

## New VVMG Statements: Back Story

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by **Dean Saitta**

At its October 19, 2007 meeting the Faculty Senate approved the new university Vision, Values, Mission, and Goals (VVMG) statements that emerged from last year's UPAC process. I was privileged to co-chair the Mission and Goals Task Force with Vice Provost for Student Life Jo Calhoun. Our group also included administrators, faculty, and staff from across the university. We met twice a month through the fall and winter of 2006-07 drafting and redrafting the statements. We sent our last draft to the UPAC Coordinating Council on 26 April 2007, where it underwent additional revision resulting in the final document that was circulated to the campus community this fall.

As any casual reader will notice, the final VVMG document is much shorter with a significantly downsized set of goals compared to the document that has been governing us since 2001. The three new goals focus on **Community, Learning, and Scholarship**. The wording for each reflects much navigating between, and negotiating of, different community interests. The Task Force's work was, as I mentioned in my 2007 Convocation remarks, "a sausage-making exercise of the highest order." In many ways we ended up with a document that represents the lowest common denominator of community interests. Concern was expressed in the Senate about faculty not having the opportunity to suggest additional revisions to the document once it came from UPAC. However, I'm not sure this would have contributed anything fundamentally new or different to the mix of interests that were expressed to us throughout the past year. At least that's my impression based on the few suggestions that I heard in Senate.

Of greater concern to me—and I speak for myself and not the Task Force—is that the final document doesn't capture the sort of *intentionality* that some of us believed was important to cultivate in this round of goal-setting. At the very beginning of our work we wanted not simply to *describe* what we already do on campus so as to make everyone feel comfortable that they are included, but rather to *challenge*—without mandating—the campus community to turn their work in particular directions that would help fulfill the university's newly reaffirmed (by UPAC, and by the Chancellor in *his* 2007 Convocation remarks) vision to serve the Public Good.

I'd like to tell a little bit of that back story here by disclosing a bit more of the Task Force's thinking with respect to the three goals that the Senate approved. The following is extracted from our April 26 draft, which also included "indicators of progress" toward achieving the goals. The hope is that there's something here that will be useful to academic units now entrusted with implementing the VVMG statements in whatever ways they see fit.

The newly framed **Community** goal is "create a diverse, ethical, and intellectually vibrant campus community to provide a challenging and liberating learning

environment.” Our final Task Force document imagined a campus community “*dedicated to cosmopolitan learning and engaged scholarship.*” We issued three main challenges under the Community rubric:

1. We will diversify the student body, faculty, and staff, especially along the dimensions of ethnicity and class, using all available means (e.g., cluster hiring, scholarships, endowed chairs, etc.).
2. We will implement strategies for achieving “Inclusive Excellence” in ways that treat diversity less as a compositional outcome than as an embedded intellectual value and process that improves the campus climate for learning.
3. We will evolve dynamic cultures of teaching and research excellence that foster an all-encompassing learning community. Embrace, encourage, and support intellectual (philosophical and methodological) diversity. Recognize and reward *multiple scholarships* of teaching and discovery, including critical, activist, and public scholarships. Respect and accommodate changing professional interests of individual faculty and staff.

The newly framed **Learning** goal is to “provide an outstanding educational experience that empowers students to integrate and apply knowledge from across the disciplines and imagine new possibilities for themselves, their communities, and the world.” Our final Task Force document linked learning to “*educating for democratic life and global citizenship.*” It specified the following challenges:

1. We will cultivate *interdisciplinary* and *intercultural* sensibilities that empower students to imagine new possibilities for themselves, their communities, and their world. Students will be alert to the interpenetration of different kinds of knowledge (artistic, humanistic, social and natural scientific), understand the dependence of professional success upon liberal and lifelong learning, and appreciate the value of knowledge as both a personal and public good. They will be able to apply these insights at the kitchen table, in the workplace, and on the street.
2. We will emphasize *five literacies* central to a cosmopolitan education: *intercultural, historical, scientific, civic, and ethical*. Students will understand the diverse cultural histories and legacies of human groups, the interdependencies between countries and cultures, and the inevitability of our interconnected futures. They will understand how human diversity in all of its forms enriches liberal learning, invigorates democratic life, and strengthens the social fabric. They will appreciate the capacity of the sciences to unify knowledge across diverse cultures and religions, and to serve as models of human solidarity. They will recognize the moral equality of all peoples, and embrace the obligation to respect and defend basic human rights wherever they are threatened. They will be engaged in examining ethical frameworks and character development both inside and outside the classroom.

