Campus Comments on the Proposed Revised Mission
Received by February 20, 2009

UW-Eau Claire faculty and staff were invited to submit comments on the revised mission statement proposed by the University Planning Committee. The comments will be used to refine the statement, which will be discussed with the University Senate on March 10, 2009.

Proposed Mission Statement: We serve Wisconsin’s public good by educating tomorrow’s leaders. We emphasize transformative learning through challenging, integrated liberal education that prepares ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world.

More than 50 faculty and staff have submitted comments. The following represent all those submitted through Feb. 20, 2009 to the online comment form:

Comments: It seems to be a bit "all about us". maybe just switch things around? "Serving Wisconsin's public good by educating tomorrow's leaders. We emphasize transformative learning through challenging, integrated liberal education that prepares ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world." That way the first sentence could be a tagline or something.

Comments: We serve Wisconsin's public good by educating tomorrow's citizens, not just its leaders. "prepares ethical citizens" - are they not ethical when they arrive? We are in the business of education. Whether or not our graduates decide they want to work toward a more equitable world is their decision.

Comments: can we please modify it to say liberal ARTS education?

Comments:"to work toward a more equitable world" sounds great to me. the rest of it seems like every other institution. I'm concerned that we are not distinctive at all.

Comments: I think there are some positives and negatives. I strongly approve the change toward conciseness. I also approve the reference to Wisconsin's public good, although the specific reference to Wisconsin introduces a note of special pleading---as though it were aimed at legislators and intended to support a claim on state budgetary allocations. "Wisconsin's and our nation's public good" might be better. The second sentence seems to me more problematic. In the first clause, the word "transformative" seems to me especially ill-chosen. One senses here the jargon of academia, which very often obfuscates rather than clarifies. Words that are current buzzwords in the Chronicle ought to be avoided in a mission statement intended to endure beyond the day's passing fancies. The word itself suggests a grandiosity in the University's self-understanding, and along with that, it might be taken to be a bit insulting. Does the U wish to communicate that its prospective students need to be "transformed" and that we are just the people to do it? This seems insulting to parents and to prospective students. Finally, since the word literally implies only change, not change in any specific direction, it leaves open the possibility that the transformation could be for the worse. A more uplifting adjective would do better, as would none at all here. In that sentence's final clause, I would substitute the word "thoughtful" for the word "ethical." I have nothing against sound
ethics, but I doubt the U.'s general qualifications to serve "in loco parentis," as a character-forming institution. I think our job as educators is to improve students' minds by instructing them in the academic disciplines in which we are trained, in which we can legitimately claim a distinctive professional competence. Along the same lines, I would substitute the word "better" for the words "more equitable" in closing. As it stands, I think there is a vague, unfortunate suggestion of the oppositional stance of the modern university toward the larger society and world, and I think this is politically unwise for the university. The world has many virtues as well as many vices, and there are many ways in which our gifted graduates might improve it. An exclusive focus on equity suggests a preoccupation with injustice and might raise questions, in some readers' minds, as to the whether the U. itself has transcended all institutional partisanship in its identifications of particular forms of injustice.

Comments: Upon discussing it with my colleagues, we had a few issues we wanted to mention. First, is it necessary to say "Wisconsin's" public good? Not that we disagree, but if we are trying to be a more global university, would it work to say just "public good?" Second, we too had what I have heard is a very common discussion about the "ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world." Sounds good on paper, but is it really our job to provide a ethic or moral compass? Third, and probably most important, although we didn't know how to address it - there does not seem to be any emphasis at all on out of the classroom experiences. (It is sort of covered in the fifth bullet, but it's too bad it can't be a part of the stated mission.) Fourth, just two 'word-smithing' issues - we would include the word "cultural" in the fifth bullet, and remove the word "academic" from the seventh bullet. (Going back to the "out of the classroom" idea mentioned earlier.) Thanks for the opportunity for feedback. I know this is a difficult task.

Comments: Put "Wisconsin" in the first place could be hard for students from other states or other countries. Also it does not reflect math & scinces or business. If I were a high school student good at math and sciences, I may get a wrong impression that this place is not for me. Here is my version: UW-Eau Claire is a place providing knowledge and opportunities. We emphasize transformative learning through challenging, integrated liberal education to produce tomorrow world leaders in Sciences, Humanity, Business, and Education with the character of ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world.

