

WHEATON COLLEGE
STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



FACING CHALLENGES WITH INNOVATIVE AND IMPACTFUL SOLUTIONS

STUDENT PRESENTATION TO THE
BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PRESENTED BY

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PRESENTED FEBRUARY 6, 2009
REVISED FEBRUARY 12, 2009

INTRODUCTION

From a financial perspective, this is a different year requiring a different approach in formulating the College's budget. The tactics and techniques we grew accustomed to due to the relative abundance of the past several years are no longer relevant in a time when scarcity is the immovable watchword. And so, to accommodate this different time, the students of Wheaton College would like to offer a somewhat different presentation.

What we offer is a not a "wish list" of student needs or wants. In fact, grounded by a pragmatic and nagging situational awareness, we will not spend much time at all asking for the items that have perennially dotted student presentations to the this committee.

The following presentation includes three discrete sections: We will begin by recounting a few stories that illustrate how the deteriorating economic climate has impacted students; we will then share a comprehensive briefing on the Student Affordability Plan (SAP); and we will end with an articulation of students' thoughts on a number of substantive questions before the Budget Advisory Committee.

At its core, this presentation emphasizes three key points: First, the current economic climate is destroying or threatening the ability of students to remain or become part of the Wheaton Community; second, our college's commitment to financial aid and better utilization of existing resources must be expanded; and third, the Student Government Association is working feverishly to formulate and implement SAP, a package of 10 policies that will help to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn on students. We hope to announce SAP to the student body on March 18th.

I. STORIES ILLUSTRATING THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

In order to understand the impact of the financial crisis, we think that it is important to see it through the eyes of those who are most impacted – Wheaton's students. These stories illustrate the issues that take precedence for many students.

Our first story focuses on a very engaged student who will not return to Wheaton in the fall. A student leader, he serves as an RA, enriching the residential experience of a floor of residents who look to him for advice, encouragement, and guidance on how to make the Wheaton experience their own. Beyond that, he pursues his passion in the arts, through strong participation in not one or two, but three musical groups – chorale, chamber choir, and an a cappella group. Affording to live and learn at Wheaton has always been a struggle for this student. While this student was once teetering on the edge if leaving Wheaton due to affordability, he is now pushed over the cliff. For him, the opportunities that Wheaton provides are no longer within his reach.

In the case of another student, a committed academic, she will not be able to actualize the full breadth of learning that the Wheaton education stands for. Having just returned from a semester abroad in the fall, she's not ready to stop exploring the world around her. This student wants to continue applying her classroom learning to the "real world" and so she has set her sights on an

interesting summer internship. However, because she contributes to her tuition payments, and because the internship is unpaid, she decides against pursuing this learning experience. The oppressive weight of her financial burdens and the finite pool of resources available to the Filene Center have blocked her options for meaningful learning.

In the final case, consider the many students who enter courses that require a host of expensive textbooks. The total cost of purchasing the books in the four most popular classes at Wheaton is about 750 dollars. To many students, this price tag is unacceptable and unaffordable. These students find themselves in a Hobbesian Dilemma in which they must choose to either save needed money and compromise their studying, or buy the books and relinquish hundreds of dollars. The price of textbooks, and the common unavailability of books on reserve, are handicapping students' ability to invest themselves fully in their courses.

II. PREVIEW OF THE STUDENT AFFORDABILITY PLAN (SAP)

By March 18th, SGA will announce to campus the Student Affordability Plan (SAP). Though this package of ten policies will be implemented and funded by SGA, for this program to be truly successful, the Administration, faculty, and staff must be apprised and supportive. Symbolic endorsement would accelerate the implementation of SAP; and, in some cases, material support would optimize the impact of SAP.

The Greener Wheaton Competition: The Greener Wheaton Competition is a campus-wide electricity savings competition that incentivizes competitive conservation with an SGA-sponsored prize and seeks to both lower Wheaton's carbon footprint and generate savings that can be invested in financial aid. This competition has been publicized through a Youtube video, meetings with every RA on campus, articles in The Wire, and through aggressive and professional postering. Sylvania and National Grid have donated over 1800 compact fluorescents that will be distributed to students. But more can be done: On February 20th, SGA will ask the Board of Trustees to provide a monetary contribution that matches the savings generated by this competition. We would also like to ask that this committee, under guidance from President Crutcher, resolve to funnel saved dollars directly into financial aid. If this committee can view these savings as cost reduction rather than cost avoidance, we can increase student conservation by assuring them that every dollar not spent on electricity bills will be spent on financial aid.

