

# Seeing Wheaton's future

"What would a person visiting campus five years from now see that is different from the Wheaton of today?"

A parent asked me that question at Homecoming weekend during a discussion about the college's future, which we have been exploring for the past year through the strategic planning and campus master planning efforts. The plans, which are nearly complete, have been formed from the listening and learning I've done at meetings on and off campus. The enthusiastic good advice I've received from alums, parents, students, faculty, staff and friends has been encouraging, as achieving our goals will require broad support from the entire college community.

The vision that we have articulated calls for building on Wheaton's strong traditions and values to earn broader recognition as being among the top tier of liberal arts colleges and as being a leader in graduating students who are intellectually alive, accomplished and active citizen/leaders.

So, what would a visitor five years from now see as different from today?

Undoubtedly, the college's science center will be enlarged and updated, the result of

an expansion and renovation project that the college has been considering for several years. Laboratory spaces would be more numerous, better equipped and designed for the collaborative work that is required for scientific endeavors.

More important than how the building will look, however, will be what students are able to do as a result. For example, every student, no matter their major, will be engaged more fully in practicing science as a process. With more lab spaces and the stations and equipment to accommodate more students, faculty members will make research a larger part of their teaching for introductory students, as it is for those majoring in the natural sciences. This will have a major impact on Wheaton's ability to graduate liberally educated students who understand and appreciate the excitement of the scientific process and who are able to play leadership roles in our increasingly complex world. And students majoring in the sciences will benefit, too, from the ability to conduct advanced research in emerging fields and interdisciplinary areas such as bioinformatics, neuroscience, biochemistry and environmental sciences.

Similarly, a visitor to campus five years from now would be struck by the sight of students who are able to access the college's computer network resources from any point on the campus. The expansion of wireless technology will be one of the more obvious ways that the college intends to make sure



**One plan calls for a Science Center expansion and the creation of a new quadrangle for student housing and academic facilities (center right).**

that technology is competitive, ubiquitous, and flexible for teaching and learning throughout the college. What is most exciting about this prospect is not the technology itself, but what makes it possible. Students will be able to consult electronic resources while holding group meetings outside of class, in residence hall common areas, at the café, or wherever they happen to be.

The number of student residence hall spaces also will have grown. At present, campus housing is filled beyond what we would consider our ideal capacity. The college must act not only on some improvements for next year, but also on longer-term plans to create residence spaces with gathering spaces inside and beside the buildings. New residence halls will be about more than creating the additional room needed for our students. It will also be about enriching their college experience.

Students will learn more from each other in living-learning communities—residence halls with sufficient space for co-curricular programs. They will regularly hold informal gatherings with faculty members and other invited speakers to address the topics that interest students. And by the increased connections between academic and residential life, students will come to more fully appreciate the pleasures of intellectual life and their role as lifelong learners.

Science, technology and residential life are among the priorities emerging from the final round of discussions about Wheaton's future. The interest and enthusiasm of alumnae/i, parents and friends, faculty, staff and students have played a critical role in getting us to this point, and will be the engine that makes our shared vision of the college's future a reality for future visitors to Wheaton. 

