



Wooster School

February 19, 2014

Dear Community Members,

Our goal at Wooster School is to produce graduates who are kind, effective, independent, and thoughtful people. We have done this by immersing our students in a learning community that builds skills, shapes dispositions, and prepares students to lead purposeful lives. Our students are also asked gradually to take more responsibility for themselves, others, and the community at large. It is also essential that while engaging in these formative experiences our students are happy, having fun, and learning to value the kinds of relationships which will help define their own identity.

Another goal is to challenge ourselves as a community to get better at what we do every day. We are a community of learners. We are committed to heeding the call of our founder, Aaron Coburn to always move from “strength to strength,” and to maintaining what noted educational expert Richard Dufour calls “a persistent disquiet with the status quo.” We will always be examining our current systems and practices with a critical, reflective eye.

In the spirit of these goals, we present the *Wooster Strength to Strength Plan for 2014-15*. The plan is designed to give community members an overview of the work that is underway at our school, and preview the steps that we are taking to ensure that Wooster maintains the student-centered, forward-thinking perspective that has served its students so well throughout the years. This plan is a framework designed so that community members can better understand the school’s goals, and planned progress toward achieving them. Because we are a community of thinkers and learners, we also know that the best thinking and most elegant solutions often emerge in process, so as we work to improve our school we know that flexibility and responsiveness are necessary elements of becoming stronger as well.

Ultimately, we strive to be an institution that models the skills, dispositions and actions that we value and nurture in our amazing students – think deeply, imagine possibilities, design, solve, reflect, improve. Thank you for entrusting your precious children to us. The *Wooster Strength to Strength Plan* is but one manifestation of our commitment to honor that trust.

Go Generals.

Matt Byrnes  
Head of School  
P '17, '19, '22, '24



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## Wooster Strength to Strength Plan 2014-15

### The Big Picture

Our plans to move from strength to strength come from our core beliefs as an institution. What follows are broad reflections on the thinking which has helped us to frame our plan.

#### **Personal, Meaningful, Visible**

We chose these words to describe the experience at Wooster because they are reflective of Wooster's history, and its strength as a school. They also help us to frame our work on a daily basis.

**Personal** at Wooster means that we strive to understand each student and his or her learning needs across multiple contexts and disciplines. Our teachers are getting better and better at structuring learning experiences by first knowing each student's current ability relative to the learning goal.

**Meaningful** at Wooster relates to our long-standing belief that we are developing the whole human being. We want our students to have a sense of purpose. Most people are happy and successful because they are good at being good people and they've found their purpose in life. Therefore, we should be as attentive to creating students who can develop strong relationships, who care deeply about their community and our world, and who can connect well with others, as we are to the other "hard" skills that we teach.

**Meaningful** at Wooster also means that in order to truly understand content and concepts, students need to develop the concrete skills necessary to make meaning of them. Starting with our work on *Making Thinking Visible*, Wooster School faculty members are transitioning to a learning environment in which teaching students HOW to think about things comes first. WHAT they think about should be framed so that student interest is fostered to promote motivation and understanding.

**Visible** at Wooster means that we should be creating learning experiences within which students' progress toward learning objectives are clear, not only to us, but more importantly to students. Students should learn to take ownership of their thinking and their learning. As they do, a stronger partnership forms between teacher, student, and peers that helps students learn to purposefully challenge themselves in regard to their own thinking and learning.

**Visible** at Wooster also means that we should strive to be clear about our goals and communicate early and often with parents about how we are trying to achieve them. Through this visibility our partnership with parents is strengthened, leading to an even stronger experience for our students.



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### **Learning Environments**

Because our emphasis is on personalizing the learning process for our students, we are creating learning environments that will allow teachers to address the needs of individual students while also providing the space and configuration to manage complex, project-based learning that requires multiple work spaces and access to technologies that will help improve learning. Our best, recent example is the Felton Learning Studio on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of Coburn Hall.

### **Programmatic Continuity**

Because we are building similar skills and dispositions at each grade level, our philosophies about best practices and our understanding of how students best learn should be shared, and connected. If there are ways to better develop the most important of these skills and dispositions – thinking, reading, writing, problem-solving, citizenship – they should be ingrained in our programs and practices in developmentally appropriate ways from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

### **Organizational Strength**

At all levels of our school, we should strive to be consistently efficient and effective with our precious resources. We have a responsibility to our families to keep the cost of a Wooster education reasonable and within reach of as many community members as possible by creating organizational structures that deliver on our promise of a personal, meaningful, and visible education in ways that are smart, efficient, and effective.

