

# Mission Review Committee Summary Report

May 31, 2024

## INTRODUCTION

As a result of our 2022 NECHE self-study, the University committed to establishing a cycle by which we would review and update, as appropriate, the University's mission statement, vision statement, and core values, and we would complete such a review by May of 2024, in advance of our next strategic planning cycle in AY24.

A proposal to establish a mission review cycle and process passed through campus governance in AY23 and was approved by the president on March 24, 2023. The Mission Review Committee was formed in October of 2023 with the goal of completing an inclusive, transparent, and thoughtful review of the mission, vision, and core values during AY24.

During the November 2023 convening meeting, the Committee discussed the impact of President Lapidus' recently announced retirement on the mission review process. In consultation with the President, it was agreed that the University would submit a request to the Commissioner of Higher Education for a deferral of our strategic planning cycle and that the Committee would continue to meet during AY24 to complete foundational work in advance of the next president's arrival in July of 2024.

## PROCESS

A [webpage](#) and an email ([Mission2024@fitchburgstate.edu](mailto:Mission2024@fitchburgstate.edu)) were created to facilitate communication with the campus community.

The Mission Review Committee was comprised of the following campus representatives:

Laura Bayless, Vice President for Student Affairs  
Deborah Benes, Associate Professor, Nursing  
Becky Copper Glenz, Dean of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education  
Christian Dedier, SGA Senator, Student Representative  
Eric Gregoire, Alumni Trustee  
Carolyn Hughes, Administrative Assistant for the Department of Education  
Linda LeBlanc, Senior Librarian, Library  
Patricia Marshall, Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Pamela McCafferty, Associate VP for Institutional Research and Planning, Committee Chair  
Paul Weizer, Professor, Political Science

The Committee met eleven times between November 2023 and May 2024. A shared Google folder **AY24 Mission Review Committee** was utilized to house committee materials, such as background documents, meeting agendas, meeting minutes and other supporting materials.

The Committee reviewed the 2021 NECHE survey data related to Mission, Vision, and Core Values and also conducted new surveys related to Mission and Core Values. Flyers and table tents with QR codes

were created and distributed across campus, including Hammond Campus Center and Holmes Dining Commons. Multiple emails were sent to students, employees, and alumni to encourage participation. Information and survey links were also included in multiple editions of the *Fitchburg Today* newsletter. Survey response rates were good for the mission survey but low for the core values survey. Overall, respondents indicated that the mission and core values are still relevant and require little to no modification.

To gather information on what differentiates our university, committee representatives met with the Student Government Association (SGA) on April 16<sup>th</sup>. They also staffed a table at the Undergraduate Conference for Research and Creative Practice on April 18<sup>th</sup>. At the SGA meeting, students were asked *What makes us unique/sets us apart?* Feedback included:

- the strength and relevance of our academic programs and equipment
- great price
- a close-knit community
- a focus on career readiness
- personalized attention

At the conference, participants were asked to indicate which concept(s), from a list developed by the Committee based on survey feedback, resonate as differentiating factors. Both students and employees identified the following as the top three:

- Preparing students for their first career and careers of the future
- A culture where all students and employees can thrive
- Personalized attention

Of note was the level of positive engagement exhibited by participants at both events. Also, of note is that student feedback was predominantly, if not completely, undergraduate.

## COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS

*[The following items represent areas of consensus and priority]:*

### Mission Statement:

A graduate and online student lens needs to be applied to the mission statement and it should recognize our strong position in graduate and online learning. The term “small college” is no longer appropriate, particularly with our online and international populations. We should rework the language to preserve the essence of a “small college feel”: high touch; strong sense of community; rich experiences in and out of the classroom, inclusive of all modalities; and the ability to build relationships with faculty, evidenced by alumni engagement. We should incorporate a unifying concept such as social and economic mobility, a continuum of education (i.e. lifelong learning, engaged alumni), and/or education justice (in concept but with different language.) A global aspect and DEIB should be incorporated as well. The current language related to *residential, professional, and co-curricular opportunities* is too generic and should be expanded as this represents a fundamental part of an FSU education. *Virtual, global, and experiential* would all apply here. Our role in the community needs to be rephrased to reflect a partnership rather

than us acting as leaders to address the needs of others. Also, it is unclear if we are environmental leaders for the community.

The Committee also discussed reordering the mission statement to position what we are most committed to in the first sentence. We should also consider using language that will remain relevant well into the future when conveying our commitment to DEIB and education justice.

#### Core Values:

We should move from alpha-ordering to priority-based ordering and consider using phrases instead of single words to better convey our intent. As with the mission statement, we should consider who our audience is (i.e. are the core values mainly for internal use to guide planning/prioritization? Or should they resonate with prospective and current students and families?)

The following represents a draft that was created for discussion purposes and that could be used for a future campus exercise to measure receptivity/resonance. Note that the following may be missing: *student-centered; lifelong learning; co-curricular; inclusive of all students; quality, engaging, relevant academic programs; and integrative learning.*

#### Academic Excellence

We are committed to providing a rigorous, innovative, and collaborative teaching and learning environment that encourages intellectual curiosity and prepares students for personal fulfillment and professional success. Our faculty and staff continuously strive for the highest standards of academic quality and integrity.

#### Accessibility & Opportunity

We believe transformative educational experiences should be accessible and affordable to all who strive for them. We meet students where they are and empower them to achieve their highest potential, breaking down barriers to opportunity.

