
2009 Staff Concerns and Considerations

Budget Advisory
Committee
Presentation

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INTRODUCTION

The staff thanks the President and members of the Budget Advisory Committee for providing us with a forum for considering and shaping recommendations about the relationship between resource allocation and broad institutional priorities. The BAC representatives for staff solicited feedback for this presentation through email, over the phone, in person, and through the Staff Association meetings.

Staff at Wheaton have been and continue to be dedicated to the mission, vision, values, and priorities of the College. This is evident in the way we provide support to students and to each other. As staff we are not focused on just one part of the community and in many cases what we do at Wheaton touches everyone. We may not be physically standing at the head of a class teaching but we are there in spirit. We are there to support that faculty member and those students. We bring those students to campus. We are there to answer their questions and guide them and their families through a sea of forms and paperwork. We make sure the building is open, lights are on, the room is clean, and the technology is working. We are there to make sure students are comfortable and safe on our campus. We are part of the Wheaton experience.

We know these are very difficult times. We know in the next twelve to twenty four months and possibly longer we will be facing an uncertain economic climate. We hope the College's administration continues to keep us informed and to ask for our opinions while leading us through these next few years.

We are familiar with working within tight budgets and have always been flexible to meet the ever changing needs of students and each other and we will continue to work this way. We hope you will take our concerns and considerations under advisement and we hope we can in many ways ease the burden that the College is shouldering. We are all in this together.

Our presentation will be presented in three parts. Part one will consist of concerns we have about the future, how we hope we can move forward, and ideas we have for the President, President's Council, and the Board of Trustees. We hope these ideas will be useful in getting us through these difficult times. Part two will contain concerns we have had over the last two years and are still important issues for staff. We recognize that these are difficult times and the likelihood of our concerns being addressed may not be feasible. However, we wanted to include them in our report as a matter of record. Part three will contain our summary and an addendum.

Part One

Staff concerns regarding the uncertain economic climate, how we hope we can move forward, and ideas we have for the President, President's Council, and the Board of Trustees we hope will be useful in getting us through these difficult times.

Based on the feedback we have received from staff over the last two weeks here are our concerns and ideas (not in ranking order).

Staff is concerned with:

- Keeping the college open
- Providing students with a great education in a safe environment
- Not having enough financial aid or access to loans to help families afford Wheaton
- Enrollment increasing without considering where they will live or who will support them
- Waste... such as food, spending on technology, events, printing, etc.
- Saving jobs in these tough economic times without losing staff or faculty
- Learning to "make do" and spend wisely
- Not using resources we may have to generate other revenue
- Many departments are already understaffed cutting them further could really impair our services
- Freezing salaries (should be equitable but at the same time consider those staff who make low wages)
- Finding ways to freeze salaries or cut them without causing too much pain
- After the salary freezes... what happens when the economy comes back? Does staff start at the bottom again or will some kind of plan be in place to bring everyone back to where they would be?
- Making cuts (in personnel or services) before weighing all the options. Please get staff, faculty, and students involved in these decisions.
- Understanding that divisions will need to make important decisions about their services. These decisions will need to be supported by the campus or funded through other division budgets in order to continue these services
- Not getting consistent messages or having to read between the lines which if misconstrued can cause more problems
- Building a new science building during lean times- how can we fill it with new science technology, heat it, staff it, and maintain it if we can't afford to take care of current budget problems now?
- What is happening with Global Education- hasn't it always been a drain on the budget- why is it still open if it can never be sustained?
- Not creating different sources of revenue
- "The plan" ... what is it?
- Not everyone jumping in to roll up their sleeves and digging deep to get us all through this. It should be a college wide commitment.

Ideas staff have submitted that may help with saving current positions, keeping the college open, and generating other revenue (not in ranking order).