SGA Experiential Learning Stipends: Wheaton has a strong dedication to experiential learning. This economic climate challenges us to keep these opportunities open to all students. Internships, research opportunities, and volunteer work over summer breaks are chances for Wheaton students to apply the knowledge that they acquire in the classroom to the outside world. Under normal circumstances these opportunities are reserved to those with means; in this climate, these opportunities are limited even further. Therefore, in order to widen access to meaningful, unpaid experiences to those from all economic backgrounds, the SGA will institute a program in which (non-credit) Experiential Learning stipends will be offered to those receiving aid who otherwise would not be able to fund small expenses such as travel to and from the site, lunch, and other fees that accompany the work experience. The merit of these applications will be adjudicated by students and the need will be determined by Student Financial Services. Our

intent is to have students help other students reach their full potential in their Wheaton learning experience.

Books on Reserve: The high cost of textbooks has always been an issue for Wheaton students and it has never been more of a burden than now. Part of the Student Affordability Plan is to purchase some of the most expensive textbooks and place them on reserve in the Kollett Center for students to use instead of purchasing them. We plan to purchase several thousands dollars worth of textbooks for the 2009-2010 academic year.

Recording Studio in Balfour: In addition to books on reserve, the Student Affordability Plan seeks to make use of under utilized facilities here on campus. We plan to create a music recording studio in the WCCS office so that performance groups can record their CD's on campus precluding the need for SGA to spend thousands every year to fund these ventures. Every dollar that SGA does not spend on recording costs can be invested in events that benefit the entire campus. This idea is innovative because we plan to use a space already available and make a one time investment to save money in the long run. This project would cost approximately \$17,000 to \$23,000 and would be shared between SGA and other interested parties. This substantial investment would pay for itself in 2-3 years.

Discounts at Local Businesses for Students: Though there are various outlets for consumption of various goods and services on campus, Wheaton students are also members of the greater Norton community. SGA has conducted outreach efforts to local business to foster relationships that will result in discounts for students who patronize participating businesses. SGA is talking to local chambers of commerce and targeting local businesses to make this a success. Through an arranged relationship between Wheaton and those businesses in the form of a discount card, Wheaton can simultaneously strengthen relations with the community outside of "the bubble" and afford its students relief from the burden of various costs, while businesses can reap the benefits of building a strong, reliable base of customers.

Support the Lyon's Den: SGA is contributing a significant amount of funds to ensure that The Lyon's Den remains operating as a unique institution at Wheaton that employs about a dozen of students. At a time where students actively seek an on-campus location that is both comfortable for social interaction and active as a multi-faceted learning space, it fills a void that would otherwise be empty. Promoting fair trade coffee and social awareness, it is an example of student initiative and leadership that requires a strong effort from the college for its preservation. Therefore, Wheaton should consider aiding the Den in either a one-time donation or a series of smaller contributions to benefit its physical structure, capital expenses, and overall sustainability.

Zipcar: By bringing a "Zip Car" to campus, SGA would, with support from the Administration, save students money who would otherwise have to procure their own vehicles. Having a Zip Car available to students will also contribute to Wheaton's continued effort to become a more environmentally sustainable campus because we will reduce the number of cars capable of spewing CO2 into the atmosphere. Zip Car's can already be found at our Northeast Nine competitor schools such as Bates, Hamilton and Connecticut Colleges- It's time for Wheaton to join this list. Procuring a Zipcar is a multi-year effort, but we believe the current economic

climate demonstrates that advanced planning and well-placed investments strengthen the College's ability to withstand fluctuations in the economy.

Graduate Test Preparation on Campus: In order to better prepare Wheaton students for graduate school, we would like collaborate with Bridgewater State College and/or Stonehill College is an effort to bring reduced cost graduate school test prep courses to each campus on a three year revolving basis. This initiative is crucial to preparing Wheaton students for life after college and it will save them the time and money associated with traveling to Boston or Providence for these courses. We must do all we can to ensure that Wheaton graduates are well prepared for graduate school and the work force. Efforts to ensure this now will pay off in the long run because well prepared and gainfully employed Wheaton graduates will be more likely to be generous to Wheaton in the future.

