

In the last several days, I've circulated numerous emails to outline the next steps in the establishment of a strategic plan and to re-introduce the draft mission, vision, and value statements for your initial review.

A couple of days ago, in response to these emails, I received the following message from a long-time, well-respected member of the ASU faculty (whose permission I received to share his inquiry; numbers added by me):

"There is considerable confusion among the faculty regarding the intent of vision and mission statements. I'm sure this is not a revelation to you. May I pose questions that would help me better understand?"

*"(1) To what extent is an academic program or specific activities within any program to be influenced by specific terms and/or clauses of these vision and mission statements? (2) For hypothetical example, would a research program in biology that was funded by a grant from another Texas state agency be devalued by the administration as a consequence of holding that program up to how well it met a campus vision of a "global perspective?" (3) Or, I suppose to put it another way, to what extent would "global perspective" penetrate deeply into department missions and goals and influence? (4) **Would consideration of existing or future programs be judged so strongly by their adherence to a "global perspective" that such a perspective might drive successful establishment or not of the program?"** [bf added]*

"I feel, Dr. Limbaugh, that most of the faculty are having a hard time getting serious about this because they cannot see its impact on their day to day, work-a-day lives in the classroom trenches."

My response to summative question #4:

---Yes, a new mission statement will strongly influence future programs' funding and growth.

Here's why.

A Change in Accreditation Standards

ASU was successfully re-accredited in 2002 under the then-existing Evaluation Criteria of SACS (the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), our accrediting agency. In 2002, however, SACS created a new set of accreditation criteria. The original "input" model--based on number of programs, credit hours generated, etc.--was jettisoned in favor of an "output" model. In effect, the new

standards say to us, "We're no longer as concerned about the number of programs that you create; instead, we want to know that students are learning what you say they're learning in the programs you now offer."

SACS' new core requirements--"basic, broad-based foundational requirements that an institution must meet to be accredited"--reveal a renewed emphasis on the mission statement serving as the fundamental framework for all academic programs (<http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp>, click on 2008 edition):

- *Section 2.4: "The institution has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement that is specific to the institution and appropriate for higher education. The mission addresses teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service."*
- *Section 2.7.2: "The institution offers degree programs that embody a **coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission** and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education."*

A Clear Emphasis on Institutional Effectiveness

In our 2002 re-accreditation, ASU received the following recommendation: that it will "implement a systematic, broad-based, interrelated, consistent, and appropriate process to evaluate all educational programs, that it use evaluation results to improve those programs, and that such uses be documented." This mandate, penned six years ago, is integrally connected to the ascendancy of our mission statement to center stage because ongoing assessment of student learning is now a Core Requirement for re-accreditation:

- *Section 2.5: "The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) **demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.**"*

Under these new SACS accreditation guidelines, the message is clear: If we say it in the mission statement, we have to prove that we're doing it. If we say it in the mission statement, then we are making a public commitment that all our students receive an education with the themes of our mission woven throughout their experiences. As a result, announcing that our mission is to offer students an education that cultivates, for example, "a global perspective" means that all students attending ASU receive an education with this emphasis because an institutional decision has been made to offer a curriculum that addresses issues of globalism in both the core curriculum and in major programs as appropriate to each discipline.

SACS' New Quality Enhancement Plan: An Institution-Wide Focus

In 2012, ASU will also have to present to its accreditors its first Quality Enhancement Plan. According to SACS' Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, the Quality Enhancement Plan "describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) related to enhancing student learning. The QEP should complement the institution's ongoing integrated institution-wide planning and evaluation process" (p. 21). In other words, we must decide, as a University, what component of student learning (changes in student's knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values) that we wish to emphasize that will lead to transformative change in student learning. Our mission statement can give us direction in the discussions about the focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan, a requirement for which planning and discussions will begin during the current academic year.

Another development, mandated by the Texas Tech University System Board of Regents, emphasizes the importance of the mission statement and its attendant strategic plan to the individual academic department. Zero-based budgeting will be implemented for next fiscal year's budget process. Ultimately, a significant component of department-level funding will be based on departmental initiatives that make a connection to our mission statement and that serve as a foundation for funding through zero-based budgeting processes.

Before anyone thinks that I'm advocating a single-focus university, please let me say adamantly that that is not the case. The mission statement, by design, provides a statement of our purpose, our business, and our values; academic programs and departments will contribute in various formats depending on their disciplinary focus. In other words, while all departments will support the mission in some way, some may have a stronger role than others. ASU also cannot forget its responsibility to serve the public purposes of higher education in educating individuals that can respond to society's core challenges (I invite you to read the report of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Partnerships for Public Purposes: Engaging Higher Education in Societal Challenges of the 21st Century"...

<http://www.highereducation.org/reports/wegner/wegner.pdf>).

This brings us back to one of the questions posed by our colleague: ***(1) "To what extent is an academic program or specific activities within any program to be influenced by specific terms and/or clauses of these vision and mission statements?"***

Academic departments should support the mission statement in programs and experiences that are thoughtfully designed and introduced at appropriate points into their overall programs. In some cases, curricular revision must occur so that we deliver the promise made by the mission. No matter what mission statement is developed, the message is clear: **the mission statement will direct broad-**

based growth, program development, and resource allocation--and that will affect individual academic departments.

These reasons illustrate why a discussion on the mission statement is so important now. Ultimately, the mission is a product of faculty recommendations and Presidential approval. If you feel that ASU's combination of resources, faculty, and location is best suited to deliver an education with a global perspective, that's great. If you think that we're better served to focus on collaborative leadership as a thematic unifier, then let us know . If you're not comfortable with any component of the draft mission statement, please share your concerns. Remember that we are required to submit a revised mission statement to the Board of Regents at its December meeting (drafts are available on the Strategy, Planning, and Policy website: <http://www.angelo.edu/services/strategy/>) .

As a preface to Dr. Rallo's remarks at next week's "State of the University" message, I'll give a short overview of how mission, vision, institutional effectiveness, and zero-based budgeting all fit together. The most important issue before the campus right now, though, is the mission statement.

Jim Limbaugh



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