

VPAA Report to the Board of Trustees
June 3, 2006

Good morning. As you know, it is the VPAA's responsibility at the June meeting of the Board to speak to the Trustees on "the condition of the College." My presentation is again in two parts: first, your agenda papers include a compilation of academic activities and accomplishments from the last twelve months, providing you with a wide-ranging overview of the College's academic life. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about this part of my report either during the meeting or afterwards. Secondly, however, I would like to use my time with you this morning to focus on the major academic initiative of the year, to contextualize that issue for you, to report what we have been able to achieve, and to look ahead at what still remains to be done. Given the amount of attention we have been paying to Admissions during this meeting, you might well expect that this would be my topic. In fact, however, although the significance of enrollment and net revenue will be an important part of what I will discuss, my theme is one I promised I would address today as I ended my remarks last June: the subject of diversity.

At this time last year, in concluding my remarks about the faculty workload initiative, I made the point that, with this issue at least initially addressed, the way had been cleared for the campus to take on other urgent concerns. In particular, I referred to the College's Strategic Plan and its targets for diversity as the highest academic priority facing us, and I promised to report back to you at this meeting what we had done to respond to that priority. That promise took on additional urgency in light of the discussion at the June meeting of the very disappointing numbers of minority and

international students in a first-year class otherwise strong in numbers, quality, and geographic diversity. This year the situation has been precisely reversed: while minority and international representation in the first-year class is at much better levels than twelve months ago, the size and geographic origin of the group overall has been profoundly disappointing. As a result, and as you know, we are face budgetary constraints for the coming year that will not hamper our daily operations but that will limit our ability to put into effect strategic initiatives. One cannot, then, discuss diversity without also considering issues of enrollment and net revenue, and I will return to the connection between the two later in my report. Before doing so, however, I would like to put the work of the Diversity Task Force into a historical context, describe and discuss the Task Force's work and recommendations, and suggest what the College's next steps might be.

With your agenda papers you will find a copy of the Task Force's report to the President. Included in that report are the reports of two earlier groups: those of the 1983 and 1996 committees discussing the quality of life for black students. We grouped these three documents together for two reasons: first, the earlier two documents help contextualize the current report, showing the persistence of the College's efforts to address the issue of diversity; second, however, that very persistence is a negative indicator. That the three documents have the degree of consistency they do is something that should give us pause – the fact that similar issues and recommendations have been identified throughout almost a quarter of a century of concern speaks both to the intractability of the challenges, but also to the limited level of success we have had in meeting those challenges.

Turning now to the work of this latest initiative, the Diversity Task Force was convened by President Hales in October, 2005 and given the following four-part charge:

- To gather and analyze data pertinent to the goals in the College's 2003-2008 Strategic Plan for domestic minority and international student enrollment
- To consider a range of programs and approaches that might be adopted in pursuit of the Plan's goals
- To recommend to the administration one or more programs that are judged to be both effective and cost-efficient in addressing the goals
- To gather data pertinent to the recruitment and retention of minority faculty and to recommend approaches that are judged to be effective and cost-efficient

With Dean Shila Garg and I as co-chairs, the group included another fifteen members of the faculty, staff, and students, and it worked in four sub-committees: one focusing on the recruitment of domestic minority students; one on the recruitment of international students; one on minority and international student retention; and one on the recruitment and retention of minority faculty and staff. We met over a seven-month period and presented our report to the President in late April and then the faculty at its May 1 meeting.

What will you find in the report? First, historical overview, trend data, and analyses. Then a large number of recommendations – fifty-eight in all – that capture a great deal of creative, intelligent, and concerned thinking by the members of the group – on behalf of both myself and Dean Garg, I do want to recognize the tremendous amount of good work the faculty, staff, and student members of the Task Force put into this project and their dedication to its goals. As you read the report, you will also find that it speaks in a variety of voices. In part, this has to do with the process of its composition: each sub-committee was asked to write up its own section and, while the general format was harmonized, we did not impose one uniform voice on the whole. Indeed, the variety

of voices speaks to the range of perspectives and opinions within the task force itself. Just like its 1983 and 1996 predecessors, our task force was a large, even cumbersome group, reflecting both the range of constituencies that must be engaged in an issue as complex as diversity but also the breadth of different, competing perspectives on the nature of the challenges and the desirability of various solutions to them.

