BUILD A GREAT INSTITUTIONAL BRAND

**DECISION ITEM:** Mentoring: Living the Brand

For the past year, the University has assessed progress toward VISION 2010. While this progress has been excellent, a central conclusion from the review is that Wilkes must distinguish itself better in the academic marketplace if it is to achieve long-term strength and stability through an increase in its brand strength in Northeastern Pennsylvania and in the Mid Atlantic Region. Based on the results of a recently completed branding study, the President’s Cabinet, after consultation with all campus constituencies and the Board of Trustees, has concluded that a singular focus on the goal of “ensuring extraordinary student success through mentoring” could position Wilkes well in this larger marketplace. The Cabinet came to this conclusion based not only on the survey results, but also on the strength of mentoring activities currently in place at Wilkes.

For Wilkes to live its mentoring brand it must make available to students, staff and faculty at all educational and organizational levels the opportunity for short and long-term learning/support relationships. This single focus will clarify University priorities, and with the support of our branding strategy, create a sharply defined and stronger institutional identity. The focus on an exceptional student learning experience that is accompanied by unique and systematic mentoring opportunities will distinguish Wilkes and create a premier learning community of national reputation.

**Mentoring Task Force**

Membership and Leadership: The President’s Cabinet has appointed a Mentoring Task Force to lead the campus to mentoring excellence. This Task Force has been designed to be representative of the campus and its constituencies. It will be chaired by Paul Adams and co-chaired by Mar Loeschke. An outside consultant, Ann Zanzig, has been retained to assist in guiding the work of the Task Force, particularly as it relates to the issues of the development of a feasible work plan and process improvement and systems design. Initial appointments to the Task Force will be for one year. Task Force members include: Paul Adams, Anne Heineman-Batory, Sandra Carroll, Ed Foote, Mike Frantz, Maravene Loeschke, Mary Beth Mullen, Josephine Panganiban, Anne Pelak, Margaret Steele, Deb Tindell, Brian Whitman, and Nicole Witek.

Committee Charge: President Gilmour has issued the following charge to the Mentoring Task Force:

> A campus-wide implementation of mentoring will be complex and challenging. While we build on a superb foundation Wilkes, if we are to be a world class mentoring organization, in which mentoring is a core value, we must recognize that this effort will take us at least five years to complete. This is because, while we have some superb mentoring
activities in place, not all students are assured that they will have an exceptional mentoring and learning experience. Therefore, it is important that the Committee adopt a process improvement approach to its work. In completing its work, the Committee must:

- Define an initial mentoring vision for the campus, based on best practice thinking.
- Define measures of mentoring success for Wilkes—should include measures of student learning, retention, graduation rates, job placements and satisfaction with mentoring processes.
- Identify current mentoring activities on campus; taking particular note of those activities with great promise and possible applicability in other units
- Map these activities in relation to one another and to other aspects of the student learning experience—remembering to do this mapping in manageable chunks—because all disciplines, the co-curriculum and all levels must manifest the mentoring brand.
- Identify gaps, conflicts and opportunities for collaboration for enhanced performance.
- Benchmark best practice mentoring organizations.
- Design and implement a campus-wide system for integrating mentoring practices into learning and living for all students.
- Continue improvement processes based on results as revealed by measures.

The objective will be to create a Wilkes’ mentoring system that assures that all programs are logically interconnected in a way that is comprehensible to all participants. The Task Force will create a vision for mentoring at Wilkes; propose a work plan and budget for the next three years; and serve as a coordinating/steering committee to make recommendations on matters related to sustaining and further developing a climate of excellence in mentoring.

Initial Work of the Task Force: The Task Force met in a daylong session on May 26 to begin its work. For this initiative to succeed the Task Force believes this effort will require broad-based support across all constituencies with support most evident from the University’s leadership team. To reach the desired levels of institutional and student success, mentoring must reach into every aspect of the University’s culture; and the ability to mentor and be mentored, must become a core competency of all employees. Ample resources (human and financial) must be made available that reflect the priority being given to mentoring in the University’s strategic plan.

Phase 1: Assessing the Situation- Summer 2005
The Task Force is beginning its work by assessing the current situation at Wilkes. Current initiatives already in place (see Appendix) are being identified and evaluated and the Task Force is reviewing mentoring “best practices” inside and outside of higher education. Benchmarking visits to a set of “best practice” organizations will likely take place this summer and fall. Programs that have already proven to be a success should serve as a
model and provide lessons as to how excellent mentoring performance can be developed and sustained within the Wilkes culture. Vital to our effort is an understanding of how supportive the Wilkes culture is to the concept of mentoring and its potential to enhance the educative process and build the University’s brand strength.

