

Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation

Bowdoin College engages regularly and systematically in evaluation and planning targeted to specific institutional objectives or challenges. We constantly engage in informal evaluation and monitoring, as we gather reports of the successes and weaknesses of policies and practices, which then are revised to better meet our objectives. In addition, and intentionally, over the past seven years the College has engaged in campus and financial planning as well as evaluation and planning for facilities, admissions and financial aid, residential life, health care, information technology, the Library, and the academic program through separate but interconnected initiatives. In the last three years, planning for a capital campaign has further integrated these planning efforts. Each of these efforts rests on ongoing evaluation, ranging from informal or regularized analysis of data to formal outside reviews by consultants.

The 1996 evaluation team noted the College's "intensive" efforts with planning and a general commitment to "orderly structuring of the future." The team identified progress since 1986 in financial and facilities planning and in the coordination of efforts among the senior administrators. They also remarked on "significant strides" in evaluation, particularly the organization of the Institutional Research Office. Issues identified in 1996 included broad and, at the time, unresolved questions in residential life; and the lack of measures of effectiveness—which the team linked to the absence of a mission statement and "of articulated goals and desired outcomes." By the fifth-year interim report the College had articulated its mission in a formal statement and set a clear course in residential life which has led to more systematized efforts to evaluate campus climate (Standard 6). It continues to work on assessing educational outcomes, now in the context of a clearly articulated set of educational goals (Standard 4); and regularly utilizes outside reviews and benchmarking data to assist in evaluating programs across the College.

Academic Program Planning

Planning of the academic program is the responsibility of the faculty, through the Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee (CEP), chaired by the Dean for Academic Affairs. In 1999, CEP completed an evaluation of the curriculum at the College and outlined priorities for strengthening it (TR4.2). During the next three years, CEP undertook modest follow-up initiatives, such as the clarification of first-year seminar goals, and began to draft a new statement of the goals of a liberal education. Beginning in 2003, it launched an intensive effort to redefine distribution requirements (TR4.1), with eventual approval by the Faculty in May 2004 of both a statement on liberal education and a new set of requirements. These are described more fully in Standard 4. In 2006–07, CEP will continue the evaluation of the curriculum with a focus on majors and minors.

In anticipation of the capital campaign and in response to the new curriculum changes, CEP solicited ideas for enriching the curriculum at all levels from academic departments, programs, and ad hoc groups of faculty along with specific proposals for the addition of faculty positions. CEP made initial recommendations about allocating new faculty

positions to be funded by the capital campaign in 2005 and 2006 and will continue that process over the next two years. CEP is charged with advising the Dean and President on reauthorizations of faculty lines, in conjunction with the allocation of new positions.

Major Planning and Evaluation Initiatives

In the last decade, the College has undertaken seven major evaluation and planning initiatives that have helped to transform the institution and that provide the groundwork for future change and strength. To illustrate the nature of evaluation and planning at Bowdoin, we describe each of these initiatives briefly while also noting that other standards will touch on evaluation and planning activities in specific programmatic areas.

Residential life planning: Following the recommendation contained in the 1996 Reaccreditation Self-Study, the Trustees formed a Commission on Residential Life in 1996. The commission's work involved evaluation of the organization of residential life and of its consequences for academic life, student experience, and perceptions of the College. Subsequent actions by the Trustees and the development of a new vision for residential life at Bowdoin are covered in Standard 6. Other elements of residential life planning, including a new dining hall and new residence halls to draw upperclass students back to campus, followed closely on these recommendations (Standard 8).

Admissions planning: In 1999 President Edwards launched a coordinated evaluation and planning effort to move Bowdoin toward greater outreach in admissions, a more diverse applicant pool, and a student body more representative of the United States population. That effort drew together students, faculty, and staff from admissions, academic affairs, financial aid, student affairs, and multicultural affairs. It made admissions recruitment more collaborative across the College and laid the groundwork for the success of new admissions initiatives and a significantly more diverse student population (Standard 6). Our strategies continue to evolve in ways informed by regular collection and analysis of data on applicants and admitted students. Increases in the economic diversity of the student population underlined the importance of financial aid endowment, which became a central feature of the last capital campaign and remains important in the new campaign.

