



## **The Long-Term Costs of Short-Term Cuts**

### **Why Austerity Alone Will Not Get Us Out of the Multi-Year Crisis Ahead**

August 2020

The College's top administrators have worked tirelessly to confront the multi-year economic and demographic crises Whitman College faces. They have done this, we believe, out of the same love of Whitman that we all share, and with the goal of making brutal austerity measures as humane as possible for our community.

The problem is not one of will or kindness, it is a misguided belief that we can cut our way out of the multi-year crises ahead—a magical hope that tightening belts in the short-term will bring us to a place where we can go back to normal eventually.

Cuts will be necessary, that goes without saying. But the liberal arts colleges that survive this existential crisis will be the ones that seize the moment to invest in their people, communities, and long-term future. This is the time for bold actions that protect our people and make Whitman the kind of distinctive college that the shrinking pool of liberal arts students will want to choose, long into the future.

**We have the means to reduce short-term cuts *and* carry out a bold investment in Whitman's long-term viability.**

We have more than a half-billion-dollar endowment (roughly a third of which is unrestricted), substantial quasi-endowments, and the opportunity to borrow money at historically low rates. Drawing on these resources is complicated, increases certain risks, and has consequences for future spending—but, weighed against the harms done by an austerity-only approach to the crisis, it's worth much more careful consideration than it has received from our single-minded decision makers.

Endowments and other funds exist to ensure inter-generational equity, but there is no inter-generational equity if there are no future generations.

**The administration's austerity-only approach to the crisis is already hurting the College's mission, long-term viability, ability to attract and retain students.**

What follows is a compilation of the reflections of many Whitman faculty and staff on the long-term harms of the short-term cuts already announced or proposed. (And some sample email templates for future use). Except for minor changes to protect identities and to smooth out syntax, the paragraphs that follow are composed of direct quotes from faculty and staff. When faculty or staff used the "I" pronoun, we've left that in. There are numerous I's in this multi-voice document. In many cases, many faculty and staff members repeated the same theme—we've condensed that. There are four sections below:

1. Harms to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – Central Pillar of the College’s Future
2. Harms to the Student-Scholar and Teacher-Scholar Model – A Brand Killer for Whitman
3. Harms to Innovative Curriculum
4. Un-Celebrating our Location

1. **Harms to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – Central Pillar of the College’s Future**

**Undermining LGBTQIA advising and support.** The responsibilities for the LGBTQIA Coordinator have been folded into the responsibilities of the Director of the Intercultural Center, possibly as an interim contact person but under austerity conditions, they're unlikely to hire someone new to balance the duties of the staff who now have an additional set of .35 FTE position responsibilities. Whitman has attracted a reasonable number of students in recent years who are much less likely to feel welcomed with the loss of this visible administrative recognition, especially if it means there is a slower response to advising PRISM, accessing endowment funding, updating the website, and answering the email for the position because of other duties the Intercultural Center staff also have to be doing for international students, FGWC students, Students and Alumni of Color, and others.

“Dear Student in Crisis,  
I am happy to help you as soon as I can, but I have a much larger queue of folks that I need to support right now. Would it be possible for you to reach out to a friend or faculty person instead?”

**Loss of valuable human capital, expertise, and knowledge in LGBTQIA support and advising.** This is the kind of position that benefits from specific expertise and is not simply replaceable by just anyone with administrative/staff experience at Whitman—let alone someone who’s time is already dedicated to crucial work supporting international students, FGWC students, Students and Alumni of Color, and others.

**Undermining Efforts to Attract and Retain Faculty of Color.** Reducing budgets for professional activity goes against the College's capacity to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion among its faculty members. It has been made clear via references in Whitman-specific pleas to the administration and other national higher ed patterns that recruiting and retaining faculty from underrepresented groups necessitates the provision of resources for faculty members to maintain networks and research connections outside of their own institution. This furthers professional activity and offers community in ways that an isolated campus cannot. Research is done in collaboration with others; reducing budgets reduces our colleagues' capacity to collaborate and network, which is necessary on a small campus. This, in turn, can lead down a path of fewer faculty in underrepresented categories, which we know lessens the possibility of students from these groups to see people like them leading classes. So, this kind of funding decrease will likely lead to less diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community.

“Dear Prospective Faculty member,  
No, we do not have funding for research and we have no  
information about when, or if, that funding will return.”

**Undermining Relations with the Low-Income Schools and the CTUIR.** Many people have weighed in on how acutely the loss of the Science Outreach Coordinator will be felt on our campus and in our community. We want to add that the Whitman Science Outreach Program rivals similar efforts that we have seen at large research universities, and relies heavily on the relationships and connections that Heidi has over many years cultivated with area teachers and school administrators. We also want to highlight Heidi's efforts partnering with leaders and members of the CTUIR and Whitman faculty, staff, and students to bring meaningful and culturally-relevant science outreach activities to CTUIR middle school students. Furthermore, outreach efforts that are part of a current research grant, and those intended for a future grant application, will now require significantly more logistical effort on my part, which will necessarily come at the expense of my time spent engaging in hands-on research projects with Whitman students.