## **Program Enhancements**

Programs are the threads that make the Wooster tapestry so intricate and strong. When we engaged in our *Making Thinking Visible* work this year, we began to strengthen our teachers understanding of how students learn, and how best to work with each other. Because of the positive returns on this work in our learning environments, this work will continue into the future.

While we know that all learning starts with thinking, we also know that being able to move through a process of questioning, problem-framing, and problem-solving requires the development of other skills as well. So, teaching students how to observe, take notes, write, compute, discuss, and present should also be intentionally woven into our curriculum K-12. As such, we have strengthened our professional learning program for teachers through the development of collaborative work groups and by sharpening our focus on our core curriculum and its alignment over grades K through 12. This is ongoing work that will improve our programs as a matter of our daily work. On a larger scale, we are introducing several exciting program enhancements in 2014-15 to help develop core skills in more deliberate and effective ways.



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## **Writing**

Writing has been referred to as “thinking at the point of a pen,” or these days, a keyboard. When looked at in the context of college and work, there are few skills that are more prized or useful than being able to effectively communicate an idea in writing. At Wooster, our goal is to develop writers who can use the writing process to develop, refine, and then communicate their thinking across disciplines. To help us create a more consistent approach to writing across grade levels, our Lower School and Middle School English teachers will be attending the **Columbia University Teachers College Writing Program (TCWP)** this summer. Adopting the core tenets and practices of the TCWP will help us to align our writing program K-12. In 2014-15, we will also be implementing our **9<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading and Writing Project**, which will be the core humanities class for all 9<sup>th</sup> graders and will be linked to our **10<sup>th</sup> Grade Humanities Program**. Both programs are designed to develop the thinking and writing skills necessary to produce the kinds of effective, deep thinking and learning that will be necessary for a successful Upper School student. In 2014-15 we also expect to implement a tutorial program in the English and History classes for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders based upon the Williams College tutorial model.

## **Maker Program**

“Ideation” is a new word invented to reflect one of the most important skills of the modern era – the ability to imagine and design solutions to problems across multiple contexts. Ideation skills are best developed when students can engage in a process that allows them to generate their ideas and then design and MAKE solutions. All too often in schools, we stop short of allowing the creative solutions process to become real, thereby missing the opportunity to activate learning and the brain in more meaningful ways. Starting in 2014-15, Wooster will be launching its school-wide Maker program to get our students into the business of building their ideas. Supported by a generous donation from the Edelman family, the program will be designed to offer students at all grade levels experiences to think, design, and build in our state-of-the-art Maker Space in the Verdery Library. Middle and Upper School students will also have opportunities for after-school experiences and ultimately, a sequence of courses designed for those that want to pursue a passion for design, engineering, and/or making.

## **Upper School Guidance Program**

Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, Wooster School will be launching a redesigned Guidance Program to help each of our Upper School students explore his/her personal talents and interests with an eye toward the planning of their four years at Wooster and as a precursor to their college search process.



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A core improvement to our existing program will be a greater utilization of the **Naviance Program** for Upper School students. Additional highlights of the enhanced program will include each 9<sup>th</sup> grade student meeting with our Upper School Guidance Counselor to create a 4-year plan based upon his/her interests and aspirations. Tenth graders and their parents will participate in a program to better understand PSAT and SAT testing, and the importance of framing the college search with personal strengths and interests. We will continue to enhance the effectiveness of our existing program, which currently begins in Eleventh Grade, including incorporating the writing of the personal essay into our core English curriculum for all Twelfth Grade students.

Finally, we will be redesigning our school profile to better reflect the unique experience that Wooster School students have during their time here. With that new profile in hand, our Director of Guidance, Head of Upper School, and Head of School will be visiting and/or making contact with numerous college admissions officers this summer to spread the good word about Wooster.