3. We will build linguistic, artistic, numerical, and writing skills and competencies that allow students to better communicate what they know and better navigate among the different ways of knowing, believing, and acting that characterize a global society.

The newly framed **Scholarship** goal is to “invigorate scholarship across the university to address important scientific, sociopolitical, and cultural questions of the new century.” Cognizant of the need for new, collaborative models of scholarly work given changes in the external funding environment and research world generally, our final Task Force document suggested that this would be best accomplished through *engagement with multiple partners* both on and off campus. It specified the following challenges:

1. We will advance research in the applied life sciences in ways that are distinctive and maximally inclusive.

2. We will build and/or deepen meaningful alliances and partnerships for promoting regional social and economic change.

3. We will strengthen and, if necessary, reconfigure existing Centers and Institutes dedicated to ethics, the understanding of religious and cultural differences, local and global security, land use and environmental policy, sustainable development, legal aid and social services provision and reform, and other issues.

4. We will create a cross-cutting structure or structures that allow the imagining of new research collaborations and academic programs—perhaps anchored by a campus-wide concern for *sustainability*, which we understand as a set of philosophical principles, ethical commitments, and concrete strategies for proactively enhancing the social, economic, cultural, and natural environments in which we, and future generations, will live and work—that can make use of assembled intellectual capital to tackle such issues as urban planning for a multicultural society, small business and other kinds of economic development, educational quality and opportunity, the social impacts of genetic, robotic, informational, and nano technologies, cultural heritage management, and others.

The numbered challenges or objectives under each goal were intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Others could be established that we confidently felt could include everyone on campus. I suspect there’s both relief and regret within our community that the final VVMG document held to a minimalist line that will allow academic units to run with the main goals as they choose.

Some of us were also keen to support a suggestion made by UPAC’s Environmental Scanning Task Force that what the university needs for our current endowment campaign is “*a means of unifying its fragments of innovation and excellence, a unifying concept or set of concepts to describe its distinctiveness, and a name or slogan for it.*”

A couple of ways of proceeding came to mind. One taps into the great enthusiasm produced by last year’s Provost’s Conference on “The University of Denver and The City” that promises new teaching and research collaborations between DU faculty/staff

and our civic partners. Top private universities in other great, global cities have created identities and/or coined phrases that encapsulate their commitments and ambitions to serve the public good. The University of Pennsylvania offers its “Penn Compact” with the city of Philadelphia. The University of Southern California trumpets a new “Urban Paradigm” for analyzing and re-imagining Los Angeles. Emory University celebrates its participation in the “Atlanta Outreach Consortium.” Accordingly, we thought about proposing to our local and global stakeholders something along the lines of a “Denver Covenant” or “Colorado Covenant”, a phrase that acknowledges our university’s historical ties to the Methodist tradition, current association with a vibrant Interfaith Religious Advisory Council, and respect for diversity of thought while promising to address the great sustainability issues of our time through independent and civically-engaged teaching, research, and service.

Another approach would be to join other elite universities in using scientific metaphors to communicate a spirit of boundary-pushing inquiry in both basic and applied teaching and research. Yale University identifies itself as a “Laboratory for Leadership.” Wake Forest University—configured, like us, as a small liberal arts college surrounded by law, business, and other professional schools and that, like us, is currently embarked on a major capital campaign—describes itself as “A Lively Experiment.” At DU we’re keen to better integrate our professional schools with the undergraduate arts and sciences. Thus, we might consider something along the lines of “A Beautiful Confluence”, a term that plays on the 19th century historian of science William Whewell’s term—consilience—for describing the “jumping together” of knowledge that was recently revived by E.O. Wilson in his proposal for unifying the “two cultures” of humanities and science.

Other ways of connecting concepts of truth and beauty with notions of “the good life” are certainly imaginable. Finding one compelling way might be just the ticket for communicating DU’s “private university dedicated to the public good” ideals and ambitions, and for capturing the imaginations of those who would support us. The “slogan conversation” didn’t get very far, but we certainly have leaders in University Advancement who are expert at pitching the case. We understand that some of the Task Force’s language is being folded into the developing Case Statement for the endowment campaign. We hope that other units will find something useful here as they frame strategies for fulfilling our institutional mission and goals.