**Undermining global awareness and engagement.** The potential loss of NTT faculty on short term contracts could hit language instruction particularly hard, as they rely on ongoing lecturer positions to run a complete set of language offerings. This in turn would add another blow on top of the previous evisceration of the Global Studies program and disadvantage student understanding of the areas of the world which speak those languages. Contributions from students who speak languages [other than English] at any level (even those taking intro-level [courses] at Whitman while in my class) to enrich our discussions and other students' understanding of history, diversity, and inclusion, as compared to when I'm the only one in the room to speak any of these languages.

**Pay-to-Play Student Research Undermines Efforts to Retain Low-Income Students.** Dramatic cuts to the library acquisitions budgets will not harm affluent students as much. They will order the books they need on Amazon. The costs of slashing library acquisitions will disproportionately harm low-income students.

“Dear Thesis Advisee,  
Yes, you can totally get that book for your research, even  
though the library doesn't have it and interlibrary loan is not  
functioning—it's only \$78.99 on Amazon!”

## **2. Harms to the Student-Scholar and Teacher-Scholar Model – A Brand Killer for Whitman**

Students are drawn to Whitman because of the ways that faculty members involve them in their research, and because of the ways that faculty members infuse their teaching with scholarly expertise (which is, in fact, the top criterion used to assess faculty teaching excellence by the Faculty Personnel Committee). This expertise is not static or stagnant; cutting funding for faculty to access scholarly opportunities goes against the teacher-scholar model. Further, faculty-student research collaboration is part of our teaching, and it is in this area where we see a lot of innovation. Bringing the latest research tools and findings into the classroom is also where innovation is occurring (e.g., using new data from NSF-funded grants in a science or social science classroom; incorporating student-faculty research findings about local art works into exhibits and classroom projects). Evidence of this can be found in any issue of the Whitman Magazine for the last decade. Examining the types of projects supported by our PDF office and external grants yields countless examples of students learning with faculty members via research projects, which then in turn become part of an innovative, up-to-date, and timely curriculum. Importantly, many of these grants are for development of research, which needs internal funding (e.g., student research assistance, books, conferences, etc.) to continue and flourish. To lessen support for professional activity thus counters the top criterion by which faculty are evaluated in their teaching, it removes many opportunities for students to do ongoing research with faculty, and it leads to classroom teaching that is less likely to be timely, well-resourced, and filled with the potential for enrolled students to feel as if they're part of big and important research that can make a difference in the world. In addition to instilling fear among current faculty about their capacity to achieve teaching excellence, and in addition to lessening the College's capacity to be seen as a desirable location for future teacher-scholars, this lessening of scholarly prowess on our campus will make Whitman less desirable in the minds of today's high-achieving high school students whom we'd like to recruit.

“Dear Prospective Students of the Class of 2030,

Why should you choose Whitman? Reason #1: Your classes will be taught by amazing faculty who were on the cutting-edge of scholarship and publishing back when you were seven years old!

A long time ago, these faculty brought their experience doing high-level research into the classroom every single day. This made classes exciting and put Whitman students at the tops of their fields. Not so much anymore. But our amazing professors have amazing memories so they can still channel the cutting-edge-2000s today.”

**When Faculty Take on Work Once Done by Full Time Staff, it Means Less Time for Innovative Teaching.** Faculty across the College—particularly, but not only, in the Sciences—are reporting that their work load has *already* increased because of staff cuts. One scientist writes, we rely heavily on the scientifically-trained and highly-experienced lab coordinators who facilitate my ability to offer deeply rigorous, research-quality lab courses for science students. They are also **essential** to my department’s ability to provide a consistent safe environment for students, staff, and faculty that meets federal, state, and local health and safety requirements for teaching and research laboratories. Now that it falls to that faculty member to take on that complex and important job, they will have less attention and energy for creating the kinds of programs and experiences that attract prospective students.

“Dear Prospective Student,  
I would love to meet with you! I love talking with students considering Whitman. Unfortunately, I can’t talk with you about student-faculty research. I’ve had to drop that work in order to do essential duties once handled by a full-time staff person.”

[A department chair in the humanities writes that they] have had to take on the work of building scheduling, maintaining office supply inventories, arranging for needed repairs, etc. in their building—a job once done by professional staff. Even before the semester starts in earnest, this has impacted the faculty person’s ability to prepare for classes—much less conduct necessary professional development work.

