

Weissman School of Arts and Sciences

Report to the Baruch College General Faculty, Fall 2004

The Weissman School's mission is to engage all Baruch students with the learning of the liberal arts and sciences to prepare them to lead responsible and fulfilling lives as individuals, as professionals, and as citizens of our city and our country.

The School is dedicated to quality undergraduate and graduate education in an urban, public institution of enormous diversity. The move to quality at Baruch as a whole led the College to reduce overall enrollments and raise standards with remarkable success, such rapid success that it astounded many of our faculty who were most involved with incoming students. For the past few years WSAS, and Baruch as a whole, has been vitally concerned with the entire process of enrollment management, focusing on admitting better students, students whose high school averages and SAT scores indicate ability to do good-to-excellent work in college. WSAS argued for the admission of more freshmen in the small number of admissions because we believed we could offer an integrated general education curriculum for Baruch's first and second year students. We thought we could do it better and that it would create a community for students, perhaps even lasting loyalty. We have had demonstrably good results from this policy—a better-qualified student body entering our base courses, succeeding in them, remaining at the college, entering Zicklin or SPA or remaining in WSAS for their junior and senior years, graduating in fewer years.

We have accomplishments that would be badges of honor for any school—an excellent CUNY Honors College, the first cohort of which will graduate this year. Our Baruch honors program is significant too. More WSAS faculty and students are engaged together in research and thesis-writing than have been for some time. Our pass rates on the CPE are excellent. In short, we have contributed to the fine reputation of the college that is the first choice of high school students in the city.

Simultaneously, over the past half decade the College has adopted a revised core curriculum that requires a general education foundation and the advanced intensive study of a discipline in the arts and sciences or interdisciplinary studies at an advanced and integrated level. WSAS plays a vital role in that curriculum. That curriculum achieved (and curriculum can never be written in stone) the next step for the School and College is to examine the base requirements to measure the degree to which they impart the necessary communications and analytical **skills** and to judge whether they are engaging undergraduates with **life-long learning** that speaks to more than credit accumulation and degree certification. We are in the process of assessing what students learn and focusing on their learning—this is a break from the frame of mind that comes naturally to academics -- focusing on the quality of our education, our learning, our teaching. It seems simple, perhaps too simple, but it is not easy to shift that emphasis as many discussions have revealed.

This last year was a successful one in terms of recruiting new faculty to fill the spots of retirees (we have **no additional** lines). WSAS was not successful in recruiting a writing director in English but it was able to hire three new assistant professors of writing. We also hired two historians, an artist, a political scientist, a sociologist, and a communications expert. This year we will be searching at least three positions which will bring the total of new faculty to the school in the three year period to 25, a little less than a tenth of our total.

The fiscal hardships of the last couple of years have hurt the School but we still have achieved higher rates of retention, greater numbers at graduation, significantly higher standards. We reduced enrollments to fit our pedagogical and space constraints and to achieve the recognition the College deserves and we proved in the last couple of years that we could perform much better with those smaller numbers. Nonetheless, fiscal constraints have forced the College, and WSAS to radical measures of student recruitment. Austerity was and is painful on top of two years of financial shortages in WSAS funds from donors and the BCF. The impact of these financial difficulties has dampened morale; it seems the ability to live within restricted or unknown budgets is not an ability that can be learned merely by suffering lurches, jerks and failures in planning and programming.

Some of the best planning for the educational future of the school (and much of the potential educational success in general education, skills, and broadening the discipline based learning) has been put on hold or watered down. The development of learning communities and of the Tier III minor both were ready to be built upon the improved preparation of our students. The provost's support system of tutoring, math and English skills (particularly writing) and basic curricular advisement has been enormously improved in a short span but consolidation of those achievements were not consolidated in this environment. The connection of that support system to the introductory education of WSAS has remained loose. The necessary stronger ties between Writing Across the Curriculum and writing in English remain slack. Just plain support in the offices across the campus which allow faculty to imagine and achieve was weakened. We have learned day to day the cost of financial exigency.

This year, in summer school and in admissions policy and in a number of targeted measures, the aim was to increase enrollments substantially to cover the operating deficits in our budget. The goals have been achieved. Baruch has admitted a greater number of undergraduates and graduates. This year there are 28,845 students in WSAS, a number 2200 higher than last year without an increase in the number of faculty. The tuition revenues may well help us with this year's budget but the day to day hardships remain. The adjunct/full time ratio worsens, particularly in base required courses. The freeze in hiring of administration and staff (the pressure to allow vacancies of staff and faculty to meet budget deficits) reduces support for faculty and students. The adjunct budget falls seriously short of covering the demand for classes. This is not new for WSAS – large numbers or smaller numbers WSAS does not have sufficient adjunct budget.

The hope or prayer was to do tighten these belts without dangerous losses to our educational program. Our graduate programs—small as they are—do not seem to have been damaged. Enrollment is level or up in each of the four programs. The mathematic finance degree is growing and has stringent requirements. The communications program is increasing in numbers by the proverbial leaps and bounds. The Industrial Organization Psychology program is part of an overseas (Asia) development of human resources and leadership in connection with Zicklin's overseas program. In the undergraduate program the College met its numbers but beyond that fact the over all outlook is not a positive one. The trial year of learning communities last year was a resounding success and the follow up planning expanded the trial group from ten classes in two learning communities to 12 learning communities (honors, regular, ESL) for this year. Intensive planning, recruiting of new and experienced faculty, recruitment of students, week-long orientation and advisement were diluted in an environment of staff shortages and resource limits. Still faculty, staff and students shook off the "dead in the water" feeling and soldier on. When a proven effort is thwarted or stunted, hard work and strong wills are not enough to make success.

The bright side for WSAS focuses on the future, a future made and brightened by its people—faculty, staff and students. The enthusiastic welcome by all of our communities for the new president has been heart-warming for us and we hope for her. The Baruch Performing Arts Center has made its place in the college and the great generosity of Marvin Antonowsky to the performing arts will deepen its impact on campus life. Opportunities arise daily for the cooperation of the three schools. Recruiting opens up dialogue between members of departments and cross departments and schools. A serious effort is being made to encourage service-learning in the college. There are many examples of student initiated activities—the Model UN, the Cinema series, the Oxford debate, new sports, political clubs. These remind us that though Baruch is unique, our part of it resembles the liberal arts colleges we know. The Middle States visit, despite all the work of it, is a time to bring us together to measure where we are, where we want to go, and even get a sense of achievement in how far we have come.