#### Diversity & Inclusion (with a note to potentially add Well-being)

We celebrate diversity in all its dimensions. We intentionally cultivate welcoming spaces where all people feel valued, heard, and supported based on mutual understanding and respect.

#### Innovation & Impact [or Creativity & Purpose]

As an anchor institution in our region, we generate innovation and research that addresses real-world problems and drives economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and social justice. We shape future-ready graduates equipped to make meaningful impacts.

#### Community & Partnership

We foster an interdependent community built on collaboration among students, faculty, staff and external partners. Together we accomplish shared goals advancing our institution's mission and enriching the communities we mutually serve.

### Mission Survey:

The spring 2024 mission survey results aligned with the 2021 NECHE survey results and with the Committee's overall consensus that the majority of the content and sentiment of the mission statement still rings true but that adjustments are needed to update and clarify who we are as an institution.

Quantitative data: Overall, the results reflect that employees are in the 'edits/updates' camp and not looking for a complete overhaul. The first sentence received the most positive feedback in terms of relevance and recommendations to keep or change. The second sentence received the least positive in terms of relevance but interestingly, positive feedback in terms of keep or change. The fourth sentence had the weakest results in terms of keep or change.

Qualitative feedback: The following represent common themes, presented by sentence number:

- 1.) Possible improvements to sentence structure/clarity/word choice; questioning the appropriateness of "small college"; liberal arts vs. professional programs (discussion: there is an opportunity to explain the "why" of the general education curriculum i.e. educating for lifelong success, ability to professionally pivot, adaptability, intellectual curiosity); need to differentiate ourselves.
- 2.) In terms of *global and civic responsibility, leadership, lifelong learning, and comprehensive*; are we true to all of these? Discussion: the tension between hyper-local and global exists, remember online can reach around the globe; biggest change for this revision will be reflecting the role of SGOCE.
- 3.) Some confusion with *residential* and *co-curricular* (discussion: will need to clarify this aspect moving forward including how these apply to graduate, online, and adult students); some feedback that the language is boiler-plate/obvious.
- 4.) Some questioning of our role and if we fulfill everything included in this sentence; suggest adding that we meet the educational needs of our community

In regards to the question as to what is missing in the current mission statement, common responses were related to DEIB, equity, student success, affordability and uniqueness.

In regards to the request for overall comments, common responses were related to the liberal arts vs. professional programs; length (i.e. too long) and that inclusivity is missing.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The Mission Review Committee collected information from various campus constituents (students, employees, and alumni) and had numerous discussions to gather foundational information and establish basic recommendations for the future.

In general, the Committee found that the current mission still resonates with the campus community and that, for the most part, the campus recommends keeping and/or making adjustments rather than overhauling it. However, a few things stood out as items to address moving forward: replacing "small

college”; identifying and including a differentiating factor, or factors; addressing our commitment to DEIB; clarifying ‘steward of place’; and highlighting our role in graduate and online education.

“Small College”: Although the phrase “small college feel” communicates our personal approach and sense of community, it can also convey the wrong message, particularly with our international students, for whom college and university are not synonymous. The intent of “small college feel” should be retained but replaced with more appropriate verbiage.

Differentiating Factor(s): As a Massachusetts public university, we are obviously aligned with the guidelines set forth by the MA DHE and need to continue to assert the basic tenets contained therein. However, it would serve us well to incorporate differentiating factor(s) that set us apart from other institutions.

Commitment to DEIB: The Committee recommends that we address our commitment to DEIB in our mission statement and reaffirm our goal of being a truly inclusive campus in the vision statement.

Steward of Place: Campus feedback pointed to a lack of understanding of this terminology as well as a lack of awareness of how we, as an institution, fulfill this role and to what extent we should do so. Also, greater awareness of the benefits of community collaboration, both to our students and to the university as a whole, is needed.

Graduate Education: As graduate student enrollment surpasses undergraduate enrollment, it is critical that we apply a graduate lens to our mission, vision, and core values and that we embrace our role as a leader in graduate and online education.

The Committee also found that the core values still resonate with the campus community and for the most part, the campus recommends keeping and/or making adjustments rather than overhauling them. Based on the review of other institutions’ core values, the Committee discussed the need to consider a change in the structure of our values. For example, presenting each value as a phrase in order to rely less on the associated description.

The Committee did not undertake a review of the vision statement but did acknowledge that the vision should remain aspirational and include our goal of being a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus.

The Committee also discussed the need to better showcase our mission, vision, and core values across our campus. For example, greater visibility in buildings and publications and inclusion in the FYE seminar. We should also measure to what extent we operationalize our mission, vision, and core values across campus moving forward.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee recommends the following:

1. The mission be revised to:
  - a. replace “small college” with more suitable verbiage
  - b. include a differentiating factor, or factor(s);
  - c. confirm our commitment to DEIB;

- d. clarify steward of place;
  - e. highlight graduate and online education.
2. The structure of the core values be reconsidered
  3. The vision be revised to highlight our desire to be a diverse and inclusive community
  4. The mission, vision, and core values be highlighted in a meaningful way throughout our community (i.e. to students, employees, alumni and external constituents.)
  5. We should measure the extent to which we operationalize our mission, vision, and core values across campus.

The Committee also recommends that a campus-wide committee continue this work, in consultation with the President, and at a time when the President deems it appropriate. The work, data and resources compiled by the Committee will be made available to support this work moving forward and the Committee recommends that the materials be reviewed in order to leverage the gathered insights.