“Dear Personnel Committee,  
I understand that evaluations for that course look really bad, but I *was* able to achieve excellence in replacing the essential work of a full-time professional staff person. Yes, I had to drop the innovative community-based program I was going to do—the one that Whitman was already advertising to prospective students—but, thanks to that, that staff furlough didn’t cripple my department’s basic curriculum.”

**Short-term Cuts = Falling Behind** The more we fall behind in our publishing, compared to schools with better resources to support research, the harder it will be to break back into those ongoing conversations, and the less likely it is that we can attract new teacher-scholar faculty to replace retirements or other faculty departures.

We build a lot of my and my peers' scholarship into my classes, so this does directly affect students beyond diminishing their research opportunities as faculty research projects they could assist with lose funding. Should these cuts continue to be in place after the pandemic lessens

enough for conferences and research travel to become possible again, we will not attract good scholars to Whitman in competition with other schools who are more willing to provide necessary resources for scholarship. There is no way I could have done the research I have completed so far at Whitman without PDA and ASID money, especially since my research requires international travel. I imagine that the computer lifecycle budget cut will similarly have a long-term impact on those faculty who require specific systems to run the programs necessary to support their research.

**Faculty Paying for the Professional Activities Out of Pocket – Not a Sustainable Look.** One faculty member wrote how the PDA cut means that they are on the hook personally to pay for a long-planned performance/exhibition of their professional work.

### **3. Harms to Innovative Curriculum**

**Undermining Student Learning by Making NTT Faculty More Precarious.** Many of us "Adjuncts" have been here for quite some time, and have developed significant and essential portions of our departments' curricula. When President Murray and Dean Tipton say that they will honor the contracts of those to whom the college has made a multi-year commitment I feel that this is excluding a good number of us. A huge number of us have *ourselves* made a multi-year commitment to the college which is not reflected by our appointment letters. Many of us "Adjuncts" do first year and major advising, and provide real service to the college. To put us on a list of the expendable, because we don't have a multi-year contract, flies in the face of the very values that the College professes to hold dear.

I have pre-major and major advisees [in the past]. In spite of working a full-load equivalence of 120-130% over the past two academic years, this coming year is the first one where my appointment letter reflected my full-load status, but I am still not a Lecturer.

“Dear Prospective Major,  
Your letter was really wonderful—thank you for reaching out. I’m glad that you have really gotten a lot out of the four classes you’ve taken with me these past years. I would *love* to serve as your advisor. In the past, I used to take on advisees, even though I am not a TT member of my department. Unfortunately, I’ve had to pull back from that now because I have to preserve as much time as possible for my efforts to find a less precarious position elsewhere. I wish you all the best at Whitman.”

**Undermining Global Intellectual Engagement.** Contributions from students who speak languages [other than English] at any level (even those taking intro-level courses at Whitman while in my class) to enrich our discussions and other students' understanding of history, diversity, and inclusion, as compared to when I'm the only one in the room to speak any of these languages. Loss of NTT in the languages, would also reduce the number of Off Campus Studies programs available to students in the future, as some programs require at least an introductory level skill in the target country's language in order to attend. Thus, reducing NTTs in the languages undermines one of the college's distinctive program areas—Off-Campus Studies.

**Losing Institutional Knowledge and Human Capital, for What?** I have given years to a specialty, to service, to my department, and most of all to my students. It is patently absurd that the college would look to faculty with this kind of a relationship with the college at large as a way to cut costs. First off, we don't get paid that much. We are the most vulnerable on faculty, because while we have given time and time again for the college, we *are not* rewarded with the security of multi-year appointments, a distinction that is suddenly quite important at Whitman College.

**All Aspects of Our Innovative Curriculum Depend on Essential Staff.** For example, to help the Geology Department's transition to online teaching, our geotech (Elliot) has taken on new duties: recording videos for faculty, learning to edit videos, acquiring and prepping lab materials to send to students around the globe for labs. Receiving these back and disinfecting them for next spring. Doing 3D printing to create more copies of materials for labs this fall and next spring. Caring for research instruments. Facilitating senior research via training or setting up remote use (via linked computers). Also "Elliot is our backup plan should one of us become seriously ill with COVID-19 or be caring for an incapacitated family member. One of the advantages of Elliot having his B.A. in Geology from Whitman and a M.Sc. in Geology (Univ. of Tromso, Norway), is he has the requisite expertise to help the other department faculty fill in for some lectures and lab instruction." His experience cannot easily be replaced.

**We Risk Losing Vital Talent and Experience, Wasting Money Spent on National Searches** \_\_\_ is an exceptionally capable lab coordinator. We conducted two national searches before locating \_\_\_, and they were far and away the best candidate we encountered. Thus, if we lose \_\_\_, we cannot expect to easily replace them. If they are furloughed, they may have to sell their house and leave Walla Walla, and we may not be able to hire them back. It was difficult to find and hire someone with their expertise, enthusiasm, and work ethic, and we have invested considerable resources in training them. Losing \_\_\_ would be a great loss to the Department and to current and future students.

