



UNIVERSITY
of HAWAII®
HILO

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Purpose: Information and discussion

Characteristics of Mission and Vision Statements

Action required: SPC members are asked to:

- **Note** the definitions of mission and vision as set out in the SPC's Charge
- **Note** UH Hilo's and the UH System's current mission and vision statements (see Annex I)
- **Note** the characteristics of 'good' mission and vision statements
- **Discuss** and where possible **prioritize** potential key elements that could make up UH Hilo's new mission and vision statements (see section 7)

1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of vision and mission characteristics. This is intended to give SPC members an understanding of the components of such statements so that these can be borne in mind throughout discussions, and can particularly aid the drafting sub-committee in their drafting work.

2. Definitions

The following definitions are set out in the Chancellor's charge to the SPC:

Mission: a foundational statement that describes the purpose of the university's existence. It answers the questions 'why do we do what we do' and 'who do we serve'. For UH Hilo, the mission statement should distinguish us from other universities within the UH System and highlight our unique attributes.

Vision: an image or description of the university community we aspire to become in the future. It answers the question, 'if we can achieve what we want to do, what will we look like in X years time?'

3. Characteristics of a 'Good' Mission Statement

There are no hard and fast rules to developing a mission - what matters most is that is generally be considered to be an accurate reflection and useful summary of UH Hilo and 'speaks' to our stakeholders. What follows though are some general principles that we could bear-in-mind:

1. **Make it as succinct as possible.** A mission statement should be as short and snappy as possible - preferably brief enough to be printed on the back of a business card. The detail which underpins it should be mapped out elsewhere.
2. **Make it memorable.** Obviously partially linked to the above, but try to make it something that people will be able to remember the key elements of, even if not the exact wording
3. **Make it unique to you.** It's easy to fall into the 'motherhood and apple pie' trap with generic statements that could equally apply to any institution. Focus on what it is that you strive to do differently: *how* you achieve excellence, *why* you value your staff or *what* it is about the quality of the student experience that sets you apart from the rest.
4. **Make it realistic.** Remember, your mission statement is supposed to be a summary of why you exist and what you do. It is a description of the present, not a vision for the future. If it bears little or no resemblance to the organization that your staff know it will achieve little
5. **Make sure it's current.** Though it is not something which should be changed regularly, neither should it be set in stone. Your institution's priorities and focus may change significantly over time - perhaps in response to a change of direction set by a new, or major changes in state/federal policy. On such occasions the question should at least be asked: *'does our current mission statement still stand?'*

Text borrowed heavily from 'The characteristics of a good mission statement' by JISC Infonet. Accessed on 12.03.2010 at <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/strategy/mission-vision-values/good-mission>

4. Examples of Mission Statements

'To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful' – Google

'To give ordinary folk the chance to buy the same thing as rich people' – Wal-Mart

'To contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.' - University of Cambridge

5. Characteristics of a 'Good' Vision Statement

There is no one formula to develop a vision. What matters is its appropriateness to UH Hilo and the direction it sets for the institution. There are though some general principles that may be helpful to us:

1. **Be inspirational.** The vision statement is supposed to challenge, enthuse and inspire. Use powerful words and vivid phrases to articulate the kind of institution you are trying to become. This is your chance to lift your institution's gaze above the grind of day-to-day gripes and problems and to focus attention on 'the bigger picture' and the potential rewards that await
2. **Be ambitious.** If you set your sights on being 'within the top 10' the chances are that the best you will come is 10th. If your real aim is to hit the top 5, why not say so and go for broke? What targets you set and how high you aim will, in themselves, also say something about you as an

organization. Ambitious, perhaps even audacious targets will help create the impression of an organization that is going places, that aims high and demands high standards from its staff and students in a way that comfortable, 'middle-of-the-road' benchmarks will not

3. **Be realistic.** This may sound odd following on immediately from a call to 'Be ambitious', perhaps even contradictory, but it is an important part of the balancing act that is required. For just as the purpose of the vision is to inspire and enthuse, it is equally important that this ambition is tempered by an underlying sense of realism. People need to believe that what is envisaged is actually achievable; otherwise there is no reason for them to believe or buy in to it. It is perfectly possible to be both ambitious and realistic and it is through successfully marrying these two forces that the best vision statements will be formed. Stating that you will become 'ranked in the top 3 in the student satisfaction league table within 5 years' may be both ambitious and realistic if you currently sit at number 7, but sound far less convincing if you currently reside at number 57
4. **Be creative.** Albert Einstein once said that *'imagination is more important than knowledge.'*¹ Of course, there is nothing wrong with saying that you will 'deliver world-class learning and teaching standards but it is probably a safe bet that at least a dozen other institutions will be saying the same thing. Just as a commercial company may need to think creatively in order to identify gaps in the market, so too you may need to think imaginatively about what your vision is and how you describe it to help stand out from the crowd
5. **Be descriptive.** Unlike with your mission statement, there is no pressure to pare your vision down to the bone. Of course you want to be concise (indeed many of the best examples of memorable visions tend to be so), but there is no need to enforce an arbitrary limit on its length. Take as much space as you need to get your vision across
6. **Be clear.** As with your mission statement it pays to avoid jargon, keep sentences short and to the point and use precise, uncluttered language. Otherwise you risk diluting or losing your message amongst the background 'noise'
7. **Be consistent.** Though bearing in mind their different purposes, there should still be an element of continuity between your mission and vision statements, or at least some careful thought and discussion given as to why this is not the case. At the same time, the vision need not be constrained by the current remit of the mission. Perhaps the institution is keen to explore new areas in the future: to become the region's conference venue of choice, for example, in which case this would need to be reflected in the mission statement in due course

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6. Examples of Vision Statements

'Peace' - United Nations

'There will be a personal computer on every desk running Microsoft software.' [Short, simple, unequivocal, memorable and long term] - Microsoft

'Our vision is every book ever printed in any language all available in 60 seconds' – [Simple, clear, bold, inspiring] - Amazon Kindle

'GM's vision is to be the world leader in transportation products and related services. We will earn our customers' enthusiasm through continuous improvement driven by the integrity, teamwork, and innovation of GM people.' [It is not short, it is not simple, it is not memorable and contains too many words open to interpretation of meaning] – General Motors

7. Discussion Questions

Based on the information and evidence the committee has so far considered, we need to now identify the key elements that could form part of UH Hilo's redeveloped mission and vision statements. The Chancellor has asked the committee to develop unique mission and vision statements for UH Hilo that describe the university and distinguish us within the UH System. You may also find the annexes to this paper helpful:

- Annex I – Mission and vision statements from the UH System
- Annex II – UH Hilo profile
- Annex III – UH Manoa profile
- Annex IV – UH West O'ahu profile
- Annex V – UH Maui College profile

We will begin with discussing key elements for the mission statement first, followed by the vision statement. This is because we need to have a sense of who we are now to be able to visualize our potential future direction.

Mission

- Who do we serve?
- What do we serve/provide?
- What distinguishes us (within the UH System)?

Vision

The Chancellor has asked that the committee develop a vision that will guide UH Hilo for the next 10 years. So, in the year 2020:

- What are our students saying about us?
- What are others saying about us? (others could include the local community, parents, businesses, peer universities, the UH System)