The Dimple Net: The Student Government Association has created and is about to launch an online forum called The Dimple Net. This forum will provide a marketplace for students to exchange ideas, suggestions for campus improvement, and goods such as textbooks. This latter function will afford students an accessible and Wheaton-oriented Craig's List.

Direct Financial Advising: In this economic climate, a firm understanding of one's financial situation is of utmost importance. Therefore, we seek to engage the office of Student Financial Services in pursuit of a mix of efforts that would provide more financial advising for students. We aim to work with SFS to utilize counselors in the office, bring outside resources and speakers to campus, and promote the need to have sound financial information.

III. STUDENT PERSPECTIVES OF ISSUES RELATED TO THE BUDGET

In the third and final part of our presentation, we would like to articulate student positions on a number of substantive questions affecting the budget.

Create an Ad Hoc Working Group: In an email to this committee earlier in the week, Professor Josh Stenger made the case for a working group charged with discussing and discovering solutions to the effects of the economic downturn on Wheaton. We strongly support the creation of such a group. We would like to suggest a few principles to guide the mission and make-up of this new group: First, the group should have a multi-year mission to allow its gained expertise to benefit the College through the challenges before us, not merely the next fiscal year. Second, the group must have a targeted mandate to give definition to its purpose and to mitigate bureaucratic friction with BAC and President's Council. Third, this group must include students, Administrators, faculty, staff, and alumnae/i to ensure that all stakeholders are heard. Four, in order to facilitate the accumulation of knowledge and the presence of issue memory, we suggest that the membership of this group be as stable as possible. And fifth, we suggest that this group be inextricably linked to BAC through shared members and through the requirement that the group regularly brief BAC.

Determining the Comprehensive Fee: On the matter of setting the Comprehensive Fee, we do not feel comfortable expressing a definitive preference. We would like to hear more from Rick Wallick and others about what each Comprehensive Fee Option translates into on a human level.

That having been said, we would like to share with you some preliminary thoughts on the three options that have been laid before us: Regarding Option Three, while we recognize the allure of a zero percent increase in the Comprehensive Fee, we do not see zero growth in revenue as responsible or feasible. If we are committed to expanding the aid rate, more resources will be necessary. Option Three does not allow for this increase in resources. As for Option Two, we believe that students and their families would greet a one percent increase with warmth and gratitude. But we are unconvinced that this option would allow us to raise the aid rate and provide for the Wheaton College that we know. This aforementioned reasoning leads us to a tentative endorsement of Option One.

Even if the aid rate increases by 2.3 percent in each option, we remain concerned about the effect of this increase in financial aid on other areas of the budget. At this point in time, we believe that a 2.3 percent increase in the Comprehensive Fee strikes the delicate balance between keeping Wheaton fiscally strong while still recognizing that many families will simply not be able to afford a significantly increased Comprehensive Fee.

In short, Option Two would be optimal if it could be shown to support current operations and quality at Wheaton. But from our perspective, Option One appears to be the best viable course of action.

Raising the Student Activities Fee: Under Option One, the Student Activities Fee (SAF) is raised by five dollars. But under Options Two and Three, the SAF is kept at current levels. We would ask that, regardless of which Option is chosen, the SAF be increased by five dollars to pay for certain elements of the Student Affordability Plan. Parts of this plan, such as SGA Experiential Learning Stipends and textbooks on reserve, require continued funding into the next fiscal year. The 7,750 extra dollars generated by raising the SAF would underwrite these programs and promise continued relief in what will surely be another difficult year.

Direct Lending by Wheaton to Students: In previous Budget Advisory Committee meetings, the idea of Wheaton directly lending to students has been mentioned; we believe this idea has great promise. Compared to recent years, an increasing number of students are being placed on “financial leave of absence” or FLOA. It is in Wheaton’s interest to avoid losing these students’ monetary and personal contributions. A fund should be created that would lend money to students at risk of being placed on FLOA at a low or no interest rate so they can stay in school and focus on their education. This is not an increase in financial aid or a grant, it is a loan the student would pay back over time as they do with other student loans. While we recognize fundraising is difficult in this economic climate, we believe that donors would be more likely to contribute to a program that differs from financial aid in that the loaned money will return to the college.

Comments on Cost Reduction Strategies: We understand that maintaining the status quo of Wheaton’s budget is not prudent policy for the institution. Our perspective on the non-personnel cost containment options for the budget recognizes our willingness to contribute to the necessary changes that need to occur. First, in response to the proposed adjustment on global programs, we offer that the College reconsider a wide discontinuation of funding student travel. Even when

taking the discounted value of travel into account, we believe that such a move risks depriving students at the margins from having a study abroad experience.

