

STRATEGIC PLANNING

## Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities & Threats (SCOT) Analysis Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies

September 2008 – November 2008

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# SCOT Analysis of Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies

*By Faculty & Staff at Fairhaven College Fall Retreat, Sudden Valley, September 2008  
(according to meeting minutes recorded by the Assistant to the Dean.)*

Faculty and staff of Fairhaven College conducted a SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis in the context of structures and processes outlined in the recent “framework” document for strategic planning authored by the Dean. The response recorded here to the observations in the framework document moves our planning forward one more step.

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## **8 Components of the Fairhaven College identity:**

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Before we began the SCOT analysis we did some reflective “warm-up exercises” to identify the most *unique* and *crucial* features of the College (from the list of sixty-four items on pages 6 - 8 of the Framework document). We identified eight practices and philosophical stances that define our identity – ones that determine what is necessary to our being who we want to be (features without which Fairhaven would no longer be Fairhaven).

### ***1. Narrative Assessment***

Fairhaven’s practice of narrative assessment (without shadow grades) was deemed the most unusual service we offer in the higher education marketplace. It sets us apart. Only a handful of colleges offer this richness of evaluative feedback to students. Without this practice of extensive evaluative narrative-feedback (including student self-assessment) Fairhaven just would not be itself.

### ***2. Self-designed Concentrations***

Close behind in uniqueness, and essential to who we are, stands our practice of coaching *self-designed majors* (Concentrations) and *independent research* projects based on guided learning contracts. This offering reflects our deep commitment to the value of personal responsibility for one’s own education in motivating student work. It makes college relevant. Gradually, other colleges are adopting some degree of self-design to majors and some independent study; but Fairhaven exceeds them all in systematically expecting independence and responsibility as ingredients of an effective educational experience.

### ***3. Intensive Advising***

The College is unique and excels at *academic advising* with its 4x4x4 advising system (four types of advisors for each student, advising embedded in four required process courses covering all four years of study). Intensive advising by faculty members compensates for the absence of pre-packaged programs and few rules. This makes the undergraduate “Fairhaven Experience” more like the experience of a graduate or professional school student; and it is a basis for the success of our students in gaining entrance to advanced educational programs.

### ***4. Seminar-Style Classes***

Crucial to fulfilling our mission—though less unique in the marketplace—is our exclusive use of small interactive seminar-style classes and our persistent *use of new pedagogical techniques* to facilitate learning. We continually find new ways to use time, space, motives, identities, and technologies to enhance student success in achieving learning objectives. We use different days and times of day, outdoor and indoor spaces, digital and visual technologies, collaborative and independent activities, and multiple intelligences to spur learning.

### **5. Interdisciplinary Study**

Though Fairhaven pioneered the systematic structuring of learning by *interdisciplinary problem-solving methods* as a response to the cross-disciplinary nature of real-world problems and opportunities, others have begun imitating us in this regard, to some degree. This makes us seem less distinctive now than at our beginning, thirty-eight years ago. We might renew our uniqueness by articulating a more profound understanding of interdisciplinary thinking, valuing, and creating—one more methodological and less thematic for discovery and explanation, decision-making and invention.

### **6. Social Justice & Global Citizenship**

Another fairly unique, and certainly crucial, practice of Fairhaven College is the deliberate *use of diverse identities and ideologies* in our students, faculty, and staff for cultivating critical and creative thinking about issues of social justice and the common good, and for provoking the development of capacities for local and global citizenship.

### **7. Sustainability**

The deliberate investigation of how *sustainability* can be achieved in societies and habitats, and about how these can be related (as human ecology) is a unique way Fairhaven College integrates the social and biological sciences. This effort mobilizes and integrates cultural and physical phenomena in the lab and in our farm, The Outback.

### **8. The Whole Student**

Our overall philosophy of education (one that sets us apart) coherently encompasses these seven practices. This approach refuses to segregate the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of students' lives; we *embrace the whole person* in the enterprise of learning. This commitment identifies curiosity and joy as more effective motivators of learning than traditional uses of coercion and fear (that are built into grade giving and pre-packaged rule-bound programs). We recognize that embracing the whole person entails providing co-curricular programs -- of dialogue and social activities, emotional development and recreation, governance roles in the dorm and classroom – activities that are crucial to making the Fairhaven Experience a truly transformation one.

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## **Strengths**

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Next the faculty and staff evaluated the internal strengths and weaknesses of the College and suggested ideas for building on strengths and mitigating or eliminating weaknesses.

Among the *strengths we can build on* (advantages, uniquenesses, excellencies) for continued progress toward excellence in fulfilling our mission are:

- Our strength in academic **advising** should be extended into non-academic areas of student lives.
- Our strength in thematic and perspectival **interdisciplinary study** should be deepened to methodological and epistemological levels of reflection on inquiry-based research.
- Our tradition of **student-centered learning** opportunities should embrace the emotional and moral development of students.

