not concentrate on the ongoing renovation needs of the principal academic buildings on campus. The CDC nonetheless emphasizes that the most urgent needs at present concern the Science Building. The most pressing improvements to that building include the addition of medium-sized classrooms; the renovation of Gaiser; additional office spaces; research and teaching lab spaces for faculty as well as student/faculty research; and new equipment spaces.

Turning directly to the academic program, the principal elements of the current curriculum of Whitman College include the First-Year Experience (General Studies 145/46); distribution requirements; established major and minor programs (including the Senior Assessment in the Major); interdisciplinary programs; and the system of electives.

With these elements in mind, this report states the general principles we believe should inform future development of the academic program at Whitman College. These principles concern 1) the structure of the academic program; 2) the definition of faculty positions; and 3) the form of faculty governance. For the sake of facilitating discussion, we have divided our statement of principles into these three categories, although we recognize that there is considerable overlap between them and hence that many principles could be included in more than one category. We also recognize that specific recommendations generated by these principles are unlikely to be perfectly congruent with one another, especially in terms of their resource implications, but that is a dilemma that cannot be entirely resolved in a broad planning document of this sort.

### **I) Principles concerning the academic program:**

- A) *Principle:* Each of the key elements of the current academic program should be subject to critical examination in order to determine whether and how it enhances the liberal arts education offered by Whitman College, and resources should be allocated in light of that examination.
  - 1) *Recommendation:* To the extent possible, the College should fold the imperatives of accreditation into forms of critical assessment that are appropriate to as well as supportive of its academic program.
  - 2) *Recommendation:* The College should sustain its current support for regular external review of established majors, interdisciplinary programs, and other key elements of the academic program.
  - 3) *Recommendation:* The College should develop appropriate mechanisms for assessing the Senior Assessment in the Major as well as other elements of the academic program not currently subject to periodic evaluation.

- 4) *Recommendation:* The College should initiate an examination of its current distribution requirements in order to determine how best to enhance the commitment to general studies that is central to a liberal arts education.

B) *Principle:* Especially in light of the move to a five course annual teaching load, modifications of the academic program should concentrate on cultivation of and innovations within the established elements of that program.

- 1) *Recommendation:* The College should take steps to address as soon as practicable the instructional staffing needs of departments unable to move to an annual five course teaching load absent additional resources as well as those whose major programs are significantly compromised by this move.
- 2) *Recommendation:* The College should ensure that established interdisciplinary programs are adequately and regularly staffed.
- 3) *Recommendation:* The College should ensure that the goals of its First-Year Experience are clearly articulated, and that this program is adequately and regularly staffed.

C) *Principle:* Acknowledging that the vitality of inter-disciplinary programs depends on the strength of established academic disciplines, but also recognizing that academic departments sometimes encourage insularity, the faculty should strive to cultivate webs of connections among established departments and other key elements of the academic program.

- 1) *Recommendation:* In order to enhance our students' grasp of the webs of connection joining various elements of the College's academic program, the faculty should determine how to better link the First-Year Experience with interdisciplinary programs as well as departmental majors in all of the current academic divisions.
- 2) *Recommendation:* In order to encourage forms of inquiry that take their starting point from substantive issues, questions, and problems that cross established disciplinary lines, the College should invite faculty members to develop new ways to draw connections between established departmental majors as well as between these major programs and other key elements of the academic program. Possible ways to do so include the development of courses taught by faculty members in different disciplines and across academic divisions; the promotion of cross-listed courses as well as the creation and/or addition of courses that can count toward more than one set of major requirements; and the grouping of courses from different disciplines into thematic constellations.

- 3) *Recommendation:* The College should make funding available, in addition to that currently provided by the Innovations in Teaching and Learning grants, in order to encourage faculty to engage in collaborative curricular projects.
- 4) *Recommendation:* Consistent with the call, included in “Building on Excellence (2005),” to pay special attention to “multiculturalism and international studies,” the College should build on its current efforts to introduce global perspectives into the curriculum of all of its academic divisions.

*D) Principle:* The faculty should support programs that foster various forms of literacy that are essential to a liberal arts education in the twenty-first century (including but not limited to written, oral, and performative expression as well as modes of media and technological literacy).

- 1) *Recommendation:* The College should encourage and enable faculty, in consultation with WCTS staff, librarians, and administrators to determine how best to integrate new media and emerging technologies into the academic program.
- 2) *Recommendation:* The College should build on the current work of the Written and Oral Communication Initiative in order to strengthen student skills in various modes of communication and to support faculty in teaching these skills.
- 3) *Recommendation:* In order to enhance the capacity of students to grasp the interdependence of issues of academic inquiry, as well as the relationship of these issues to matters beyond the formal academic program, the College should encourage the acquisition of ecological literacy.

*E) Principle:* Recognizing that learning takes place in multiple contexts, the College should support community-based, off-campus, and other extra-classroom programs, but only insofar as they are clearly grounded in the academic mission of the College and do not detract from established forms and sites of learning.