**Undermining Student Research Opportunities.** Especially if we can't rely on ILL and Summit loans and are limited to just what the library holds, cuts to the library acquisition budget are going to dramatically impact student ability to do research projects. We have been gradually culling books that are held by at least 3 other institutions in Summit, but without access to them

it's as if we've slashed our library collection before even touching the purchasing budget for this coming year. This is a problem not just for senior thesis research, but also for all the classes which have smaller research papers - certainly I have projects that need significant library work in my classes from 100 level on up. The quality of that research will suffer in direct relation to the diminishment of our library resources.

**Shooting our Newest and Most Innovative Program in the Foot?** As you probably already know, professional development funds have been cut for the first-year seminars. It is unclear whether this means the promised \$1000 for developing a syllabus, which for all of us, has taken months of planning and meetings. As for fall payments for professional development (the old Encounters meeting payments) I fear that morale will be very low amongst faculty. There may not be much buy in or incentive for those of us teaching a section this year to invest in teaching in future years. Additionally, without an incentive to attend these twice monthly meetings I am afraid that some faculty might make attending these meetings a low priority, which in turns affects the cohesion of the FYS in this critical trial roll-out.

**We risk losing millions in future grant funding.** The elimination of the Science Outreach Coordinator is a short-term saving that jeopardizes millions of dollars of future grant funding at risk. So many of us have used the Science Outreach Coordinator as a vital local resource in FSF and other grant applications.

**Replacing Paid Staff with Student Interns?!** The President proposed having students do the work of the Science Outreach Coordinator. And maybe they could do that work and it would be a good learning experience for them—but who would be responsible for training and supervising every new crop of students taking on this vital job?!

**Crises Can Bring People Together and Raise Morale as We Join Together to Save Whitman – But the Administration’s Approach Sews Discord and Fatigue.** Lack of transparency and a feeling of powerlessness means that resentment builds up with a potential for long-term harm at Whitman.

“Dear Committee Chair,  
I’m afraid I cannot serve on your important committee. A lot of my service time right now is taken up by training and supervising students who are valiantly trying to replace work that had been done by a trained staff person with years of experience.”

Cuts to wages and benefits in any department and program, without consultation or regard for equity will hollow out the institution's capacity to meet its mission. This hinges on a faculty and

staff with job security and trust in the College's leadership. Austerity measures without transparency and equity are bad for the "business of student learning"

Fatigue of faculty doing staff work on top of their own jobs while also organizing to try to save those staff positions.

Long-term cuts to faculty research budgets will liquidate the teacher-scholar model, diminish the College's ability to attract and retain junior faculty from diverse backgrounds, and send a strong message to prospective students that this is a 4th-tier liberal arts college. It will kill the brand.

#### **4. Un-Celebrating our Location**

**With Less Staff Support and More Work Once-Done by Staff Now Falling to Faculty, Time-Consuming Community-Based Education Programs will Suffer.**

“Dear Prospective Student,  
I’m so glad that you hear about my community-based research program. It’s so cool how it’s been featured in every Admissions pamphlet and view book!!! Unfortunately, I am not going to be able to do that program this year because of cutbacks to staff support and because I am scrambling to keep the basic components of our curriculum afloat. We have really beautiful dorms, though!”

**The Science Outreach Coordinator.** The removal of the science outreach coordinator runs counter to the goal of celebrating location (and runs counter to the goal of being able to get national grants for science faculty, which has been pointed out in other places). Putting the administrative tasks held by the person in this position into faculty hands reduces faculty time for their own teaching and research and threatens the ability of the College to nurture relationships with local partners in a concerted way. Community-based research is research for many faculty members, and as the Mellon funding runs out and travel opportunities go away, faculty may look to these kinds of professional opportunities. The cuts to professional activity funding and staff positions such as the science outreach coordinator hinders this possibility. In addition, it is precisely in the connections with community via community-based research where we see students from underrepresented groups finding tremendous satisfaction and opportunities, thus lessening the College's capacity to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion. Lessening opportunities for students to connect their academic work with local contexts lessens the attractiveness of Whitman in the eyes of students who aim to make the world a better place as soon as they set foot on campus.

I also want to highlight Heidi's efforts partnering with leaders and members of the CTUIR and Whitman faculty, staff, and students to bring meaningful and culturally-relevant science outreach

activities to CTUIR middle school students. Furthermore, outreach efforts that are part of a current research grant, and those intended for a future grant application, will now require significantly more logistical effort on my part, which will necessarily come at the expense of my time spent engaging in hands-on research projects with Whitman students.

*This document was researched and written by members of the Whitman College chapter of the American Association of University Professors.*