Comments: Do we only educate leaders? Do we only serve Wisconsin? Why insert the words "public good"? Do we only want an equitable world? What about a just world? A peaceful world? A loving world? A generous world? A diverse world? If we need to explain the mission statement, that's a problem. It should stand alone without need for explanation, especially to us. If it needs explanation then the words in the explanation count as part of the mission statement which brings it up to about 141 words. What does the word transformative mean to the average person? Check out the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. "All lives have equal value" and 15 guiding principles. Perhaps that's a better model.

Comments: Since we are the Center for Excellence in Faculty/Student Collaborative Research, shouldn't that be central to our mission?
Comments: Maybe I'm idiosyncratic, but I know my 17 year old self would've looked at that mission statement and thought the school too provincial ("We serve Wisconsin's public good... "). I know most students stay here after graduation, but I also know that many think of college as a way to seek "freedom." Of course, at 17 I never would have paid attention to a mission statement at all.

Comments: PLEASE include ARTS between the words 'liberal education'. Many students think you are referring to liberal as in politics. Also, I'm not sure it's appropriate to say we are preparing "ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world". This is a state-funded institution, but the mission statement reads a lot like a private religious college. We should be educating citizens who are prepared to think critically and make positive contributions to life in a multicultural environment. Who defines what's 'ethical' here? Who defines what's 'equitable'?

Comments: Though I personally like the new mission statement, in its ethical earnestness it seems perfectly designed for the year 1972. Is this really where the university is headed? Did anyone tell the College of Business?

Comments: Will the explanation accompany the mission statement? There's much in the explanation that can't be assumed from the mission statement, if it is to stand on its own. I don't care for the phrase "prepares ethical citizens to work...." It begs the questions of what we do for unethical citizens. I'd prefer "prepares citizens to work toward a more equitable and ethical world."

Comments: The mission statement feels exclusive of the professional schools. "We emphasize transformative learning through challenging, integrated liberal education that prepares ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world." This feels so phony. So many classes are not transformative nor challenging nor integrated. And the barriers to their becoming that are many.

Comments: I don't think you'll get many substantive comments, because who could disagree with this apple-pie-and-motherhood assertion? Who could prove it or disprove it? Couldn't every campus in Wisconsin -- public and private -- claim this with equal authority, if not an equally straight face? Aren't nearly one-quarter of our students from Minnesota? How about something more specific and realistic: The mission of UW-Eau Claire is to be the leading educational and cultural institution of northwest Wisconsin. We do everything we can to provide an affordable opportunity for Upper Midwest students of all races and backgrounds to learn to become productive, fulfilled, and caring citizens.

Comments: The University Planning Committee emailed the following two statements: 1. We serve Wisconsin's public good by educating tomorrow's leaders. 2. We emphasize transformative learning through challenging, integrated liberal education that prepares ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world. I suggest changing statement number 2 as follows: We provide an integrated liberal education that prepares our students to make
ethically sound decisions as they work toward a more equitable world while engaged in their chosen occupations. Ethics is both personal and professional. We should emphasize both.

Comments: I take issue with the phrasing "ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world". This has tones of socialism -- I do not *want* everything to be equitable. I want to be able to work harder, improve my skills, and make a better living for myself. I do not want the fruits of my labor given to those who may not have worked or studied as hard as me. I do recognize that many would disagree me with, but regardless of whether one leans more towards capitalism or socialism, the University's mission statement SHOULD NOT indicate a bias one way or another. As it is, the proposed statement expresses a clear preference towards one particular ideology, even if that was not the intent. It would be better to say something like "ethical citizens to work toward a better world" or something along those lines.

I think it is a great start to the ACADEMIC NATURE of UWEC. But as always the NON ACADEMIC side of what we do here at EAU CLAIRE is not touched on. This is a common occurrence here at UWEC. Granted students education is important, but there is much more than that in UWEC's offerings.

Comments: The first line can read as: We serve Wisconsin’s public good by educating today’s and tomorrow’s leaders. We do engage the community here in Eau Claire and across the state. I, for example, advise Rep. Ron Kind on US Middle Eastern policy and many colleagues address issues of significance at local, state, national, and international levels.

Comments: 1. What is meant by the "public good"? What definition of "public good" is being used? 2. What standard of ethical behavior shall our students use as they prepare for ethical citizenship?

