

Provost Spectar
May 20, 2005

Re: Final Progress Report on the Institutional Aspirations for Learning

Dear President Coker and Faculty Senators:

I am honored to inform you about progress in the campus wide conversation we began about a year ago regarding our "Institutional Aspirations for Learning" in the 21st century. Recall I had indicated in an earlier communication to the entire faculty that I would prepare a final report about this communal dialogue for the Senate's review. I am pleased to include herewith the final revised campus consensus document that reflects the sentiments and aspirations of a broad swath of faculty.

The dialogue started with discussions in the Hamersly Library during the fall. In wide-ranging discussions, many faculty members also shared with me their aspirations for liberal education in the 21st century as well as their hopes for our students. The visions articulated in those conversations led to the preparation of a draft document entitled "Institutional Learning Aspirations for WOU-Educated Graduates."

To spark further campus-wide discussion, the draft "Institutional Aspirations" document was disseminated to all faculty members in mid-March. In the ensuing weeks and months, a broad spectrum of faculty engaged in a collaborative review of the draft document. Moreover, each division was encouraged and expected to prepare its own consensus document. In various divisional meetings, faculty members discussed, reviewed and evaluated the draft "Institutional Aspirations" document. Several divisions adopted the proposed "Institutional Aspirations" without any modifications or revisions. A few other divisions had additional comments, questions and minor revisions.

On May 17, 2005, divisional consensus documents and perspectives were reviewed by a broad-based task force consisting of division chairs, faculty and deans. The extensive discussion and review of the divisional reactions led to further refinements of the draft document. This process culminated in the attached final unified document that reflects consensus about institution-wide learning aspirations for WOU graduates.

The "Institutional Aspirations" document, which updates, refines and affirms our common vision for learning in the 21st century Academy, is a further indication of our commitment to student-centeredness. The final document articulates, in a nutshell, the common set of knowledge, skills, attributes, dispositions, experiences and values that all students graduating from WOU are expected to possess. The broad dissemination of these Aspirations will also ensure that our students are fully informed about our community's 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.

I believe these "Institutional Aspirations" will serve as common guideposts in the on-going dialogue about assessment of learning outcomes, a dialogue that is sure to intensify as we prepare for the upcoming re-accreditation. A shared understanding of our institutional learning aspirations will greatly facilitate our assessment initiatives.

Finally, at year's end, it is fitting to take a moment to reflect on and be thankful for the progress we have made in the cause of advancing liberal education. Your collective efforts have advanced our efforts to become a leading comprehensive public liberal arts institution in our region and beyond. Thanks to you all, we will be piloting an engaging freshman year in '05-'06 characterized by extensive and exciting learning communities.

As a result, our incoming freshmen will have the opportunity to take a cluster of interconnected courses often with the same learning community cohort. Moreover, more freshmen will have the opportunity to enjoy rich faculty-student interactions in smaller classes. Most importantly, the new Freshman Academy includes a broad mix of stimulating interdisciplinary seminars that integrate intellectual perspectives, coordinate aspects of the core curriculum and increase the coherence to students' learning experiences. It is also envisioned that the incoming class will benefit from engaged communities of learning outside the classroom (through selected residential living-learning arrangements) as well as through various co-curricular initiatives. The range of exciting and innovative experiences will facilitate student success and nurture the development of the habits and skills of successful scholars.

These and other curricular innovations have been made possible by your spirit of goodwill and collegiality as well as by your strong commitment to a dynamic student-centered learning environment. Despite the pressures and constraints you face in your professional lives, many of you devoted time to meetings (and more meetings!) to do the right thing for our students. The imaginative transformation of the first year program is a testament to the vision, ingenuity and industriousness of a faculty that is unimpeachably dedicated to student success.

Thank you for the brilliant work you have done this year. I hope that in the years ahead, our work continues to be suffused by the same ethos of solidarity in the service of our students.

INSTITUTIONAL ASPIRATIONS FOR LEARNING

[AS REVISED BY CONSENSUS ON MAY 17, 2005]

(1) Critical Thinking

Students will develop refined analytical or reasoning skills, including logical and quantitative reasoning abilities, and problem solving.

Students will develop and exhibit habits of curiosity necessary for lifelong inquiry, discovery, learning and appreciation of the world of ideas. They will be able to think, question, investigate and reflect critically about human societies, individuals and the environment. As a result of refining their analytical abilities, students will be capable of rendering informed, mature, systematic and sophisticated judgments about ideas and intricate human and societal problems, including contentious and complex questions requiring focused and intense intellectual inquiry, modeling and analysis.