Wanting to learn from our past, the Task Force has considered what it was that characterized past successful change events at Wilkes. Several themes emerged. First, those most involved must aspire (and be able to inspire others) to be better – they must be committed to reach a new level. Second, the Task Force must take advantage of expertise that already exists on campus. Third, the initiative needs to be linked to learning – in and out of the classroom. Fourth, patience must be our guide as we take the time to develop our approach and secure “buy in” from all stakeholders. Fifth, we must be realistic in our goal setting – making sure that stretch goals that are challenging, but attainable. And lastly, support from the University’s leadership must be visible and backed by adequate resources.

As implementation moves forward, these principles will guide the Task Force in its work and be revisited periodically to ensure that we are being true to our guiding values.

Phase 2: Create a Definition and Initial Vision- Summer and Fall 2005
The Task Force must get mentoring on solid footing so people will trust and embrace it. An early challenge will be to create a definition of mentoring that is necessarily inclusive of a broad range of opportunities and initiatives, but at the same time, provides direction, clarity and connection. The benefits of a more robust mentoring culture must be identified for the campus; emphasizing the clear links that mentoring can bring to improving the learning environment for students, faculty and staff.

The Task Force has yet to consider its definition of mentoring; however, preliminary discussions lead us to believe that mentoring at Wilkes will be an active, not passive activity; and that during a career at Wilkes students/faculty/staff will be both mentors and mentees with numerous experiences in each role. Mentoring will not be just face-to-face, but will take place in multiple and varied venues, and will be enhanced through the use of technology. Key, will be the recognition that the mentor is a facilitator of an evolving learning relationship; and that effective mentoring starts with self-learning and the mentor’s and mentee’s willingness to grow and develop.

Agreement on language will be important for securing buy-in, setting direction, and connecting to the branding images and symbols.

After reviewing existing mentoring initiatives on campus, and benchmarking inside and outside of higher education, the Task Force will create an initial vision for mentoring at Wilkes and set forth a preliminary work plan for the 2005/2006 academic year.

Phase 3: Design Systems and Structure – Fall 2005 and ongoing
The Task Force will need to design the systems and structure needed to implement the plan. Included will be an infrastructure to support anticipated initiatives and their integration with existing mentoring programs; integration with existing training and performance evaluation systems; an internal promotion and communication plan; and technology processes and systems that will help leverage mentoring throughout Wilkes.
Indicators of mentoring success will be identified, but will include measures of student learning, persistence, graduation rates, placement information, as well as satisfaction with mentoring programs.

Critical to our success will be an understanding by students, faculty and staff upon entry into Wilkes of the role mentoring plays in creating an exceptional learning environment, and the roles they will play at Wilkes as both mentor and mentee.

**Phase 4: Building the Processes- Fall 2005 and ongoing**

Once the Task Force has developed its initial plan and designed the systems and structure to support it, adequate resources must be allocated. Resources are already reserved in the University’s budget for FY07. The initial “set aside” is $750,000 in FY07 and is planned to increase to $1.75 million in FY11. While it is too soon to know how the resources will exactly be spent, faculty release time, staffing, training, and technology are all anticipated to be in the mix of expenditures.

To ensure success, the Task Force recognizes that it must test its systems and structures before rolling them out in a campus-wide initiative. Building on successful programs already in place and use of pilot initiatives will provide the opportunity to flush out any incongruent aspects of the plan and fix them in time for a larger rollout.

A mentoring culture at Wilkes will exist when the following indicators are in place (Zachary, 2000):

- **Accountability**: everyone accepts accountability for maintaining the integrity of mentoring at Wilkes. Benchmarking is routine. Evaluation is an ongoing procedure, and results are communicated throughout the organization.

- **Alignment**: mentoring is aligned within the culture, not an add-on to what is already in place. There are solid educational reasons to engage in mentoring and adequate resources to support it. Mentoring is linked to organizational values and strategy.

- **Demand**: the mentoring pool is brimming with faculty, staff, students, and alumni who are eager to become mentees and mentors. Mentors and mentees are involved in simultaneous mentoring relationships.

- **Infrastructure**: resources, both human and financial, are in place in meaningful ways. People are encouraged to respect and dedicate time for mentoring.

- **A Common Mentoring Vocabulary**: People of different levels areas of the organization speak positively about mentoring. A shared vocabulary and set of assumptions informs conversations.

- **Multiple Venues**: Opportunities to engage in mentoring include group mentoring, long-distance mentoring, mentoring circles, reverse mentoring, and mentoring networks. Resources remain accessible and up-to-date.
**Reward:** reward for mentoring is built into the culture. Reward may be tied to professional development and goal achievement. There is acknowledgment and recognition in different forums and formats.

**Role Modeling:** Best practices are the norm and mentoring excellence is visible.

**Safety Net:** Support is readily available to help, coach, and counsel mentors, mentees, mentoring partners, departments and teams. Confidentiality is honored and learning relationships that do not work out are assisted in reaching a positive learning outcome from mentoring experiences.