In this sense, the Task Force was truly a microcosm of the campus: the seventeen of us saw the issues in very different ways and had quite different senses of what could, and should, be done. To give you just one example of this, let me describe our differing responses to the Posse Program. If you are not familiar with the Posse Foundation, let me say briefly that this is an organization that works in partnership with colleges and universities to increase their enrollment and retention of inner city students. When a college joins with Posse, it commits to providing full-tuition scholarships along with mentoring and other support services. In turn, and here I quote from the Foundation's website

The Posse Foundation identifies, recruits and trains student leaders from public high schools to form multicultural teams called "Posses." These teams are then prepared, through an intensive eight-month Pre-Collegiate Training Program, for enrollment at top-tier universities nationwide to pursue their academics and to help promote cross-cultural communication on campus.

The Task Force considered the Posse program, consulted with peer institutions such as Denison, DePauw, and Grinnell that have experience with it, but was, in the end, unable to agree whether or not to recommend it – the recommendation we do make is to consider

whether Wooster should join it, a somewhat guarded proposal that reflects a real division of opinion within the group.

That we had such a division is not surprising – after all, this **is** a liberal arts institution, where one form of diversity – that of critical opinion – is never in short supply. And the Posse program, to take my one example, can legitimately be seen as either a highly successful innovation or a very expensive solution that might be addressed just as effectively through more local efforts. More significantly, however, is what such divisions reveal: on the one hand, we have the competing agendas that emerge in discussing an issue as politically volatile as that of diversity; on the other, the lack of decisive institutional focus on the issue as a whole became evident during the work of the Task Force. What was clear to Dean Garg and I as we led the initiative was that, in the absence of a larger focus, responsibility for addressing issues related to “diversity” has fallen to a range of departments, offices, programs and groups across the campus. In the academic program, for example, the Department of Africana Studies has felt that it is bearing much of the burden. Others sharing the responsibility include the Office of Multiethnic Affairs, the Office of International Student Affairs, the Ambassadors program, student groups such as Images and the Men of Harambee, and the Black Alumni Council. While each of these groups does a great deal of good work and we have many people on this campus who are deeply committed to diversity, what we have lacked is any overall coordination between these departments, offices, programs, and groups. As a result, each has worked independently, focusing on its own area and advocating for its particular needs or goals. By and large, they do not communicate with one another or work in partnership, which points to the lack of a unifying institutional vision that would

allow the College to focus its efforts, assign priorities and resources, and clarify the direction of our progress. Given these different perspectives, moreover, and the constraints upon the College's revenues, resource issues have become increasingly politicized and divisive and the need for such an overarching focus has become all the greater.

Just how challenging are the resource issues? In his response to the report, President Hales has identified the total ongoing cost of its 58 recommendations as running to something over \$1 million annually. Not all of the recommendations come with a price tag, of course, and there are clearly a number of things that can be done with little or no financial burden. Take the area of faculty hiring, for instance. I am currently working to try and bring a senior African-American scholar to the campus, and I certainly do not want to minimize the difficulty of hiring minority faculty. Nevertheless, there are things we can do to improve our effectiveness in this area, for example, if we truly have the will to do so, and the Task Force's report has some concrete recommendations on this subject. As you can probably imagine, though, and as you will see from the report itself, it was not difficult for the Task Force to come up with a whole series of ideas for programs, initiatives, structures that would almost certainly have significant impact upon diversity at the College -- ideas, especially the more creative ones, that would indeed require additional resources. Given the responsibilities I have for so many of the College's budgets, however, I was only too aware that these are also resources we simply don't have at the moment, and this in turn brings me back to the link between diversity and the College's entire work in enrollment, retention, and net revenue management.