(2) Communication

Students will develop effective communicative abilities, including listening, observing, speaking, writing, and dialoguing.

Students will develop their capacity to listen and use language more effectively in both written and oral communications. They will be increasingly able to communicate cogently, persuasively and concisely. Students' writing will reflect an increasing ability to acquire, assess and organize complex material and articulate sophisticated arguments in a variety of written formats, including essays, memoranda and letters. Students will also demonstrate increasing confidence and refinement in their speaking and rhetorical abilities in diverse settings. In addition to improving their individual communication skills, they will also be able to effectively listen and engage in respectful dialogues with others on a variety of subjects.

(3) Reading and Literacy

Students will become active readers.

Students will improve in their ability to carefully, closely, and thoughtfully read a range of texts, including journal articles, academic monographs, works of literature, visual images, performances, mass media and culture. Students will demonstrate a growing appreciation for the value of reading and the critical interpretation and evaluation of texts.

(4) Field or Discipline Specific Knowledge.

Students will understand disciplinary modes of intellectual inquiry.

Through the introductory core and advanced study in their majors and minors, students will demonstrate a growing appreciation of disciplinary contexts, methodologies and conceptual frameworks. Students are expected to have a deeper understanding of the natural world and our human connection to it, a keener appreciation of the diverse forms of human creativity, a broader understanding of social and historical processes, a greater knowledge of literary and scientific traditions, and deeper insight into human behavior.

(5) Interdisciplinary and Integrative Perspective

Students will recognize, explore, appreciate and engage the interconnections between disciplines.

In addition to developing enhanced abilities in one or more fields, students will be increasingly aware of the interconnections between primary modes of thought and inquiry as well as the necessity for multi-disciplinary approaches to solving complex problems. Students will have growing capacities to effectively integrate and synthesize diverse or discrete aspects of their

educational offerings into a coherent and relevant whole. Through capstones, theses and other integrative experiences, including multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs, students will demonstrate abilities for linking knowledge from various sources and bringing such inter-relationships to bear on pressing intellectual and social dilemmas.

(6) Research

Students will develop advanced research abilities.

Students will demonstrate improvements in their information and media literacy. They will demonstrate an ability to apply their critical thinking skills and discipline-specific knowledge to the evaluation of sources. Students will demonstrate an enhanced capacity to engage in, communicate and disseminate independent research that employs a range of information resources and technologies. Students will recognize and adhere to the ethical obligations of researchers.

(7) Technology

Students will learn how to use appropriate technologies effectively.

Students will demonstrate an ability to use a range of technologies for research and communication. These include basic, everyday technologies such as e-mail and web search engines and more complex and discipline-specific technologies.

(8) Civic, Social, Intercultural and Global Competence

Students will demonstrate competencies, skills, attributes and values necessary for successful participation in a diverse, pluralistic and increasingly interdependent world.

Students will have a solid understanding of, and concern for, aspects of diversity, including race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, ability, and opinion. Students will understand on-going social, political, economic, environmental, cultural and technological transformations and their mutually reinforcing impacts. Through a variety of international and intercultural learning experiences, students will develop the skills needed for local, national and global citizenship as well as for meaningful participation in the quest for equity, dignity, sustainability and social justice.

(9) Collaboration

Students will be able to work effectively in teams.

While evincing a capacity for independence and self-reliance in thought and action, students will also demonstrate social and collaborative skills necessary for effective functioning in collective endeavors.

(10) Balanced Personal Growth and Development.

Students will strive to be well-balanced persons capable of making thoughtful and healthy choices.

Students will demonstrate the capacity for informed ethical and moral judgment. They will be able to make responsible and healthy life style choices and to exercise ethical reasoning in all their interactions. Students will demonstrate creativity and imagination in their personal and professional lives. They will strive for a balance in their physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual domains.

(11) Practicality and Real-World Relevance

Students will be able to apply theory in relevant, appropriate and reflective ways.

Students will be familiar with the real-world contexts and applications of theories. They will be able to reflect on their academic experiences and relate them to diverse real-world issues. They will appreciate the connections between what they learn and their everyday lives. Students will successfully participate in experiences such as internships, research, service learning and study abroad. The connection to the real world will increase students' confidence in selecting majors and/or exploring career options.