

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
OF OTTAWA UNIVERSITY'S PROPOSED REVISED MISSION, 2016
AN INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This document draws the contours of the new Mission Statement's broad themes—its Essential Elements—as well as to invite interpretation and debate. This seeming paradox has become a touchstone for Ottawa University, which navigates by the light of ideals, yet honors reason as a path to improvement.

These pages describe the broad intent of these Elements, as defined through exchanges among members of the Mission Task force; they also outline the signatures and outcomes of each Element, and suggest channels for communicating clarifying messages to various audiences. The text of the revised Mission follows, with its Essential Elements highlighted:

Building on its foundation as a **Christ-inspired community of grace and open inquiry**, Ottawa University prepares **professional and liberal arts** graduates for lifetimes of **personal significance, vocational fulfillment, and service to God and humanity**.

This Mission encapsulates OU's core purposes, with students always at the center; and it embraces our identity as a liberal arts institution that values its defining historical and contemporary relationships with the American Baptist Churches, USA, and the Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma.

Needs of Key Stakeholders

Only a strategic, nimble, and varied communication approach will address our audiences' highly diverse media consumption habits, aesthetic values or tastes, social spheres and concerns, geographies, aspirations, and relationships with the University. The following key stakeholders have a vested interest in these messages about the Mission:

- OU's alumni and currently enrolled students (residential, adult, ground, and/or online);
- Prospective students, their families, and their present and future employers;
- OU's faculty, staff, and administration;
- Accrediting agencies;
- Members of OU's Board of Trustees;
- The American Baptist Churches, USA;
- The Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma;
- Other affiliated organizations and individuals, including funding agencies, donors, and advisory boards; and
- Communities surrounding our campuses.

We recommend several overarching strategies for designing a network of channels to support communication of OU's revised Mission:

- The main public website (ottawa.edu) features a well-positioned image-and-text representation (map? electronic brochure?) of the revised Mission, with explanations of the Essential Elements, as well as links to other "Mission Documents";
- The MyOttawa portal includes access to internal supports in realizing the Mission and its Essential Elements (e.g., assessment data and tools for its interpretation, organizational charts and employment policies, and accurate and individualized advising information.
- Units share responsibility for realizing the Mission by developing internal Mission statements, policies, programs, practices, and assessments appropriate to the Mission's Essential Elements;
- The upcoming issue of OU's Annual Report summarizes the work of the Mission Task Force and debuts these Essential Elements.
- This revised Mission replaces the previous one as posted in brick-and-mortar and virtual spaces, including classrooms, and as stated within syllabi and other documents; where appropriate, text on the intent of these essential elements will supplement the Mission Statement.

Together, these strategies will remind us of the histories, conversations, contexts, principles, and nuances relevant to each Element; they will also hold us accountable, challenging us to live up to our ideals.

CHRIST-INSPIRED COMMUNITY OF GRACE

Intent:

To honor the University's Christian heritage, identity, and purpose, and to support and inspire all members of the community through word and deed.

Signatures and Outcomes:

- Students experience intentional exposure to the tenets of the Christian faith, without prescriptiveness in several ways, including curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular, and/or other programming, as well as advising, mentoring, and ministerial services and resources.
- The University and the University community exhibit the Spirit of Christ in many ways, including:
 - In our support, inspiration and inclusion of people from all communities and faiths, with deep respect for all dimensions of human diversity.
 - In our climate of acceptance, mutual respect and love, as is necessary for the safe and healthy exploration of faith, values and ideals.
 - In our value for spiritual and philosophical discovery that is complemented by intellectual discourse and discovery, as we develop as whole human beings.
 - In our struggle with issues of faith, doubt, agnosticism, and spirituality.
- Open discussion of these issues is integral to OU's definition of intellectual freedom as it is expressed in classrooms and other teaching and learning environments.
- Students examine ethical questions, recognizing and evaluating differences in value judgments, and applying various philosophical and religious perspectives (General Education Learning Outcome¹).
- Students recognize and appraise social judgments and the cultural values that inform them (General Education Learning Outcome).

How Communicated:

- Externally, through OU's public website, admissions materials, and marketing messages.
- Internally, through the University-wide portal; "town hall" sessions; Student, Faculty and Employee Handbooks; employee conduct policy; and Mission Documents (e.g., OU's Statement on Diversity).
- Academically, through course syllabi where appropriate, and through Graduation Requirements:
 - College: Gospels & a course in the Theological/ Philosophical breadth area. (NOTE: to these might be added a new course University-wide that links Christian theology and service, pending faculty engagement on the question.)
 - APOS: two courses in the Value/Meaning breadth area. (NOTE: to these might be added a new University-wide course that links Christian theology and service, pending faculty engagement on the question.)

