Letter to the Wheelock community from President Jackie Jenkins-Scott

Earlier today, I shared with Board of Trustees Chair, Kate Taylor, my plan to conclude my presidency of Wheelock College in June 2016 following Commencements and Reunion. At that time, I will have served and led Wheelock for twelve years. There is never a good time to leave a wonderful institution; however, Jim and I have decided that now is the time for us to embark on the next chapter of our lives while we have the stamina and good health to explore new adventures.

For more than a decade, I have been most privileged to work with this extraordinary community of dedicated trustees, faculty, staff and alumni through an era of great accomplishment and progress while overcoming significant challenges. What we have achieved together will continue to have positive impacts on Wheelock for decades to come. We have strengthened the foundation that Lucy Wheelock created so many years ago to enable a bright and thriving future for the College. We have demonstrated how we are indeed “tough enough” to successfully navigate the fast paced, rapidly changing higher education environment with a strong and lasting commitment to our mission of improving the lives of children and families.

When I first arrived at Wheelock, I asked our community if we were aiming for incremental improvements or institutional transformation. The overwhelming consensus was institutional transformation! I am very pleased to write that, together, we have made great strides towards institutional transformation. We have inaugurated innovative and ambitious programs, enhanced our visibility and reputation locally, nationally and internationally, and expanded our academic and extracurricular programs. Wheelock is excelling in nearly all metrics used to measure thriving academic institutions. This is something for which we can all be proud.

Shortly after my arrival, we embarked on a renewed commitment to student success and that intense focus is paying off. Undergraduate applications have increased by nearly 60%, and our Boston campus undergraduate enrollment has grown more than 50% from 566 to over 869 including the largest incoming class in the history of the College. Our commitment to student success has resulted in record high four-year graduation rates from 42%, well below the national average, to nearly 60% which exceeds the national average by almost 10 percentage points. Our graduation and retention rates are consistently improving.

We are proud that we have created greater access to a high-quality education and our student body is not only growing but it is changing for the better. Diversity and inclusion is real at Wheelock College and we see it every day. Our undergraduate population of ethnically and racially diverse students has increased by 23% and by 11% in our graduate programs. The number of first generation students has grown from less than 25% in 2005 to nearly 41% in 2014.
Diversity extends to students with disabilities as reflected in the 20% of our current student body. The increase of students attending Wheelock from Boston is also significant and represents nearly 25% of our student population. Additionally our international student body is growing with students from 28 countries.

The remarkable impact of our focus on truly being a student centered institution is evident across campus in many areas; for example, strengthened core academic programs including the addition of 11 new undergraduate programs including majors in Political Science and Global Studies and Communications Media Literacy; enhancements in the first-year academic experience; expanded research and scholarly opportunities for our students; and increased faculty support. Co-curricular programs growth is evident in the number of clubs and student led organizations now numbering over 25. Our commitment to and recognition of the importance of multicultural, spiritual and religious experiences are reflected in day-to-day campus life. Athletic programs have added male sports to the roster since 2008, and we now boast a competitive and growing athletic program that attracts the participation of nearly 20% of our Wheelock students.

In 2007, we launched an excellent Honors Program that continues to grow and thrive. Our superb Summer Bridge Program that began nine years ago has demonstrated the value of providing support to incoming students and has contributed to their improved academic experience as well as their persistence and retention. These achievements were only possible because of your commitment to the success of our students and your determination to keep a Wheelock education relevant and purposeful.

You know, as I do, that community service and civic engagement has been a hallmark of our College and even more so during the past decade. The New Orleans Service Learning program, Ubuntu Arts, Jumpstart, and the Mattahunt Community Partnership are outstanding examples of the tremendous opportunities provided to our students by a dedicated faculty and staff. For 2012-2013, Wheelock students contributed over 219,000 hours in 280 community partnerships with Boston-area schools, social service agencies, and hospitals, as well as numerous other organizations throughout the country and the globe. In 2014, Wheelock was selected as the winner of the Presidential Award in Education on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement, an honor that is unparalleled in the history of the College.

Our faculty and the entire community eagerly endorsed and supported our commitment to internationalization and the goal that all students leave Wheelock as global citizens. Our International Visiting Scholars Program has brought almost 50 scholars to our campus enriching and expanding our academy in unexpected and exciting ways. Our International Service Learning Program, now in its tenth year, is truly transforming the lives of our students, and it is offering important opportunities for collaboration and cross disciplinary work among our faculty. This year, over 90 students will participate in international service learning, travel learning and study abroad programs, another remarkable accomplishment.

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We all owe a special thanks to the faculty who travel with our students and the staff of the Center for International Programs and Partnerships for making the commitment to this work possible and successful.

During the past decade "Bring Wheelock to the world and the world to Wheelock" has been reflected in the addition of new degree granting programs abroad and expanded collaborations in a wide range of international communities. We are especially proud of the long-term contracts with our partners in Singapore which are adding Bachelor and Masters trained Wheelock graduates to the Singaporean workforce and contributing to Singapore’s exemplary reputation as a progressive country committed to providing high-quality early education for all of its citizens. New initiatives in the Caribbean will strengthen early education services in that region for years to come.

In 2006, the College completed its first comprehensive Facilities Master Plan, and I know you agree that we have made great progress in implementing many of the recommendations of that first plan. Our new Campus Center and Student Residence, completed in 2009, the total renovation of the Riverway Residence, construction of the Earl Center for Learning and Innovation, renovations of many existing spaces, exterior landscaping and beautification of the campus have all contributed to Wheelock being a wonderful place to learn and work. The energy and improved sense of community is palpable.

Wheelock is an exciting campus with a promising future.

Since my arrival, our community has stood together during challenging economic times. As a small, tuition driven college, it has not been easy to maintain strong financial stability. We can all be very proud that through it all, we have been able to grow our endowment, provide salary increases for ten of the past eleven years, improve our employee benefits program, and operate with a positive bottom line. Sincerest thanks go out to our entire community for this sustained commitment to financial stability. This institutional tenacity will serve the College well during future challenging times.

All of our accomplishments would not be possible without the devotion and generosity of our amazing alumni and friends of the College. Our College was able to secure over $100 million over the last eleven years including the largest fundraising campaign in the history of the College. Generous financial support for The Campaign for Wheelock contributed over $82 million in support of student financial aid, building renovations, innovative programs and faculty. I am confident that the extraordinary support and commitment of our alumni will sustain the College well into the future.

On a personal note, Jim and I are deeply appreciative of the invaluable love and support we have received during our years at Wheelock. I especially want to thank the trustees, my administrative and faculty colleagues, our students and friends who have served this institution with extraordinary dedication and commitment often without recognition and praise. During the next few months, we look forward to thanking you personally and celebrating with you the joys of what we have accomplished together.

Jackie Jenkins-Scott, President
April 28, 2015