### **World Language**

Beginning in November of 2013, Wooster employed the services of Tucker Hastings, French Teacher and Director of Foreign Travel for the Brunswick School, to work with faculty, students and community members on the redesign of our foreign language program. As of the printing of this plan, the results of his work are being distilled into guidelines and recommendations to help us chart the future course of this valuable discipline.

### **Athletics**

Starting in 2014-15, the management of athletics will be more tightly tied to our divisional leadership structure, giving us the opportunity to create athletic experiences that are in line with our high expectations for learning throughout the institution. Given the success of our pilot program this year with 7/8 basketball, we will be expanding our middle school athletic offerings and examining the possibility of after-school practices for certain advanced teams in 2014-15. Our advanced middle school teams will also be participating in the more local Fairchester Athletic League in 2014-15. At the Upper School level, our emphasis will be on building the capacity of our teams and athletes by providing more opportunities for individual skill building (including summer programs), thereby helping us to field teams made up of students at the appropriate grade levels. We will also continue to pursue coaches for our teams who have a deep knowledge of their sports and a talent for building student skills and successful programs. We are excited to be bringing back Boys Lacrosse this year and will be exploring the possibility of our Upper School teams also entering the Fairchester League at the appropriate time in the future.



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### **International Student Program**

Diversity and the cultivation of an international perspective are integral parts of Wooster's past and present, and with the "flattening" of the world, building our students' understanding of other cultures and peoples will be key to their success in the future. As a part of our efforts to broaden our international perspective, starting in 2014-15, Wooster will be partnering with the Cambridge Institute for International Education (<http://www.thecambridgeinstitute.org/highschool.html>), on bringing several Chinese students in to our Upper School. Under the auspices of Cambridge's partner company, Green Planet (<http://www.gbhomestay.com>) these students will be placed with local families for the duration of their stay at Wooster. More information about this program will be forthcoming.

### **Technology**

Under the direction of our new Director of Innovation and Technology, Wooster will be building a comprehensive technology-learning continuum for our students K-12. Using our new Makerspace as one building block and our growing strength as a Google school as another, we will be increasing our capacity to prepare our students to be creators, not just consumers, of technology.

## **Capital Improvements**

### **Facilities Planning**

Through a generous donation from the Edelman family we are able this year to engage in a focused facilities planning process with the Claris Company. As a part of the process, community members will be invited to engage in focus group work designed to help us shape our capital improvement plan to fit our core tenets and future goals as a school. Our work with Claris will be beginning in February of 2014.

### **Coburn Dining Room**

Starting with the publishing of the *Wooster Strength to Strength Plan for 2014-15*, we will be embarking on an aggressive, short-term capital campaign to raise funds to finish the renovation of the Coburn Building. Our plan for the Dining Room calls for a complete makeover to include the transformation of the Annex into a café area that can be used as a gathering place for Upper School students, parent meetings, and coffee house events. We also plan to reclaim the basement as useable learning spaces. Details about our capital campaign to support this exciting work will be provided shortly. Our goal is to raise the capital necessary to begin this project by the end of the 2013-14 school year.



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### **Makerspace**

Thanks to a very generous lead gift from the Edelman family, and additional support from the Unger family, we have the capital in place to transform the existing Student Center into a state-of-the-art Makerspace for use by our students Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade. See our earlier description of the power of ideation and “making” in developing students thinking, design, and production skills and visit these links (<http://www.makered.org>; <http://www.inventtolearn.com>) for a more comprehensive look at the power of making. Wooster will be the first school in the region to establish a Makerspace of this kind on its campus.

## **Organizational Improvements**

### **Administrative Restructuring**

The restructuring of existing administrative roles, systems, processes and committees at Wooster School is designed to improve the school’s efficiency and effectiveness in several core areas. The implementation of these modifications will produce a much improved learning experience for students by helping to create a stronger continuum of skill-based learning, and more effective learning experiences, from Kindergarten through Twelfth grade. This redesigned structure will also foster more efficient communication, and more consistent systems, processes and expectations across all grade levels.

### **Middle School/Upper School**

Beginning in 2014-15, the Middle and Upper Schools of Wooster will be managed by a single administrative team. While both divisions currently operate under the aegis of the overall Wooster School mission and philosophies, numerous stakeholders report that the two divisions are viewed by parents, and by staff members, as two separate schools. This separateness exists despite the fact that numerous staff members are shared between the two divisions. Organizing the two divisions under one leadership team will help to promote programmatic continuity, enhance the clarity of internal and external communication, and provide a more seamless transition between the two divisions.

