Weissman School of Arts and Science

Arts and Sciences has almost made it through the second year of two years of financial shortages, shortages that have come just at the moment when important curricular change, improvements in student skills and abilities, new faculty and staff hires, and a new physical environment promised a bright future. The entire College has felt the hardships of the “freeze” on hiring from CUNY—a thin staff got yet thinner and a burdened faculty carried a heavier load. The promise is still there and the achievements of the school this year have been important ones—all the more remarkable in the light of the obstacles. The contribution of the school to scholarship and the arts, to teaching and service, is commendable and professional, a testimony to the fine faculty of WSAS. Their efforts and initiatives, and the support of our colleagues in the administration, in Zicklin and Public Affairs indicate the commitment of the entire college to the learning of the arts and sciences.

For the past few years WSAS has been vitally concerned in the entire process of enrollment management, focusing on admitting more qualified students, students whose high school averages and SAT scores indicate their ability to do good-to-excellent work in college. WSAS has argued for the admission of more freshmen because we believed we could offer an integrated, quality general education curriculum for Baruch’s first and second year students. We have demonstrably good results from this policy. All the indices point to a better-qualified student body entering our base courses over the last couple of years. There are many indications of a new level of success, for example, the retention rates have gone up and the number of years to graduation have steadily declined. We have contributed to the fine reputation of the college that is the first choice for more city students than any other CUNY school. Further, we have a large and successful CUNY Honors College and our own honors program is significant. We have about 300 CHC students who are finishing their junior year and their SATs and grade points are admirable. Our pass rates on the CPE are the best in CUNY. The numbers of students who are able to advance through the pre-business requirements to apply for admission to Zicklin are a testimony to the successful policy of raising the original requirements for admission. It is also a testimony to the efforts of WSAS to improve the instruction in communications, English, and mathematics.

One significant part of the enrollment management policy that aimed to improve the quality of students coming to Baruch, whether at the freshman level or as transfers, also reduced the total number of students admitted to the college. This year Baruch has paid the price of reduced numbers just as it reaped the benefits of a more qualified student body. Among the faculty and administration there are justifiable feelings that CUNY penalized Baruch for aiming high and doing well. The financial costs of a smaller student body—students, after all, pay for their education--has made for cut backs, for larger class sizes at just the moment that additional demands and opportunities of the curriculum (Tier III requirements) have come into play. In Weissman the demands of greater numbers of entering students, greater numbers of students beginning to fulfill tier III requirements, and unfunded mandates have put a severe strain on tax-levy money.
Financial strain means faculty and staff pain; it means student pain as well though, like
good parents, faculty have tried to shelter them from pain. There have been painful
restrictions of released time for research and travel money, of graduate assistantships and
scholarships. Money for recruitment has been seriously curtailed. Weissman’s relative
lack of “soft money” (endowments and gifts) has also meant a reduction of professional
opportunities for faculty and some reduction of cultural activities on campus for all. Our
Baruch Performing Arts Center (in the beautiful spaces for the arts in the Vertical
Campus) performed with less dollars; we squeezed to maintain the jazz series; we
worried about the Alexander String Quartet; we rented to have theatre; we skimped to
have seminars.

Nevertheless WSAS has undertaken some important initiatives. The school is part of a
CUNY wide, on-going and important examination of general education. General
education at Baruch and at CUNY is not to be a matter of skills and vocation but of
liberal learning, active citizenship, human values and ethical behavior, and cross cultural
understanding. The discussion centers on curriculum, on faculty development, and
university-wide exchange. Our new curriculum is an important part of the examination
of general education here with all Baruch undergraduates required to take their minor in
the liberal arts. This program offers the student the opportunity to deepen his
understanding of an arts and sciences discipline and to improve his skills in writing,
speaking, reading and general analysis. It also offers the faculty the opportunity to take
another and a new look at curriculum and courses for some serious planning and some
interdisciplinary focus.

The burden of the efforts of the Weissman School has always been to educate students
who have chosen business as their future. There are majors in the arts and sciences but
the role WSAS plays in the lives of students is not often mentor to a future academic.
The new curriculum requires a stronger and broader learning in the arts and sciences than
was required previously. Success in English, mathematics and communications is a
prerequisite for entry to Zicklin and has called for strenuous efforts in those disciplines
by Weissman faculty. There are on-going curricular and pedagogical inquiries in English
and mathematics as well as many other disciplines for the honing of analytical and
critical skills. There have been new and important hires in English and in mathematics to
strengthen the teaching and testing for all our students. The CPE exam—the results of
which indicate that Baruch is doing a good job—makes special demands on Weissman
faculty.

Initiatives have been undertaken to strengthen the connection with the School of Public
Affairs as well, beginning with the shared interests and professional work of social
scientists in the two schools, particularly in the area of immigration and urban studies and
in the world of not-for-profit institutions. For WSAS there is genuine interest in creating
a center for immigration and transnational studies—a fitting activity for the country’s
most diverse college.

One of the exciting experiments in teaching that WSAS undertook this last fall was the
learning community in the freshman year. Two learning communities were created
including about ten faculty and about fifty students. The results were impressive in terms of student development, faculty interaction, and advisement. For the coming semester English has taken its place at the heart of each community with more discipline coordination and a much wider range of faculty (new, newly tenured, and senior) included in the expansion of the program. At least 25 faculty and as many as 500 students will be included. Learning communities may prove to be a way of creating a greater commitment to the college for new students as well as improving the learning experience for the incoming freshman.

WSAS faculty in their individual departments will undergo a self study discussion this coming year. Some departments have already begun a self examination, for example the departments of Sociology and Anthropology, Psychology and English particularly around the issues of writing. The practices of hiring and the exercise of the faculty’s authority over curriculum call for the examination of goals and outcomes on an almost yearly basis. Last year and this, the searches in WSAS (totaling twenty two) brought virtually every member of every department together to plan strategically.

The WSAS numbers of students taught in the spring semester of 2004 are down to 25,298 from the fall 2003 of 25,805. The numbers of freshmen for fall 2003 were about 1500 and the transfers were about 1000. The spring 2004 FTE are up slightly—1.8%--with Fine and Performing Arts, English, Mathematics, Modern Languages and Sociology/Anthropology all down but seven other departments up. Each department in WSAS increased the number of courses and seats offered for the summer in an attempt to help students meet their requirements and to gain the tuition revenue needed to lessen the financial strain for the current and next year. The graduate programs in WSAS suffered enrollment losses in Industrial/Organization Psychology and in Business Journalism this last year but increases in numbers and quality in Applied Financial Mathematics and Corporate Communications. At this moment the enrollment/admission future of the graduate programs in WSAS is not apparent because admissions will take place deep into the summer.

With this year not yet over and still much to be done before it is over, nonetheless WSAS, like sports fans everywhere at the end of one season, is looking forward to next year.