**Training and Education:** Training and education are strategically linked together as part of an overall plan to keep mentoring visible throughout the organization. Skill building and renewal training are available for mentors and mentees as needed.

The assessment program we create to monitor and evaluate mentoring will need to examine each of these key indicators.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The Task Force will continue its work through the summer and into the fall, working with our consultant, as well as in sub-groups with assigned tasks. The August Faculty Retreat will focus on mentoring and provide the Task Force an opportunity to roll out initial concepts and continue to build the necessary “buy-in” from the faculty.

Mentoring will add value to Wilkes, most importantly, improving the quality of learning for our students, faculty and staff. As the University works to build effectiveness and efficiency, and assign resources in support of strategy, our mentoring initiatives will help us to leverage our energy and make best use of time and effort. Having extensive resources at our disposal is not most important. Most important, is using the resources we have wisely.

**Reference Note**

Appendix

Some Current Examples of Mentoring at Wilkes

It was the depictions of mentoring relationships in their survey and focus group research at Wilkes that caused Carnegie Communications to conclude that mentoring had great potential to distinguish Wilkes in the academic marketplace. Whether one prefers the labels of formal/informal, structured/unstructured, or organic/inorganic, mentoring has long been a staple of the Wilkes culture. As the Task Force begins it work, it has explored some examples of mentoring that already exist at Wilkes:

PPD in the Sidhu School of Business and Leadership: The Sidhu School of Business and Leadership has designed a program to develop and nurture emotional intelligence and leadership in undergraduate students. The Personal and Professional Development Series (PPD) is designed to 1) achieve an engaging and effective advising process, and 2) create a learning adventure that combines cognitive, affective, and behavioral experiences to help students achieve their goals.

Each semester, Sidhu students will take a one credit PPD course. The course activities will allow time for self-assessment, interpretation, and development of competencies and sensitivities in leadership, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. The first year is focused on learning about oneself; the second year adds “fit,” the third year continues career preparation and skill development and the fourth year prepares students for graduation and life-long growth and development. The PPD series uses learning/action plans, teamwork, learning portfolios, community service, field experiences, shadowing, guest speakers, career preparation materials, and coaching/mentoring to achieve its educational goals.

Advising and mentoring is integrated into the PPD series timeline. In year one, freshman academic advisors, freshman business faculty, peer mentors and the PPD Coordinator work together to create opportunities for individual attention and support. In years two, three and four resource coaches from the faculty, alumni and community are added to support the PPD students and provide additional mentoring opportunities.

PPD has just finished its first year with an initial group of freshmen. Even though the first year just ended, early assessments of the programs are positive.

Alumni Mentoring Program: The Alumni Association is developing a mentoring program for students, alumni and friends of the University. The program intends to provide career networking to facilitate optimal career decision-making for students and alumni, to assist students and alumni in development of professional contacts, to create the opportunities for mentees to learn from the experience of others, and to create for mentors an opportunity to reconnect with Wilkes, to lend support to the lives of our students, and have the opportunity to further develop their skills, knowledge and expertise.

This past year a pilot program with upperclassmen from the Sidhu School of Business and Leadership provided a starting point for the program to develop and eventually grow across the campus.
Masters in Creative Writing: The program focuses on mentoring between practicing writers, agents, and editors with aspiring writers in the program. Instructor and student are teamed together in a forum that consistently requires relationship building through critique and dialogue.

Mentoring relationships will be nurtured at a distance through the use of technology and through face-to-face contact during the twice-each-year residencies.

Depending on the stage of the program and competency pursued, students will seek mentors/expertise from different faculty members in the program.

Young Women in Leadership: The Provost selects 8-10 women student leaders on campus to participate in a yearlong leadership symposium. The women meet one evening a month to study leadership qualities and styles. Five to six books are read and discussed. The students receive media training, work on service projects involving mentoring, participate in exercises, involve their mentors, keep a journal, and support each other as an ensemble. The culminating experience is a public presentation in which each participant talks about what good leadership is and what style she is developing for herself.

Program Goals include: 1.) to provide opportunity for women students to study and discuss leadership issues; 2.) to provide opportunity for young women to develop a personal leadership style; 3.) to provide a student support group for campus leaders; 4.) to provide connection between the Provost and students; and 5.) to initiate mentorship between administration, students, faculty and staff.

Examples from Academic Departments: In the Communications Department Wilkes students mentor 8th grade students at Wyoming Seminary. Seniors Communications majors mentor undergraduates take Com 101 (Public Speaking). In Nursing the Senior Capstone involves mentorship with practicing registered nurses. In Biology and Chemistry upperclassmen serve as undergraduate teaching assistants for freshman and sophomore labs. In addition, upperclassmen are involved in research projects with faculty that result in presentations and publications.