- Our expertise and excellence in the practice of **narrative assessment** should be reinforced with a clear articulation of its rationale to prospective students, to graduate and professional schools, and to higher education accrediting bodies.
- Our excellence in **seminar-style learning** experiences should include meta-reflections on the nature of learning as dialogue. And it should be enhanced by a recruitment plan that guarantees even more of the diversity of identities and ideologies that facilitate transformative dialogue and inquiry.
- Our reputation for **creativity in the arts** should be enhanced in practice across a wider variety of media, and embrace 21<sup>st</sup> Century digital video narrative learning styles and artistic expressions.
- The rationale for our effective **core curriculum** should be clearly stated and articulated into process and content sub-cores. And our curriculum strength in signature programs (LDJ and ACS) should be expanded with new ones in narrative film-making, international studies, creative writing, and sustainable social and biological ecology, social entrepreneurship and responsible leadership.
- Our success at meeting learning outcomes in effective **writing and critical thinking** should be replicated with quantitative and scientific reasoning skills. And two new learning outcomes should be added to our list: capacities for global and local citizenship, and skill in narrative moving-image narrative understanding and presentation.
- Our management of **learning outside the classroom** (internships, service learning, field work, mentoring) should be better organized. Our strength in creating integrative capstone experiences and thesis projects should be enriched by even deeper understandings of interdisciplinary inquiry (at the level of method, not just of perspective). Our interdisciplinary themed courses should be transformed by truly problem-driven syllabi.
- We should acknowledge the distinguished **accomplishments of our graduates** and effectively tell the story of how their lives and work is also the story of Fairhaven College. We should use alums as mentors for current students and recruiters of prospective students. We should use them to convince prospective students that the Fairhaven Experience is a “pathway to the professions.”
- We should exploit the **excellent reputation of Western Washington University** more effectively in securing students and resources for the College.
- We should complement our excellence in qualitative narrative assessment with **quantitative measurement** (using the Wabash Study) and use both kinds of data to complete feedback loops; our reform of programs and activities should be based on the analyses these data provide.
- We should **preserve the outstanding dedication of our faculty and staff**, who sacrifice for the sake of the College and its students, by nurturing our caring for their wellbeing, taking care for their health and state of mind, for the level and fairness of their workloads. Our caring for each other must not diminish our care for the College (as a special thing in its own right) without which we could not find meaningful individual roles in helping the next generation of young people understand, re-create, and transform their world.
- We should capitalize on our advantage as a flexible institution to be nimble in responding to opportunities **for creating and testing alternative ways of facilitating learning**.

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## Challenges

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Among the *weaknesses we must acknowledge* (disadvantages, mediocrities, and gaps) and respond to-- in ways that mitigate, if not eliminate, them -- are:

- Due to the new Faculty Union Bargaining Agreement and an outdated Faculty Handbook, we must create a new **Academic Unit Evaluation Plan** (for hiring, retention, promotion, tenure, merit pay, senior lecturer status, and evaluation of adjuncts); this should be submitted to the Provost by February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
- Our struggle to **recruit and support students, faculty, and staff of color** in the College should be addressed with a Task Force that in the near term, and with a sense of urgency, generates a diagnosis and a strategic plan for solving this problem (John B, Larry E, Jackie M, Tanis S, volunteered for the Task Force).
- The looming **budget reductions and increases in tuition** (for 2009 - 2011) due to a nation-wide turn-down in the economy should be addressed by creating a consensus within the College on how we will respond to a request for a 5% (or more) give-back and on-going, permanent cut in our operating budget and at the same time minimize losing faculty positions or the limited-term faculty pool of funds.
- We should address the **aging of our computer equipment and our need for new video equipment** with focused and well-written Student Tech Fee funding proposals; and we should address the need for a video-editing lab with negotiations to receive "minor capital" funds from the University.
- We should address our desperate **need for more classroom and office space** with a near term campaign to revive support for the proposal to build a small multi-use Annex Building (that can be internally variously configured) on the abandoned basketball court behind our main building. And for the long term, we should begin planning and building campus-wide support (especially among the Vice Presidents of the University) for a larger building on the current site of the playground of the (slated to be moved) Child Care Center, and get this project in the queue as a future "major capital" project; and then push it up the list of university priorities.
- The **limited access for our students to classes in departments in other colleges** of the University (especially psychology, biology, music, art, and environmental science) must be addressed at the highest academic levels (in the Academic Coordinating Commission and among the deans, vice provosts, and provost).

We must show the evidence and make the argument that reveal the inconsistency of deliberately claiming that Western's brand consists in providing *liberal arts frameworks* for training in the disciplines and "pathways into the professions" and then turning around and siloing – *insulating* -- *all but entry-level classes from non majors* in departments (by their requirements to officially declare majors before getting access to most courses, multiple course pre-requisites, or higher grade point averages than University admission standards).

- We must deal with **the pressure on our small faculty for teaching the core curriculum** (a number made even smaller by sabbaticals, leaves without pay, retirements, resignations, illness or injury, tenured half-time positions); it must be addressed either by changing the curriculum or by expanding the set of those who can be called upon to teach core classes.

