This was a year of major change for the Advisory Committee, as the only continuing members were John Bezis-Selfa (fall only) and Vicki Bartolini (spring only). The Committee met several times over the course of the year, had a representative at all AAUP meetings, and met with President Crutcher on three occasions in the spring. Advisory took on two tasks this year, as described below.

By President Crutcher’s request, Advisory’s first charge was to attend “Senior Management Meetings.” These meetings, held approximately once a month starting in late 2010, were and are meant to address the student experience so as to improve Wheaton’s retention rate. Advisory was asked to attend to ensure that there was a faculty voice in these meetings. Most of the meetings were informational; reports were presented from various administrative offices giving their take on the current state of the student experience as it related to them. While much of the information was not surprising (e.g., students don’t like forced triples), at one meeting, Alex Vasquez pointed out that there were increasing instances of students asking questions regarding faculty morale. This suggested that the poor faculty climate on campus was starting to trickle down to students, a very troubling trend. This led, in part, to Advisory deciding to conduct a survey to gauge faculty morale (see below). Another bit of interesting information was the dissemination of a student-initiated survey on student satisfaction. The results of this survey revealed that the faculty and the student interactions with faculty as well as academics in general were all rated very highly. This suggested to Advisory that investments should be made to support faculty, the College’s “most important asset,” rather than continuing the College’s recent policies that have resulted in real and perceived feelings of being underappreciated.

Advisory’s second task was to try to find solutions to the perceived low morale of the faculty. This led to some information gathering, as evidenced by the “Faculty Climate Survey” conducted in April, 2011. The results, which were disseminated to faculty via email recently, showed that there is indeed a morale problem among faculty on campus. Advisory voiced these concerns in meetings with President Crutcher, in the hopes that some or all of AAUP’s recommendations might be followed and that some positive initiatives may come out of this crisis. In particular, Advisory (and AAUP) have begun discussions with the President regarding a faculty-only committee that will have access to budget information and that will be a conduit for shared governance. This group would replace a standing committee, obviating the need to create a new one; the question remains as to which committee is the most appropriate to receive the new charge. In addition, Advisory will continue to work to a) ensure that the faculty is not neglected but rather supported, through pay raises, research support, and other initiatives; b) keep a close eye on Wheaton’s retention rate, and determine if resources are well allocated to enhance the student experience; and c) guide a discussion to help the President and, in particular, the Provost formulate a more satisfying statement of Wheaton’s academic goals.

Respectfully submitted for the Advisory Committee,
Michael Gousie, Chair