Program Mission Statement: A Quick Look

Contents

What is a Mission Statement?

A program (program refers to a department, school, or program) mission statement includes a description of the broad purposes the program is aiming to achieve, the general activities the program engages in related to those purposes, the community and stakeholders the program is designed to serve, and the values and principles that guide the program purposes and activities. A mission statement serves as a foundation for program goals and student learning outcomes. A program mission statement should distinguish the program from other units and should be consistent with the principles in both the college's mission and UNC's mission (including UNC's vision, values, purposes, and goals). Key elements of mission statements are in the diagram:
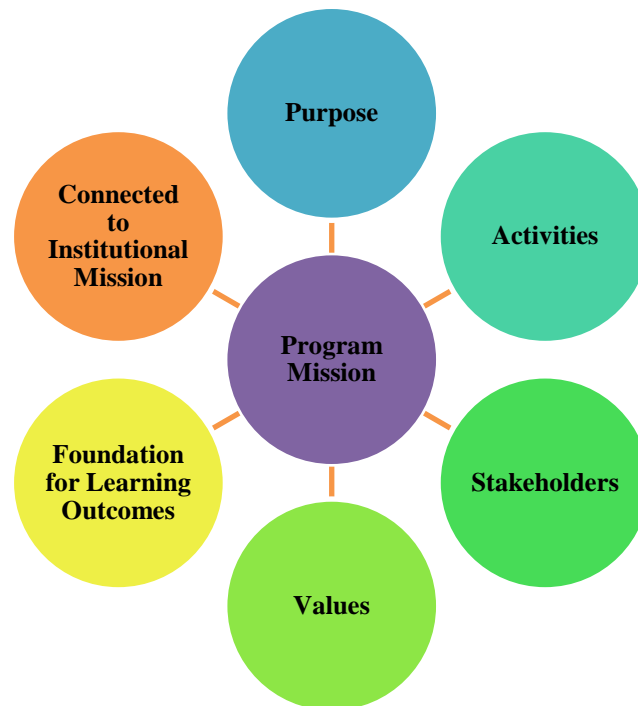
A program mission should be reviewed periodically to ensure that there is alignment between the mission and current program purposes and activities. If the mission statement, purpose, and activities of the program are misaligned then this is a signal to the program that either 1) the mission is no longer reflective of the program and needs to be modified or 2) the program purpose and activities have drifted and need to be modified to align with the intended mission. Either scenario is possible; reflection by the program is needed to determine which is the case.

Mission statements are sometimes confused with vision statements. A vision statement is a short, aspirational and inspirational statement describing your program's image of the future you seek to create; whereas, a mission statement describes what your program is going to do and why it's going to do it. Mission statements are more concrete and action-oriented than vision statements. One way of thinking about mission and vision statements is: "Your vision statement should inspire people to dream; your mission statement should inspire them to action" (Network of STEM Education Centers, 2016).

Why Mission Statements are Important

Mission statements are important for several reasons.

- The process of creating and revising a mission can bring people together to create shared focus for the work they do.
- The process of creating and revising a mission statement enables people to see the unit/program as something they helped shape.
- A mission statement provides a shared language for faculty, staff, and other key stakeholders.
- Mission statements convert the broad dreams of your vision for the program into specific, action-oriented terms.
- It is easy to lose sight of your program's purposes when dealing with day-to-day issues. A mission statement provides a good reminder of the program's purpose as you do your daily work.
- Having a well-developed mission statement can also help prevent "mission creep" by providing a basis for developing priorities, goals and objectives, student learning outcomes, and for making decisions about program changes.
- When your mission statement is easily visible and accessible (e.g., on unit website), it communicates your purpose and values to others (e.g., students, parents, other faculty and units, employers), and it communicates what is important to program faculty.

Who Should Develop Mission Statements

It is critical to be as inclusive as possible when developing mission statements to ensure that the statement fully represents a range of stakeholder voices and perspectives. Stakeholders with a vested interest in the purpose and activities of the program should have a role in developing the mission statement. Stakeholders can be broken into two groups: key stakeholders and auxiliary stakeholders.

Key stakeholders are responsible for implementing and overseeing the mission. In academic programs, key stakeholders are faculty. Units are encouraged to include all program faculty in the mission writing/revision process. Key stakeholders (or a subset of key stakeholders) will oversee the mission statement development process. If there is a large number of faculty, some units may want to create a subgroup of faculty who will be the writing team and who will do the main work of synthesizing stakeholder feedback, writing the draft statement, and revising the draft statement. Also, units may place some faculty into the key stakeholder group and some faculty into the auxiliary group. For example, some programs place full-time faculty into the key stakeholder group and part-time faculty in the auxiliary group. When determining placement of part-time faculty consider how many courses part-time faculty teach in the program; if part-time faculty are teaching a significant number of courses they will have an important perspective in the key stakeholder group.

Auxiliary stakeholders are those individuals directly influenced by the unit's mission and activities. In academic programs, the main auxiliary stakeholders are students. Auxiliary stakeholders can also include faculty (generally part-time or adjunct), researchers, staff, community members, employers, advisory boards, and the like who have a vested interest in the

program. Some units have auxiliary stakeholders provide input in the initial round of feedback gathered in preparation to create a draft mission statement. Other units have auxiliary stakeholders provide input once the draft mission statement is created.

Who Should Know About the Mission Statement

All stakeholders should be aware of the program mission. At a minimum, this includes full and part-time faculty, students, fieldwork and internship supervisors, and student support personnel who work with the program. Other stakeholders could include parents, employers, and alumni/ae of the program. Programs can post their program mission on their UNC websites and in program brochures. Often programs are also asked to include their mission statement in academic program review reports.

Checklist for Evaluating a Mission Statement

This checklist is a summary of the guidelines for creating mission statements. Use the checklist to create, evaluate, and revise a mission statement.

Checklist Question	Does the mission meet the guideline?	
	Yes	No
1. **Describes the program purpose.** Does the mission describe the purposes of the unit (i.e., why the unit does what it does)?		
2. **Describes program activities.** Does the mission describe the primary activities a program does related to meeting its purposes?		
3. **Describes program values.** Does the mission identify the values of the program?		
4. **Identifies stakeholders.** Does the mission identify the major stakeholders the program serves and works with?		
5. **Serves as foundation for program learning outcomes.** Does the mission include a general description of what students will learn if they get a degree in the program?		
6. **Connected to broader mission.** Is the mission consistent with the principles in the college's mission and UNC's mission (including UNC's vision, values, purposes, and goals)?		
7. **Distinctive.** Does the mission distinguish your program from other programs at UNC and from similar programs at other universities?		
8. **Broad enough, yet specific enough.** Is the mission statement realistic and not too broad or too specific?		
9. **Clear and understandable.** Is the mission clear and understandable to a wide range of stakeholders?		
10. **Reflects stakeholder input.** Does the mission reflect input from stakeholders with a vested interest in the purpose and activities of the program?		

Need help?

Need help creating/revising SLOs? Contact the UNC Assessment Office at Assessment@unco.edu.

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