



Innovation in Learning

IN MY CONVOCATION REMARKS at the beginning of the academic year, I spoke about the need both to continue to make the arguments that demonstrate the value of a liberal-arts education, and also to ensure that the education we provide is preparing our students for a world that is changing so rapidly. It is from a position of great strength that Wellesley takes up this charge.

In those remarks, I noted that Wellesley has sustained its reputation over the years because we have remained true to our academic traditions. We teach the basics well in the classical manner. We always have. We always will. But, importantly, we have not shied away from innovation and from being responsive to the changing state of knowledge and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

To ensure our continued academic excellence, we must be thoughtful about the ongoing development of our academic and intellectual community. This requires careful planning. Two years ago, we formed an all-faculty Academic Planning Committee (APC) to consider the College's goals for its educational and research mission and charged the members with making specific recommendations. In addition, we have had three task forces—a task force on the arts, a task force on the sciences, and a task force on languages and area studies—meeting in recent years to formulate specific recommendations related to each of those curricular areas. The integration of these plans, as well as recommendations that emerge from other academic-planning initiatives, will help shape the future of Wellesley's academic program.

The recommendations that have emerged thus far from these groups are inspiring. I want to provide you with a flavor of the plans that are in process. This fall we launched an exciting new program based on the recommendations of the APC.

Think back to your most satisfying courses at Wellesley: stimulating discussions; close contact with learned professors who challenged and inspired you; exciting and free-wheeling consideration of life-altering concepts; hands-on

projects and assignments. These classes probably occurred *after* your first year. In the past, many first-year courses did a good job of laying the groundwork for future scholarship, but tended to be larger, lecture-based classes that were less conducive to a participatory spirit of intellectual inquiry.

After careful consideration, the APC recommended and the faculty concurred that we formalize a first-year seminar program. A few first-year seminars have been in place for some time, many others are new this fall, and still others will be added as we expand the program.

It is an important concept for many reasons. First-years arrive at Wellesley with unlimited potential but widely varying educational backgrounds. First-year seminars are designed as an immediate immersion of our new students in Wellesley's rich intellectual community. Students will participate in the small, collaborative, discussion-based classes that epitomize a Wellesley education. They will experience the excitement of new

ideas. They will feel part of an intellectual and social community. They will discover early the defining characteristic of our Wellesley community—the love of learning. As they do so, they will be developing the educational foundation we believe is critical to the scholarly passion that will drive their Wellesley careers.

Many seminars are multidisciplinary, and classes are small. First-year seminars are designed to tackle big questions in creative ways. A sampling of the titles reveals much about the intent of the program:

- > *Archaeology and Artifacts: Exploring Classical Cultures Through Objects*
- > *Robotic Design Studio*
- > *Literature and the History of Ideas*
- > *Science and the Bible*
- > *The Coastal Zone: Intersection of Land, Sea, and Humanity*
- > *Where Should We Store Nuclear Waste?*
- > *Meet the Dinosaurs: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly. A Journey Through the Metazoic*
- > *News and Politics: Reading Between the Lines*
- > *Freedom of Speech*

Ultimately, as resources permit, we hope to provide enough first-year seminars to allow every student to take one.

I am confident that our commitment to the ongoing work of academic planning will serve us well as we position Wellesley to be a leader in making the case for the value of a liberal-arts education. It will also ensure that we continue to be regarded—justifiably—as one of the best liberal-arts colleges in the world.

H. Kim Bottomly



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—President H. Kim Bottomly

➔ Read the convocation address at <http://web.wellesley.edu:80/web/AboutWellesley/OfficeofthePresident/speeches.psmi>.