OPEN INQUIRY

Intent:

To appreciate and support the examination and investigation of ideas and insights.

Signatures and Outcomes:

- As an institution dedicated to open inquiry, Ottawa University supports the conditions necessary to the free exchange of ideas, including academic freedom, academic shared governance, faculty oversight of the curriculum, an independent student media, a strong library, and due process for students, faculty, and staff.

¹ Signatures and Outcomes identified as "Learning Outcomes" are drawn directly from Ottawa University's academic programs' student learning outcomes; OU's success in attaining these outcomes is appraised through direct assessment of student learning. As they arise, periodic updates to program Learning Outcomes would be integrated into "Signatures and Outcomes" for these Essential Elements of the Mission Statement.

- The University encourages the examination of how faith informs our intellect, and vice versa.
- Everyone enjoys the right to speak openly and freely, in a respectful manner conducive to learning, to deepen mutual understanding, or to voice dissent, whether concerning a matter of faith and doubt, academic inquiry, or anything else.
- The University hosts and promotes programs, conferences, courses, and organizations related to diversity and inclusion.
- As stated in OU’s Statement of Educational Purposes, OU provides an educational environment that “enables its faculty and students to investigate the world broadly and freely in order that its students develop and express their life philosophies and values with awareness of and concern for others.”
- Student Learning Outcomes for the General Education program establish a foundation for open inquiry: critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, as well as the analysis, development, and application of ethical, religious, social, and cultural values.
- Student Learning Outcomes in the majors emphasize knowledge, skills, and values that define and support open inquiry in the context of specific disciplines.
- Classroom spaces, including online learning environments, are particularly venerated as safe spaces for open inquiry.

How Communicated:

- Externally, through OU’s public website, admissions materials, and marketing messages.
- Internally, through the University-wide portal, “town hall” sessions, Student, Faculty and Employee Handbooks, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, student media policies, and Mission Documents (including OU’s Statement on Diversity).
- Academically, through course syllabi and program-specific Learning Outcomes, where appropriate.

PROFESSIONAL AND LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

Intent:

To provide a General Education for all students, infused with liberal arts practices and habits of mind: problem posing, delayed judgment, appraisal of evidence, reason, synthesis, etc.

To support traditional liberal arts majors, minors, and faculty—not merely because they support General Education needs of “practical” majors, but because they are practical in their own right, and because their co-existence results in an institutional culture that values an informed citizenry, participation in and appreciation for the arts, academic study, interdisciplinary thought, innovation, and adaptability.

To offer academic programs in professional and technical fields, infused with liberal arts values, practices, and habits of mind.

To support students’ future work on behalf of organizations, institutions, corporations, communities, and projects, by enhancing their professional and scholarly maturation, confidence, expertise, self-awareness, and workplace acumen.

To foster a learning environment that foregrounds scholarship and professionalism throughout the University community.

Signatures and Outcomes:

- The General Education curriculum promotes the liberal arts through instruction in multiple ways of knowing, unified by explicitly defined relationships among disciplines; Student Learning Outcomes for the General Education address the key skills, values, and practices of a Liberal Arts education, founded upon knowledge that is both broad and integrated.
- The University offers majors in liberal arts disciplines and in professional fields; directly assessed student Learning Outcomes in each discipline reflect integration of the liberal arts, a value for lifelong learning and professionalism, and alignment with discipline-specific standards for expertise and ethics;

accreditations from agencies such as HLC, ACBSP, and CCNE confirm the rigor and relevance of specific professional programs.

- Definitions of “education” are expanded beyond traditional degree programs.
- To sustain a culture of learning and professionalism, the University hires, develops, and sustains faculty and staff who are dedicated to the liberal arts; OU promotes faculty publication and professional engagement; through its policies and resources, OU supports continuing education for all employees, and faculty scholarship in the disciplines, as well as in teaching and learning; and OU provides career development services for students.
- Each program defines discipline-specific strategies for addressing employer needs for the workforce by encouraging and in some cases requiring internships, field experiences, undergraduate research, project-based learning, graduate school preparation, and/or other professionally-oriented learning; OU engages School Advisory Boards to gather information about employer needs and curricular relevance.
- The University commits full-time faculty positions to oversight of academic majors and to the general education; OU recognizes the value of a faculty body led by full-time academics in the disciplines, and enriched by adjuncts drawn from the ranks of practicing professionals.
- As a student-centered institution, OU values the cultural diversity, co-curricular engagement, and professional experiences that residential, adult, ground, and/or online students bring to our classrooms.