Strategic review of College size: The inauguration of Barry Mills as the College's fourteenth president took place shortly after the fifth-year report was submitted. His selection as president coincided with the completion of the report of the Trustee Committee on the Future "to identify and examine the environmental factors and constraints that will be important to Bowdoin's strategy over the next five to ten years." Shortly after taking office, President Mills initiated a strategic review related to college size (which at that time was 1,625 FTE). The review focused on the costs and benefits of expanding the College as a way to widen "the breadth of experience here academically and intellectually...." Over two years, senior staff reexamined studies of the costs of growth completed internally in the 1990s, the broader literature on growth, and economic models examining the costs of such growth. This analysis was linked to more refined tools for financial planning and analysis (Standard 9), and led to the conclusion that the endowment/student ratio is a fundamental resource for this College and that significant

growth in the student body would put this in jeopardy in the short run. The review concluded with a decision not to pursue significant institutional growth.

In the past five years, in the context of substantial increases in the College endowment and in the depth of the student applicant pool, and expansion of student residence space on campus and growth of the faculty, the President, senior staff, and Trustees accepted a planning target of 1,700 students (FTE on campus) as the appropriate student body size for the College.

Campus planning and design: After two decades of relatively little investment in major capital projects, the College completed over \$100 million in renovation and/or construction in the 1990s. Projects included renovation and construction of theater and dance space, science facilities, a student union, three residence halls, a new dining hall, outdoor leadership center, and creation of College Houses through conversion of several former fraternity houses. As President Edwards retired, many at the College felt that Bowdoin's academic and other facilities were much better suited to our aspirations and to the quality of our faculty and students than they had been in 1990.

As President Mills took office, there was discussion about the next major campus projects and the need for comprehensive planning and evaluation of Bowdoin's facilities. The last campus planning initiative at Bowdoin had been completed in 1979. A team from the Chicago office of Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM) began working with Bowdoin in the fall of 2002; their work is covered in greater detail in Standard 8.

Financial planning: As noted in Standard 9, the College has substantially enhanced its financial planning through the revision in 2002–03 of its five-year budget model to one based on sources and uses of funds. This model provides a much clearer picture of the year-to-year costs of College operations and revenue sources. This model is revised annually based on the budget experience as well as on enrollment patterns and projections and regularly helps to guide strategic decisions.

Academic program planning: Standard 4 reviews academic program planning, which culminated in new distribution requirements that take effect beginning with the Class of 2010 in 2006.

Capital campaign planning and faculty focus groups: In September of 2003 the Trustees established a Campaign Planning Committee to study the feasibility of launching a major capital campaign. The committee, working with members of the senior staff, the development staff, the President, and the College's professional fund raising counsel, studied staffing, budgets, fund raising history and institutional needs.

The Campaign Planning Committee established three subcommittees to concentrate on helping to prioritize the College's most pressing needs: Financial Aid, Academic Affairs, and Student Life. These groups worked with senior officers over six months to understand and categorize needs in the specific areas. The priorities they identified grew out of discussions on campus in a variety of forums; faculty committees; financial data

and the President's own strong emphasis on achieving diversity in the student body and enhancing the academic program. Academic program initiatives emerged from a series of faculty focus groups led by the President in Fall 2003.

Ultimately, the Campaign Planning Committee determined that a campaign of \$250 million was possible and that the central components of the campaign were to raise nearly \$175 million in endowment for the academic program, financial aid, and student life initiatives. The remainder of the campaign goals were to significantly grow the Annual Giving program to \$10 million annually by the end of the campaign and to fund several important building projects, including a new music recital hall, a significant renovation and expansion of the Museum of Art, and a new hockey rink.