Let me stress what I mean by this point: I am speaking not simply of the Admissions Office but of the College as a whole. We have not managed our enrollment effectively: flattening applications, an unprecedented decline this year in overall yield, a multi-year trend of shrinking market share in Ohio, the absence of any definition of our goal for an in-state versus a national student body, a laissez-faire handling of off-campus enrollments – in all these ways we have not done enough to put ourselves in a position of stability in enrollment that would allow us to count on new revenue, plan accordingly, and implement all aspects of our strategic policy. Instead, and too often, we have been managing simply to get through the year. There are certainly things the Office of Admissions itself can do immediately to address student diversity – addressing the decline in Ohio recruiting through a reallocation of personnel and redefinition of aid policy is the most obvious, and work towards that end has already begun. But, as we discussed in the joint meeting of the Finance and Admissions Policy Committees yesterday morning, the responsibility is a much broader one. We also need more fundamental changes in our understanding of our market position, in our awareness of our competition, in our entire recruiting and retention efforts as a campus, and in our willingness to manage on-campus enrollment. And we need those changes not just for our diversity initiatives but for everything we do and everything we want to do to remain competitive in a fiercely evolving market. Until we make these changes, stabilize enrollment, and put the entire College budget on a more predictable base, we simply are not going to have resources to carry out many of the ideas this task force, and those that preceded it, have come up with.

On the one hand, then, diversity is an Admissions issue, albeit in a more complex way than the obvious one of how effectively the Office of Admissions recruits. On the other hand, however, I would like to end by going back to the point I made earlier about the various, and often competing, voices on the Task Force. It seems to me that Wooster will not make significant progress in the area of diversity until it does two things: first, and as a pre-requisite, we must solve the enrollment challenges so that we can both have, and know we will have, the net revenue that allows us to pursue strategic goals in a sustained manner. Secondly, and far more broadly, we must, as an institution, decide what our goals truly are, especially in an area so challenging and complex as that of diversity. To give you an example of what I mean, let me quote the closing sentence from the College's Mission Statement: "Wooster values co-education, diversity in its many forms, a global perspective, and the heritage arising from its origin as a college founded by Presbyterians." Ever since I first read this in the College catalogue, I've puzzled over this sentence, and I think we need to know what we mean by it if we are to be more successful. Why, for example, are we still making reference to co-education? What does that Presbyterian heritage mean for us today? What exactly is "a global perspective"? And, most relevant of all for my theme today, what do we mean when we say we value "diversity in its many forms"?

Personally, I believe we need a more complex and more complete definition of diversity than the one with which we have tacitly operated. Given the enormous changes in our nation's understanding of race and ethnicity, for example, it seems to me that Wooster needs to have a concept of diversity that matches the reality of the society beyond the Oak Grove. Why, for instance, are we not working towards creating a more

complexly diverse campus to which we more intentionally recruit Asian-Americans and, especially, Hispanics, than we do currently? Next, as we think about the mix of domestic minority students on campus, I believe that we need to be far more deliberate in our international recruiting and focus our resources to target markets both where we can be successful and from which we can enrich the diversity of our entire campus population. Finally, to be a truly diverse campus in the twenty-first century we need to address issues this year's Task Force did not even take up this year, most notably those socio-economic diversity and gender and sexual orientation. As an institution, we have not yet taken on the challenge of defining our priorities and force ranking them. As a result, and not surprisingly, our results across the board have been unfocused. If Wooster is truly to address these issues, I believe that, finally, it will take a concentrated effort by the entire College—Trustees, administration, faculty and staff to make a determination to do so and to be willing to face the hard choices we will have to make. Some of our peers – I think notably of DePauw, Grinnell, and Macalester – have made this level of institutionalized commitment to diversity; if we truly want to be successful, we will have to do no less.