How Communicated:

- Externally, through OU’s public website, admissions materials, and marketing messages.
- Internally, through the University-wide portal; “town hall” sessions; career development programming for students; Student, Faculty and Employee Handbooks; the Academic Reference Handbook; the University Catalog; and Mission Documents (including OU’s Statement of Educational Purposes).
- Academically, through internship program agreements and relationships, course syllabi, and program-specific Learning Outcomes, where appropriate.

PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Intent:

To encourage each student to develop a unique and personalized understanding of life’s meaning, and of “personal significance,” exploring dimensions such as:

- *Personal and professional accomplishments*
- *Thoughtful stewardship of shared resources*
- *Constant learning and improvement*
- *Reasoned and enlightened faith*
- *Exemplary service to others*
- *Inspirational leadership*
- *Appreciation for the arts in their many forms*
- *Critical thought and discernment*
- *Honest self-reflection*
- *Humor, joy, creativity, and passion*

Signatures and Outcomes:

- Students reflect on their evolving personal identities and goals for further growth (General Education Learning Outcome), through assignments such as the LifePlan Narrative and Learning Autobiography.
- The University provides opportunities for all students at all campuses to engage (collectively, personally, virtually, and in person) with counselors, chaplains, advisors, and/or faculty in defining “significance”; in discovering purpose and clarifying values; in gaining the self-awareness needed to appraise their own insights, effectiveness, and contexts; and in outlining and achieving personal goals.

How Communicated:

- Externally, through OU’s public website, admissions materials, and marketing messages.
- Internally, through the University-wide portal; “town hall” sessions; student advising procedures and practices; Student, Faculty and Employee Handbooks; and Mission Documents.
- Academically, through course syllabi and program-specific Learning Outcomes, where appropriate.

VOCATIONAL FULFILLMENT

Intent:

To encourage students to understand “vocation” in the framework of one’s larger life purpose, with attention to their values, beliefs, and future fulfillment.

Signatures and Outcomes:

- Students are encouraged to explore the difference between jobs and *vocations*, between the call and vocational calling (c.f., Os Guinness, *The Call*) whether we feel called by God, urged by a sense of justice and service, or compelled by creative inspiration.
- Students engage with career planning and development (both open-ended and focused), values clarification through discussion and self-reflection, self-assessment, and work-related experiences (e.g., job shadowing or internships).
- Students describe the significance and value of the major in meeting the needs of global community (University-wide Learning Outcome).
- Students exhibit behaviors indicative of continued learning in their fields of study (University-wide Learning Outcome).
- The curriculum and co-curriculum are explicitly relevant to students’ future lives and careers; Ottawa University’s liberal arts curriculum serves as a foundation for 21st-Century careers, emphasizing methods for solving problems and the capacity to thrive through changes.
- The University demonstrates integrity of design through policies and management strategies that frame employee appraisal and development in terms of life-long vocation.

How Communicated:

- Externally, through OU’s public website, admissions materials, and marketing messages.
- Internally, through the University-wide portal; “town hall” sessions; career development programming for students; student advising procedures and practices; Student, Faculty and Employee Handbooks; employment appraisal and development practices; and Mission Documents.
- Academically, through internship program agreements and relationships, course syllabi, and program-specific Learning Outcomes, where appropriate.

SERVICE TO GOD AND HUMANITY

Intent:

To share our time, talent, and treasure —generously and sacrificially—to express and encourage human kindness and Christian concern, as well as to redeem and restore humanity.

To translate faith and ideals into action.

To provide the world with graduates who are prepared to contribute to a just, loving, and nurturing society.

To honor our founding as an institution built to help fulfill the purposes of the American Baptist Churches, USA, and to serve the educational needs of the Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma.

Signatures and Outcomes:

- The University provides its faculty, staff, administration, and students with abundant, meaningful, and accessible opportunities for volunteering and service, through the curriculum, the co-curriculum, student activities, and special programming.

- Students describe the significance and value of the major in meeting the needs of a global community (University-wide Learning Outcome).
- The University fosters a climate conducive to the growth of altruism and responsiveness to suffering.
- The University’s students, faculty, staff, and administration aspire to serve their communities through their faith, creativity, public service, and/or volunteerism.
- The University’s educational experiences and programming help students to recognize the value of their unique talents in the service of others; to understand the conditions, policies, and biases that may produce suffering; to deeply participate in co-creating change, alongside those in need; and to approach service without expectation of reward or gratitude.

How Communicated:

- Externally, through Fredrikson Center programming, OU’s public website, admissions materials, and marketing messages.
- Internally, through Fredrikson Center and campus ministries programming; the University-wide portal; “town hall” sessions; student advising procedures and practices; Student, Faculty and Employee Handbooks; and Mission Documents.
- Academically, through internship or service learning program agreements and relationships, course syllabi, and program-specific Learning Outcomes, where appropriate.