- Freeze all hiring and new positions:
 - Find ways to share the duties by having others in the department assume them
 - We may have to cancel an existing service if we can't fill the position responsible for doing it so support will be needed
- Salary freeze:
 - No raises for FY10 and the situation should be evaluated for FY11 and so forth until the economy rebounds
 - Rising cost of health benefits. If they do rise and there is a salary freeze the college should consider borrowing from our retirement contribution and pay the added expense. Those receiving no benefits can keep the retirement amount. (for example - if the college gives us 9% and health benefit rises 3% then the retirement amount decreases to 6%)
- Discontinue retirement contribution until economy comes back and use that money for salary or annual bonuses or budget relief.
- Request that employees pay more for life and dental benefits if it will save jobs
- Salary cuts:
 - Find an equitable way to cut salaries. It would not be fair for all staff to absorb the same percentage of salary cuts.
- Furlough (State and federal government do this from time to time):
 - Every employee gives back 104 hours of salary annually. Staff could work 40 hours a week but only get paid for 38 hours. At the end of 52 weeks we would have given back the equivalent of 104 hours without pay and it wouldn't be as bad as not receiving 2.5 weeks without pay all at once or a cut in salary.
 - Possible receive 104 hours of additional benefit time as compensation
- Offer part time arrangements or position sharing for those who are able to do it
 - Could save on position overhead, physical office space, share technology
- Discontinue Over Time:
 - If staff need to be here above and beyond regular schedule let them flex their work week to accommodate it.
 - Let staff accrue and use comp time (state workers accrue and use comp time so it must be legal)
- Work a condensed work week (40 hours in 4 days)
 - College could close most of its buildings and save energy
- Generate other revenue:
 - Charge (at a discounted educational price) for student software now free
 - This could help defray the cost of other software commitments (i.e. administrative and academic software)
 - Charge for student repairs (at a discounted rate)
 - Generate revenue on our recyclables:

- College and staff recyclables (Many staff do not recycle because their cities or towns do not provide a method to do this. If we had bins on campus they could drive by and deposit it themselves. Wheaton could then sell it.)
 - Many students stay in the area during summer break (internships, local jobs, etc.) see if there is any interest renting rooms to them
- Spending money:
 - Each Division should spend wisely
 - Cutting budgets can sometimes create an active “black market” with wasteful spending. Cutting the technology budget is one example of this.
 - Spending wisely on technology
 - Research hardware and software virtualization to save money
- Find ways to help families with rising education costs:
 - Make financial aid a priority
 - Help students with computers or book purchases by giving them a low/no interest loan or work study opportunity
 - Eliminate the student food take out policy to reduce waste and food costs
- Communications and Decision making:
 - Staff hopes that decisions that have to be made are made with input from all staff, faculty, and students, especially when it comes to cutting or limiting services.
 - As soon as the plan has been formulated and decided upon communication should begin.
 - Have regular “town meetings” to discuss problems and possible solutions or use radio station to get message out
 - We have enough committees! Let’s utilize the ones we have and not waste time recreating the wheel.
 - We need to know the truth. If there is nothing to report or not all of the facts are in yet we need to know that.
- Please stop talking about tuition benefits! It's time to move on- Thanks!

Part Two

Contains concerns staff has had over the last three years and are still important issues to staff. We also know that these are difficult times and the likelihood of our concerns being addressed is not feasible at this time. We just want them listed as a matter of record.

- Salaries (equity in increases for staff and faculty, merit/performance based instead of across the board, longevity raises or steps, market comparisons and geographic location considerations, need for a salary plan comparable to the faculty plan)
- Medical benefits for retirees (group coverage for retirees)
- Tuition benefits for employees (not their dependents)
- TIAA CREF Retirement Contribution (increase requested)
- Medical and Dental benefits (keeping them low/affordable)

Part Three

Summary

As you can see from our report the staff at Wheaton College is concerned about the effects the current financial situation is having on the institution. We are concerned for our jobs, but are also worried about the future of Wheaton. We accept the current hiring freeze, pay freeze and budget cuts as necessary in today's environment. As our comments and suggestions indicate, staff members are ready to do whatever we can to help in these trying times.

It is also very important to all members of the Wheaton Community that the situation be discussed openly and truthfully. Rumors continue to swirl creating unease across campus. We thank President Crutcher for the open meetings and sincere requests for comments. However, based on the comments received, there still remains a concern about the true financial status of Wheaton. As BAC staff representatives we request that an effort be made to continue this open policy with frequent updates regarding the changing situation.

Finally, we believe it is important to reiterate the issues from previous years that remain a staff concern. We appreciate the financial stress the College is experiencing and understand the cost of addressing these issues during the current financial situation is not feasible. However, as we continue to formulate the budget for this year and the future, it is important to not let current problems overshadow future planning.

Again, we thank President Crutcher and members of the BAC for the opportunity to present our concerns and our ideas.

Addendum:

Due to the early scheduling of this year's presentation of the staff report the BAC staff representatives did not have enough time to ask the staff if they were behind a 0% or 2.3% increase to the Comprehensive Fee for fiscal year 2010. Based on the information we did receive we have recommended that the President and the Board of Trustees implement at least a 2.3% increase to the Comprehensive Fee for fiscal year 2010.