Comments: Congratulations on a job well done so far! I can tell every word was purposefully chosen and thoughtfully placed to convey the right message. It just sounds a little "starchy" or a bit on the ivory tower side. May I respectfully suggest you consider this: We serve Wisconsin’s public good by educating tomorrow’s leaders. We emphasize a challenging, integrated liberal education that prepares our students to work toward a more ethical, equitable world. Thank you for considering my suggestion.

Comments: Two parts need work. 1. Do we serve just Wisconsin's public good, not the country and the world? The last phrase of the mission statement seems to contradict the first. 2. As noble a goal as "an equitable world" represents, I envision our students doing more and other things. A "more productive and equitable world" or a "more successful and equitable world"?

Comments: Too wordy and long. What do you mean? Can't you get to the point in a more straightforward manner?

Comments: This new statement seems more heavily individualized and less focused on community than the prior statement. Also, it seems to emphasize the neoliberal "global economy" aspect of education at the expense of a more holistic version of liberal education.
Comments: It's obvious you have spent a lot of time and energy on this statement and explanation. I have had the challenge to do this type of thing myself. But for me an average person with an average level of education this is difficult to read and understand. The Mission Statement itself has wonderful words but that's just it "words" with little meaning to me. The explanation is great but the first and last bullets again do not create a picture for me other than just words. I once read that to teach or explain something to someone you should use a second grade level, perhaps this is too low but you get my meaning.

Comments: I don't think we have a basis for saying that we prepare "ethical" citizens. It is a good goal, but I don't see us requiring anything, in terms of degree requirements, that necessarily results in teaching ethics. I would buy "service-oriented" or something along that line, but--ethical?--not so much. If asked "how do we specifically prepare students to be ethical?" how would we answer???

Comments: I feel that using Wisconsin limits the reach of our mission and propose that it would say simply serve the public good. We are a global University that is serving much more than Wisconsin. I feel that using the word, "work" for what we are going to do presents a negative connotation because of the history of the usage of the word "work." I propose using "contribute" which is both engaging and active instead.

Comments: I do not like the first sentence at all—it implies that our focus is to train leaders. This might be the role of a military academy, or Oxbridge. This perspective seems to overlook the comprehensive aspect of UWEC. It sets us up to be too elite. One problem I have with the second sentence is syntax: "emphasizing" is not the right verb. It might make more sense to say that we prepare ethical citizens by emphasizing transformative learning. If the mission statement needs and explanation, and you seem to think that it does because you provide one, then the mission statement is incomplete or too short.

Comments: I'm not sure "equity" is, in and of itself, always a desirable goal. I would much rather live in a world where there is freedom with some inequality, then a totalitarian state where all opportunities and outcomes are equalized. At any rate, I think this is a pretty loaded statement (in terms of what it implies about which political/social systems are most desirable) and I'm guessing that many citizens of Wisconsin would be not be thrilled that this was an avowed goal of one of their public institutions. Why not just change it to: "....that prepares ethical citizens to work for the common good"? This is a more open-ended statement that leaves it up to the individual student to determine for themselves what actions/policies are in humanity's interest (and that may not always be "equity").

Comments: It is a vast improvement, but I would propose the following: We serve Wisconsin’s public good by providing and supporting challenging, integrated liberal education. The mission should apply to everyone who works here. The new mission while an improvement excludes people from the mission who work here. Custodial staff will have a hard time owning the new mission for example. Another bullet should then be added saying that utilizing transformative learning we prepare ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world.
Comments: Finishing with the final goal of "a more equitable world" somehow seems limiting. How about "a more equitable and enlightened world"?

Comments: Isn’t there a conflict of interest between the "leaders" and their goal of working toward a "more equitable world"? Are there leaders in an equitable world? I understand no one wants to train followers, but this contradiction in the statement seems rather like glaring fodder for late night comedy monologues.

Comments: Why only "Wisconsin's good"? Don’t we have international students here as well? Do we ignore their "good"? And do we only educate "leaders"? Not everyone can be a leader, nor does everyone want to be; this sounds like more business-speak. The wording in the second sentence is unclear. Do we prepare ethical citizens [people who are already ethical] to work toward a more equitable world? Or rather, does our preparation make them ethical citizens? In fact, I’m not so sure that it is our responsibility to teach ethics and/or to foster a desire in students to work for a more equitable world. Of course, we would hope that they would do so as a result of having their minds opened, but it seems rather presumptuous on our part to believe we will directly influence them to change the world.