- 1) *Recommendation:* The College should provide appropriate forms of support, including but not limited to financial and staff support, in order to develop appropriate learning opportunities, short as well as long term, that take place outside more conventional spaces of inquiry and performance (e.g., the classroom, lab, studio, and stage).
- 2) *Recommendation:* The faculty should revisit the College’s current course scheduling model in order to minimize conflicts between learning opportunities that take place outside the conventional spaces of academic inquiry, on the one hand, and community-based, off-campus, and other extra-classroom programs, on the other.

## **II) Principles concerning faculty positions:**

*A) Principle:* The responsibilities involved in sustaining the academic program of the College should be fairly distributed among tenured as well as tenure-track faculty and within as well as across departments.

*1) Recommendation:* The College expects each full-time member of the instructional staff to teach courses that contribute to the general education requirements of its academic program (the First-Year Experience and/or distribution requirements).

*2) Recommendation:* Where feasible, the College should make departmental contributions to established interdisciplinary programs and the First-Year Experience a required condition of the addition of new tenure track positions to established academic departments.

*3) Recommendation:* The College should seek to ensure internal fairness within departments with respect to the course offerings necessary to sustain established major programs, including the Senior Assessment in the Major.

*4) Recommendation:* To the extent possible, the faculty should seek to ensure an equitable distribution of workload between departments, taking into account independent study projects, comprehensive examinations, faculty-student research projects, the Senior Assessment in the Major, etc.

*5) Recommendation:* To the extent possible, the responsibility for pre-major advising should be distributed fairly among faculty members holding tenure-track positions.

*B) Principle:* Whitman should consider ways of defining new instructional positions and, where appropriate, of re-defining existing positions in ways that cultivate webs of connections among established departments as well as between the major programs of those departments and other key elements of the academic program.

*1) Recommendation:* Where possible, the College should make joint appointments involving formal commitments to an existing department as well as an established interdisciplinary program; or, alternatively, make appointments in an established area of interdisciplinary inquiry joined to a formal commitment to an established academic department.

*2) Recommendation:* Consistent with the mission statement of the College, the Office of the Provost and Dean of the Faculty should reaffirm its commitment to incorporate the value of diversity, broadly construed, into all stages of all searches to fill faculty positions.

C) *Principle:* The College should increase its total number of tenure track appointments and, in consequence, reduce its reliance on short-term non-tenure track faculty.

- 1) *Recommendation:* Where possible, the College should upgrade long-term adjunct positions to tenure track status and create permanent internal sabbatical leave replacement positions.
- 2) *Recommendation:* The College should identify additional ways to enhance the status of non-tenure track faculty members who are central to the integrity of its academic program.

### **III) Principles concerning faculty governance:**

A) *Principle:* Responsibility for the various elements of faculty governance, including supervision of the curriculum and regulation of the conduct of students, should be fairly distributed among tenured as well as tenure-track faculty and within as well as across departments.

- 1) *Recommendation:* When identifying faculty members to run for elected positions, and when recommending faculty members for committee appointments, the Nominating Committee should review the current distribution of administrative responsibilities among the faculty. In addition, the Nominating Committee should take into account the expectation, stated in the *Faculty Handbook*, that “evidence of conscientious college service should be clearly apparent at such key points as the granting of tenure and promotion. Significant contributions to college service, as defined below, are expected for promotion to the rank of professor.”
- 2) *Recommendation:* The College should acknowledge and, where possible, reconfigure the workload of department chairs, interdisciplinary program directors, and division chairs.

B) *Principle:* To the extent possible, the faculty should re-configure the work involved in faculty self-governance.

- 1) *Recommendation:* The faculty should revisit and continue to act on the recommendations contained in the final report of the Faculty Workload Committee, with an eye to abolishing unnecessary committees and reorganizing the approval process for curricular changes.
- 2) *Recommendation:* The faculty should develop a means of ensuring more adequate coordination among and formal representation of interdisciplinary programs in the collective governance of the academic program.

- 3) *Recommendation:* The faculty should consider the creation of one or more additional academic divisions.
- 4) *Recommendation:* Recognizing that it is formally authorized “to take proper measures for the government and discipline of the students,” the faculty should seek to reconfigure and, where possible, streamline its exercise of this authority.

C) *Principle:* The College should encourage more regular and effective channels of communication among its principal academic divisions.

- 1) *Recommendation:* To the extent possible, faculty meetings should be devoted to discussion of issues of substantive concern to the faculty as a whole.

## VI. Conclusion

We recognize that planning for and modification of the Whitman academic program is an ongoing process, and that this document represents a crucial but not the sole element of that enterprise. Because we do not believe that the purpose of this report is to generate detailed proposals for changes in the current curriculum, for the most part, we have cast our principles and recommendations in general terms.

That said, it is our expectation that this document will provide guidance to the CDC in the coming years as it considers modifications of the academic program; as it entertains requests regarding the allocation of various resources; and as it generates recommendations regarding the most pressing instructional staffing needs of the academic program. In addition, we anticipate that this report will prove helpful as the college undertakes a major capital campaign and as it engages in the assessment required by the accreditation review process.