Placing the entire 6-12 Wooster program under the leadership of a single team will allow the combined divisions to create 6-12 programs and philosophies designed to provide our students with expanded individual learning opportunities within a well-defined continuum. Put simply, we will know what students should know, understand and be able to do at each grade level, and in all disciplines so that each builds on what came before to the benefit of students.



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While the learning environments and programs will continue to be developmentally and age appropriate, opportunities for individual student acceleration, support for struggling learners, and access to enrichment activities will be expanded and improved. Faculty will also benefit from access to more frequent, more focused professional learning opportunities. We are very pleased that Mr. David Newman, current Upper School Head, has agreed to take on the responsibility for Middle and Upper Schools.

### **Prospect School Strength to Strength**

Over the last two years, the Prospect School has experienced impressive growth in the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades. With their integration into the life of the Middle School, our 6th-8th grade Prospect students have flourished, both as learners and community members. As a result of the demonstrated success of this initiative, and consequent demand, beginning in 2014-15 the Prospect Program will focus solely on grades 6 through 8, and be housed in Wellington Cottage on the Wooster Main Campus. The Board of Trustees will manage the disposition of the existing Prospect School building.

From a programmatic perspective, moving the program closer to the Wooster Middle School provides opportunities for more efficient and effective connections between the two programs, and will cut down on the amount of time that students spend traveling between the two sites. Wooster Middle School students will also gain better access to learning support from expert Prospect staff members.

Finally, bringing the two programs together on campus will also allow for shared administrative oversight, creating a more seamless communication structure for families, and opportunities for efficiencies between the two programs. We are convinced that contracting the program to focus on these strengths, and bringing it on to campus in close proximity to the Middle School, will allow us to grow the Prospect Program into the premier program of its kind in the region.

### **Lower School**

Contraction of the Lower School has occurred naturally over the last several years, driven by demographics and the economy in the region. Based upon our analysis of these trends and our plans for overall institutional growth, school administration and the Board of Trustees feel strongly that a single-section Lower School, with the possible exception of two sections each at the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade levels in 2014-15, will serve the institution well, and allow it to continue to be the vibrant, wonderful place that we all love. Given this contraction, Pre-K and Kindergarten classes will be housed in Grover Hall for the 2014-15 school year.



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### **Lower School/Prospect Leadership**

Because the Prospect Program is being brought on to campus, and because both programs are contracting, a single administrative team will manage both the Lower School and Prospect Program. The Lower School Division Head will be housed in the Lower School and continue to manage all aspects of the Lower School program on a daily basis. The Prospect Program will have an administrator at the Assistant Head level who is responsible for the daily operations of the program, while also reporting directly to the Lower School Division Head. Dr. Stephanie Bell, who will assume the leadership of the Lower School and Prospect Program is uniquely qualified for this position, having run the Prospect School for the last two years and prior to that having long experience in lower school settings in New York.

### **Wooster Leadership Team for 2014-15**

Head of School	Mr. Matthew Byrnes
US/MS Division Head	Mr. David Newman
LS Division Head Prospect Program	Dr. Stephanie Bell
Director of Finance and Operations	Mr. Andrew Gray
Director of Teaching and Learning	Ms. Elizabeth Higgins
Director of Advancement	Mr. Matthew Honeycutt
Director of Admissions	Mrs. Paige Fischer
Director of Student Life	Mr. Brian Hastings
Director of Curriculum	Mr. Chris Pannone
Director of Innovation and Technology	Mr. Tom Curley
Director of Information Technology	Mr. Bob Magni
Coordinator of Prospect Program	Dr. Jordana Levine

### **Thank You**

Two members of our leadership team – Jocko McKean, Head of the Middle School and Rae-ann Allen, Head of the Lower School, will be leaving Wooster at the end of the 2013-14 school year. Both Jocko and Rae-ann have been dedicated, inspirational leaders for their divisions and have been instrumental in Wooster’s continued success during their tenures. We thank them for their tireless service on behalf of Wooster’s students and wish them all the best as they enter into the next phase of their careers.