Comments: I think the word "ethical" is too narrow. One can do what is ethical and still be wrong or unjust. I propose the word "thoughtful." It suggests ethics can be considered but that they might not be the highest priority.

Comments: I like it, but is it really true for all programs? The part about an equitable world is the troubling part for me. I'm not sure 'equity' is the goal behind business decisons, or decisions around athletic training for example. It seems to me that they are about the 'inequity' that comes from being more successful than their opponents. How about "working toward opportunity that is equitable". I believe this to be a truer statement for all UWEC units.

Comments: I am of two minds here. On the one hand, the mission statement is certainly an improvement from what we have now. On the other, it reeks of elitist liberal mumbojumbo, particularly the "equitable world" part. Makes me want to just roll my eyes. Clearly this was done in a faculty vacuum as are most of the initiatives on campus right now...all thought up by the same handful of faculty, rolled out for us peons under the illusion of "input," and approved without significant change...("no wordsmithing" - subtext=no changing it). It will probably be approved and we'll all rally around it and those involved will congratulate themselves for how inclusive they were.

I like the length, I like the emphasis on public good and leadership. I like the notion of a “challenging, integrated liberal education that prepares ethical citizens to work toward a more equitable world." However, and especially considering this last part of the mission statement that begins with challenging, I have just read the preliminary report of the GE Reform Committee and I think we are still very challenged in our quest to develop this integrated liberal education curriculum. We may have much more work ahead.
Comments: i like it . if iwould have written the first sentence i would have said .[ WE SERVE WISCONSIN’S PUBLIC GOOD BY EDUCATIONG TOMORROW’S LEADERS TODAY ]; ] and it is true we do educate our future leaders t today and every day .here at at uwec. all we have t o do is look t o our alnmi ;] thanks ;]

Comments: I think this is a very good statement, especially when backed by the explanation which focuses on some of our particular strengths. My vote is to go with it.

Comments: Please check with members of the extended community (Chippewa Valley) before this statement is adopted. I think many will not respond positively to two items: (1) "liberal education", which is misunderstood by a large segment of the population and has a negative connotation to many, and (2) "to work toward a more equitable world", which I believe many would argue should not be part of our mission. How is "more equitable world" defined? Do you mean our Judeo-Christian values? Do you mean economically "more equitable"? Do you mean everybody gets more flat screen TVs and Blackberries? I believe many of our stakeholders would disagree with this statement. It's certainly open to lots of interpretations!

Comments: Less is much better. I appreciate the reference to ethics.

Comments: We talk often about being a student-centered university yet I do not see the word student in the proposed mission statement. If we are being asked to live our mission then the mission statement needs to be simple, easy to remember and without all the buzz words. If the mission statement needs the long explanation provided above, is it really an effective statement? I'd envision something more like this: UW-Eau Claire educates and nurtures students through challenging and integrated liberal-arts based programs, preparing them to use their knowledge and social awareness to serve Wisconsin and the rapidly changing and diverse world beyond.

Comments: according to some recent research, "shaping leaders" did not rank high in what people care about when searching college website. if we say we are "educating tomorrow's leaders", will that be exclusive, rather than inclusive? what if someone does not want to be, or does not think of themself as a leader?

Comments: I think the word 'leaders' is not the best word. It has a connotation of politics to me. And, doesn't necessarily appeal to what our audience wants or how they think of themselves, both traditional and non-traditional. The "we" is not needed, it is implied; in addition it's quite egocentric. We're supposed to be student-focused. I'm still not sure that most people on campus, yet alone the general public or a high school student, could easily define what transformative learning is. Are we relying on jargon? Here's how I'd word it: Serving Wisconsin's need for highly educated, ethical citizens by emphasizing transformative learning through a challenging, integrated liberal education that prepares students for a global community.

Comments:I have no philosophical problems with it - seems to encompass the Learning Goals in an active sense. Cons: It may be politically unpalatable. Makes no reference to experiential
learning. Also, I am not sure any specific program can claim "mission centrality" - that may be a + or a –.

Comments: "Transformative learning" is poor wording. Sounds like blah, blah, blah, edu-speak. The first sentence is great. The second one is pompous...very pompous.