Evaluation

Although evaluation is set apart from planning in Standard 2, a cycle of planning-implementation-evaluation is interwoven at Bowdoin, as noted in the earlier examples. In general, evaluation efforts are undertaken at a number of levels, using a variety of methods, and with the goal of obtaining useful information that will aid decision-making, improve the quality of the educational experience for Bowdoin students, and strengthen the operation of the College.

The College regularly uses consultants and outside reviewers to provide informed, independent perspectives on policies and operations of key programs. In the last five years, for example, we have reviewed such diverse subjects and programs as the Library, the teaching of writing, job classifications and competitive pay levels, the student health fee, mental health services, faculty procedures for tenure and promotion, and energy use. Academic programs and departments are each reviewed on a roughly ten-year cycle, and in the last decade twenty-one such reviews have been completed.

Bowdoin's Office of Institutional Research, while relatively new at the time of Bowdoin's last reaccreditation visit, is now well established and provides data and analytical support for many of the College's internal evaluation efforts. Data supporting these evaluation efforts are readily available to senior officers and College committees. The Office of Institutional Research makes available to campus users a broad range of useful data through its online Factbook.

In the last two years, with support of funding from the Davis Educational Foundation, academic programs have been encouraged to make greater use of resources from Institutional Research during their self-studies. Programs have derived useful information from analyses of transcripts of student majors; surveys of majors, minors, and alumni; and interviews of seniors. Recent reviews of the Library and of writing across the curriculum have made significant use of relevant data. For example, the writing review was informed by a 2002 study of faculty views on the teaching of writing and 2001 and 2003 surveys of student perceptions of and experiences in first-year seminars. As noted under Standard 4, these reviews led to changes in major programs

and College-wide initiatives regarding pedagogy. Standard 4 also discusses the character and evolution of assessment of student learning, a continuing challenge for the College.

Institutional Effectiveness

Bowdoin has a strong record of evaluation and planning initiatives that engage key components of the College community and translate into meaningful change. The College's continuing reliance on targeted planning and evaluation efforts places a premium on regular sharing of information and plans across lines of responsibility. Regular meetings of senior officers and of the broader College Coordinating Group provide the major vehicle for this sharing (Standard 3).

As we look forward to the next several years, we anticipate several key planning and evaluation challenges.

- The 3,200-acre Naval Air Station Brunswick (NASB) was commissioned in 1951 and has been a vital force in the area for many years. The base closure (by 2012) is a highly significant event for the Town of Brunswick. The impact of closure on Bowdoin is not clear, and plans for redevelopment of the base are under discussion. The College is playing an active role, both formally and informally, in the process.
- The SOM campus planning work and the preparation for a new hockey arena highlighted the need for a comprehensive review of parking at Bowdoin. The College has been working with consultants and has developed a multi-year plan for faculty, staff, student, and visitor parking.
- As noted in Standard 8, the College has taken a number of important steps in the past three years to reduce energy costs and strengthen Bowdoin's commitment to sustainable energy policies, including a May 2006 agreement to purchase 100% of our electrical power from green sources. The three-year agreement with Miller Hydro group of Lisbon Falls ensures that any non-green electricity that Bowdoin buys from the New England power grid will be replaced with electricity from a clean and renewable source. Energy use and energy sources will be the focus of continued evaluation and planning over the next decade.
- The long-term Campus Plan does not provide a clear guide for the short term in meeting pressing space issues (Standard 8) or in making choices about future uses of spaces to be vacated, such as Banister Hall. Senior officers and the Campus Planning and Design Committee will engage these shorter-term issues.
- The expanding demand for program evaluation and assessment of the educational program cannot be met by current staffing in Institutional Research. At the same time, some areas of the College may underutilize the resources that Bowdoin has within its IR office. Senior officers will begin to review annually IR's data-gathering activities or surveys to ensure that they are aligned with current

priorities and are relevant and informative. Planning for staffing will be part of the budget-making process.

- The College recognizes the need to identify appropriate methods to assess aspects of student growth and learning in ways that inform teaching and improve the educational experiences of students (Standard 4).