However, we stand in strong support of two other cost containment measures and would, in fact, to strengthen these measures. In regards to upgrade capability and efficiency of printers and copiers, we would like to push the college a step further by encouraging the enforcement of a system that would limit the paper use of each student. We accept the reality that there is an abuse of free printing privileges. Due our college's increasing commitment to environmental sustainability and the need to reduce costs, we endorse a dramatic change in this policy.

On the topic of energy usage, while we applaud a commitment to reducing energy consumption by 1%, we support a more aggressive consumption target. From the student, the SGA Greener Wheaton Competition demonstrates a desire to change the consumption culture. We hope that the administration continues to foster and expand this culture.

Invest in Greater Utilization of Existing Resources: In this climate, the acquisition of new buildings, services, and spaces is generally not feasible. And yet, the student experience must continue to improve and evolve or retention will fall and our College's quality will wilt. To reconcile the realities of the economy with the necessity of quality, we suggest a redoubled commitment to utilize existing resources.

a. Fully Staff the Filene Center- We learned at the February 3, 2009 Senate meeting that there is an opening at the Filene Center for Academic Advising and Career Services that may not be filled due to the hiring freeze. We strongly urge the Administration to reconsider this and to do all they can to strengthen the Center. In times like these it is crucial to graduating students that they have all the tools available to find a good job and a career they enjoy. There has never been a more important time to attract students to fully staffed Filene Center. So long as this position remains open, an increasing number of students will not be able to reap the benefits of career advising. We strongly advocate that this vital service be maintained despite the hiring freeze.

b. Open Weber Theater for Winter Musicals- As you know, SGA negotiated a partnership with Triboro Musical Theater, a local community group, to expand students' opportunities to participate in musical theater. We staged our first collaborative performance this winter and it was a huge success. Out of a cast of 30, 17 cast and crewmembers were Wheaton students. By all indicators, this partnership will continue in perpetuity. To optimize this partnership, we suggest that Weber be opened to the cast and crew for rehearsals and performances in next year's production. Weber is a beautiful theater that should not collect dust during three weeks in January forcing Wheaton students to travel to rehearsals and performances in an Attleboro Elementary School. Making Weber available for use during the first three weeks of January is an inexpensive and easy way to let Wheaton's students participate in 25,000-dollar musical productions. Such a decision would illustrate that Wheaton is trying to do more with the resources it already holds.

c. Improve Community Spaces- We applaud the efforts of the college to address the pressing need of improved student spaces. However, with a new residence hall further off into

the horizon, we reaffirm our belief that continued investments will have several important effects. First, it will contribute to the dynamic nature of the student experience. Collaborative learning does not just occur in the classroom, it takes places in the various areas where students congregate. Similarly, with the strains placed on students living in forced triples, comfortable space where students can relax is important and allows to students to build the relationships that make Wheaton a place of their own. A continued effort to renovate our common community would ultimately ensure that they are spaces that we use to the fullest.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this presentation, we have tried to present innovative measures that could help to mitigate the effects of the economic climate on Wheaton. Some of these measures are feasible; some may turn out to be impractical. We never aimed to create an exhaustive or definitive budget prescription. Rather, our goal has been to present ideas in the hope that our community will engage in a discussion of them within a larger context.

We hope you found value in the three sections of this presentation: The stories that we recounted demonstrate the human effect of our budget decisions. We must always remain cognizant that, beneath all the statistics and calculations, are students and families. Our preview of the Student Affordability Plan demonstrates that SGA is doing its part to tighten its belt and deliver relief to a struggling student body. And the positions we've articulated on issues ranging from the student activities fee to cost reduction strategies are thoughtful representations of our considered and vetted opinions.

Let us reiterate our request for symbolic and, in some areas, material support for the Student Affordability Plan. We sincerely hope that, in the next several weeks, you and the constituencies you represent can engage with SGA to give the Student Affordability Plan impact and effect. In the end, this committee and the broader Wheaton community must work collaboratively to tackle the challenges that confront all of us. No part of our community will be immune from the pernicious effects of the deteriorating economic climate; and so, no part of our community can be left out of the effort that provides solutions to the current challenges.

We are eager to engage in a thoughtful evaluation of the ideas presented today; and we look forward to hearing the perspectives of the staff and faculty in the coming weeks.