

**Office of the Provost  
Jem Spectar**

## **Greetings!**

I am honored to invite you to continue the conversation we began about six months ago about our shared aspirations for liberal education in the 21st century. Those conversations and subsequent discussions resulted in an imaginative transformation of the first year curriculum, beginning in Fall 2005. The emerging Freshman Academy is a testament to the tremendous talents, creativity and vision of a faculty whose passion for student-centeredness is simply overwhelming. These curricular innovations have advanced our effort to build a dynamic learning environment dedicated to student success and have moved us closer to becoming a leading comprehensive public liberal arts institution! Nonetheless, I reported to the Senate that the transformation of the freshman experience is only the first stride on the pathway to greater prominence and prestige. This missive is an invitation to build upon our progress by formally articulating a consensus about institutional learning aspirations.

## **What do I mean?**

Recall that during our conversations in the Hamersly Library, I had asked participants to share with me their aspirations or aims for liberal education in the 21st century. Many of you put forth brilliant ideas which I noted, reflected on and distilled into the attached draft document entitled "Institutional Learning Aspirations for WOU-Educated Graduates." While this document represents a synthesis of many views, let me emphasize that this is only a draft and I am soliciting more insights and inputs.

The draft document is meant to suggest, in a nutshell, the common set of knowledge, skills, attributes, experience and values that all students graduating from WOU are expected to possess. Of course, at the departmental level, there are other learning aspirations or aims that are discipline or major-driven. Those departmental outcomes are not altered by an institutional commitment to these broad aspirations. Instead, institution-wide aspirations serve as common guideposts that inform or reinforce various departmental approaches.

The task of updating, refining, affirming and announcing institutional learning aspirations is a very important endeavor, especially when viewed in light of commitment to student-centeredness. As a community of scholars, it behooves us to express our common vision for learning expectations in the Academy. The broad dissemination of these expectations will also ensure that our students are fully informed about our high standards for learning. More importantly, our students will know that we will hold them to these standards, that we will challenge them to achieve their highest potential and that we will provide them with appropriately rigorous and stimulating curricular experiences. By clarifying these expectations, we will be clearly communicating to the world not just where we stand, but our shared vision for the evolving liberal arts tradition.

In another context, an institutional statement about learning outcomes is a critical and urgent need as we embark on implementing the strategic plan and preparing for upcoming re-accreditation. Accrediting bodies emphasize that institutions should develop "a culture of evidence" characterized in part by extensive learning outcomes assessment. It is clear that we will be unable to undertake effective assessment without a shared understanding of our institutional aims, outcomes or aspirations.

**To accomplish the development of our institutional learning aspirations, I am recommending a collaborative process that shall, I hope, engage the entire faculty.**

1. Between March 28 - April 30, 2005 faculty are encouraged to participate in divisional meetings to review, revise, modify or amend the attached draft document as desired or necessary. Please note since these are not department or division-specific they have to be kept at a level of generality.
2. By May 1, each division is expected to submit a final consensus document to the Provost's office.
3. Between May 1 – May 15, 2005, task force consisting of all division chairs, the deans and designated faculty shall review and reconcile the divisional documents. The task force is expected to produce a unified document that reflects campus consensus about institution-wide learning aspirations for WOU graduates.
4. As soon as the process is completed, I will prepare a report for the Faculty Senate and formally request Senate review and assent, if the Senate is so inclined.

Let me again take this opportunity to thank the faculty members whose initial efforts have launched our efforts to emerge as a leading comprehensive public liberal arts institution. Your efforts have paved the way for an engaging freshman year including stimulating seminars that integrate intellectual perspectives, coordinate aspects of the GE and bring greater coherence to students' learning experiences. Mobilized by a passion for student-centered learning as well as by high hopes for this institution, you have already undertaken a commendable effort to revitalize liberal education. Thanks to your efforts, freshmen will have increased opportunities to take smaller classes with more tenured/tenure-track faculty. Your innovations have paved the way for related enhancements of the first year including the prospect for residential living-learning communities. By your diligent efforts we are fulfilling our generation's responsibility to secure the accessibility of a sound liberal education that not only hones the head but that also tempers the heart, that not only liberates the individual for the ingenious pursuit of private ends, but that also cultivates an ethos of solidarity for humanity. As you fulfill your individual roles, you are the catalysts for a better future because your actions effectively change lives, build communities and transform our world!

Finally, on a personal note, I have been touched by your individual generosity and your support in the past few months. Thank you. In an era when constituencies in sundry institutions are frequently at loggerheads over this and that bone of contention, the Zeitgeist here is refreshing. Even in difficult times, you have forged on with your passionate concern for our students serving as the predominant leitmotif. As we embark on this new aspect of our work together, it is hoped that we will continue to enjoy this climate of goodwill, comity and vitality.

**Jem Spectar**