- Under-prepared newly admitted students, deficient in one of the basic skills of college work (writing, reading, math, analysis, presentation, studying, and so on), must be supported with **additional tutoring** so they may quickly acquire that skill and be successful in their work. Our flexible recruitment plan must be tied to an extra-support plan.
- In order to ensure quality, we need to **raise our standards and better monitor independent study projects (ISPs)**, especially those conducted out of town and overseas. We also need to set a limit on the number of ISPs a faculty member can supervise at one time.
- The lack of useful and consistent data about our students, data that can be correlated with various kinds of assessments of student success, deprives us of information necessary to the analysis of the type that should precede budgeting and planning. This deficiency should be overcome by constructing a **College Data Collection System** that tracks students from admissions and recruitment to graduation and alumni status; the data should be made available in graphic form.
- The prospect of a coming series of **faculty retirements** in the near term should be addressed with succession planning; and the built-up deferment of sabbaticals by those eligible to take them must be rationalized with a plan, given the small size of our faculty.

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## Opportunities

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Next we evaluated some external opportunities and threats for the College and suggested ideas for taking advantage of the opportunities and for minimizing or overcoming the threats.

Among the trends and *opportunities we should take advantage of are:*

- We should meet the desire already in place in our students for an **enhanced co-curricular dimension** to the “Fairhaven experience” that will make it more substantive and transforming.
- We should take up the pleas of our alumni for more contact and information about the College and each other by establishing a **College Alumni Association**, electronic alumni magazine and web-link, and by creating an Alumni Advisory Board; this infra-structure will allow us to ask their support for scholarships and mentoring opportunities, and to profile them (for the sake of current and prospective students) in order to show how the Fairhaven Experience prepared them for their lives and careers.
- We should take advantage of two significant, up-coming milestones in the College’s history (its 40<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversaries) as occasions to sponsor exciting **alumni reunions** that celebrate excellence and innovation, achievement and growth in both the College and its graduates.
- We should take advantage of new trends in on-line social behavior among students to create a viral **marketing program for the College** in the realm of blogs and social-networking sites (as a supplement – if not substitute – for paper brochures and viewbooks and for the re-designed website).
- We should capitalize on the human need for, and student interest in, narrative understanding of sustainable societies and their environments to create a unique and exciting **“Science Curriculum for the BioRegion”** in the College and market it to prospective students, and then support this program with targeted science scholarships.

- We should meet the social need and student interest in international understanding and global perspectives with a new learning outcome in **“capacities for global citizenship”** and combine this with a requirement for either a domestic or international cross-cultural living or research experience as a graduation requirement (and combine this expectation with a preference in admissions for those who are learning a second language).
- Demands by students for documentary and educational **film-making** skills should be embraced with an extension of our visual literacy learning outcome to encompass skills in digital moving-image narration for discovery and presentation purposes.
- We should take the opportunity to choose **“affiliate faculty” from other colleges** and departments in the University in order to offer a greater depth and wider coverage of disciplines (and their methods) to our students, and thereby create a deep pool of “friends of the Fairhaven” that help correct inaccurate understandings of the College.

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## Threats

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Among the *threats we must minimize* or overcome (challenges, harms, pressures) are:

- The drop in number of high school graduates in the state and the rise in college enrollment-targets by the state legislature should be met with **“pipeline programs”** for high school students and their teachers that will identify candidates for admission to our college (among others); we should especially target **minority status students**.
- The risk of admitting students who will fail to succeed at Fairhaven or drop out or take too long to finish their degrees should be mitigated with **more refined student profiles of the qualities necessary to succeed** in the College.
- We must minimize the threat to our distinctiveness that comes from imitators – colleges that adopt our innovations as their best practices – by deepening our current practices or by inventing new ones. **We must continue to be an innovative college.**
- The threat of near-term budget cuts must be met with a **collaborative plan to trim the budget** so as to have least impact on direct instruction and jobs and leave the College healthy enough not only to recover but to improve in the interim.
- The risk the College faces from others who give it a misshapen reputation (based on stereotypes and incomplete information) must be countered by **active management of our image** in all sectors of Western Washington University and the Bellingham community.

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## Summary

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In short, the patterns of suggested actions to improve the College lie in eight areas (out of the forty-two listed in the Framework document). We agreed to refresh the following plans:

- Academic Unit Evaluation Plan
- Support for Persons of Color in the College
- College Data Collection System
- extended and refined Curriculum Plan
- Recruitment and Admissions Plan, Marketing and Communication Plan, and
- Alumni and Development Plan

These will form the focus of our Strategic Planning. (September, 2008)

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## **Addendum – (November, 2008)**

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### *Areas of focus*

It is interesting to note that in our recent faculty and staff meeting (following the Retreat) the votes for “disciplines and perspectives that most interest us for replacing Jungsik’s position, and half of Raquel’s position,” cluster around the disciplines of:

- Filmmaking
- Health sciences
- Art performance
- Global, Cross-cultural, Sustainable, and Quantitative perspectives

We can see an emerging direction and focus for our strategic planning in all of our work over the last two months. Now it is time to zero-in on specific component and create plans.