

Standard One: Mission and Purposes

OVERVIEW

Over the past two decades Northeastern University has wholly transformed itself, as the Standards chapters of this document will reveal. Yet the University's 1987 mission statement remained in place for twenty years, even when it was no longer closely aligned with the University's new identity and aspirations.

In 2006–2007, in the context of a larger strategic academic planning effort, Northeastern's mission statement was updated.

Prior to 1990, Northeastern was an institution of opportunity for students seeking upward mobility, playing a unique role within the Greater Boston college and university marketplace. It offered large numbers of students the distinctive opportunities associated with cooperative education. For a time, the University was the largest private institution in the United States, with an enrollment exceeding 50,000 by the early 1980s. Its wide variety of academic programs served a broad array of largely commuter students, through an economic model predicated on relatively low costs and low financial aid. The 1987 mission statement reflected all these aspects of Northeastern's historical identity.

Fall 1990, however, proved a watershed moment for the University. The combination of the declining population of high school graduates and the rise of the Massachusetts public higher education system exposed weaknesses in a strategy that was designed to bring in as many students as possible. The steep decline in that year's fall freshman enrollment forced a careful review of the institution's mission and purposes. A strategy known as "smaller and better" emerged from within the Board of Trustees and guided the University through a period of retrenchment in the early 1990s. This strategy led to a redefined set of priorities that sought to increase academic excellence, transform the physical campus, support an increasingly residential student population, and build a greater sense of campus community. Despite this dramatic shift in priorities, a new mission statement was not at that time articulated.

With the arrival of a new president in 1996, the metrics underlying the resource implications of the University's new enrollment strategies were embodied in the "Enrollment and Resource Plan." At the same time, Northeastern developed an aspiration statement to serve as the framework for the next stage of planning: *"To achieve excellence as a national research university that is student-centered, practice-oriented, and urban."* The 1996 statement tacitly included many of the historical values embedded in the 1987 mission statement. But it also made clear that Northeastern was seeking to develop its national and research presence. The competitive landscape required Northeastern to become more than a regional institution, and to enhance its student selectivity and research visibility.

The University used this aspiration statement to define areas of emphasis in its self-study for the 1998 accreditation review. It did not, at that time, revise its standing mission statement.

The arrival of a new president in 2006 led Northeastern to rethink both the content and the form of its mission statement. The mission statement should be concise, it was decided, to capture the essence of Northeastern's purpose.

DESCRIPTION

Together, the two parts of the new mission statement, adopted in 2007, answer the question "Why does Northeastern exist?" The first part expresses Northeastern's commitment to educating the whole student. The University seeks to prepare students to lead complete and fulfilled personal and professional lives, embrace lifelong learning, and influence the affairs of the world. To do this requires an education rich in the contemporary tools of intellectual pursuit and filled with strong experiential opportunities.

The second part states Northeastern's commitment to creating knowledge that can be translated in meaningful ways to meet global and societal challenges. Translational research captures the strength of fundamental and applied research to move new knowledge, ideas, and discoveries to the point where they meet societal needs. The most pressing challenges facing society are large and complex, demanding the collaborative efforts of our best minds. These collaborations often require interdisciplinary efforts and global connections, underscoring the value Northeastern places on partnerships across disciplines and around the world.

The succinct new mission statement has been augmented by a vision statement that articulates the University's aspiration. The vision statement explicates the individual elements of the mission statement and addresses the means by which Northeastern will succeed.

A statement of core values has also been developed. These foundational principles form the basis for all of Northeastern's endeavors. They reflect the University's historical values and its commitment to offering a means of upward mobility to promising students, pursuing reciprocal relationships, being responsible to its communities, acting ethically, and embracing diversity in all its forms.

All three elements — mission statement, vision statement, and statement of core values — serve as the preamble to the University's new Academic Plan.

Our Mission

To educate students for a life of fulfillment and accomplishment.

To create and translate knowledge to meet global and societal needs.

Our Vision

Our vision is to be a university that expands the meaning and impact of our engagement in the world using our knowledge and resources as positive forces for change in both our local communities and our global society.

This vision will be realized through offering students a transformative experience, grounded in experiential education that ignites their passion for learning while opening up for them the endless possibilities around them. We will assist our students in becoming engaged citizens of the world, confident and resourceful people who realize that their knowledge and actions can have positive consequences for their own lives and for the lives of others.

This vision will be realized through interdisciplinary scholarship and translational research by which we will dynamically participate in addressing problems in our urban environment, in our region, and across the globe. Northeastern strives to translate fundamental research into applications that will contribute to economic development and enhance societal well-being. Our collaborative approach will encompass partners in government and industry, and artists, innovators, and scholars both inside and outside our community.

We strive to create a vibrant and diverse community, characterized by collaboration, creativity, an unwavering commitment to excellence, and an equally unwavering commitment to exhibiting respect for one another. We aspire to be a model for what our society can be.

Our Core Values

Contribution. *Northeastern seeks to contribute to the individual fulfillment of each member of the campus, to the welfare of the surrounding communities, and to solutions that will address global and societal needs.*

Diversity. *Northeastern celebrates diversity in all its forms and fosters a culture of respect that affirms inter-group relations and builds community.*

Engagement. *Northeastern promotes active engagement in teaching and learning, in scholarship and research, in the life of urban communities, and with our alumni and friends.*

Integrity. *Northeastern pursues each of its activities and interactions with integrity, maintaining the highest ethical standards.*

Opportunity. *Northeastern provides opportunities to those who strive to overcome disadvantages and show great promise for future success.*

APPRAISAL

The process of drafting the statements of Northeastern's mission, vision, and core values was overseen by a committee of faculty members, administrators, and students. The draft statements were shared with university constituencies. These discussions led to a concise mission statement, a vision statement that expresses both what the University aspires to be and its plan for realizing its goals, and a statement of the values that have sustained Northeastern in the past and will lead Northeastern into the future.

All three statements were developed with the strong input of the Board of Trustees' Long-Range Planning Committee. This body was part of discussions during the course of the development of the statements and provided support when the statements were brought to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Also involved in the statements' development was a Strategic Partners Advisory Council composed of leaders from industry and nonprofit-organizations — many of them Northeastern alumni who are dedicated to helping the University continue to rise in strength, service, accomplishment, and reputation.

PROJECTION

As noted above, the mission, vision, and core values statements serve as the preamble to Northeastern's new Academic Plan. The Academic Plan will help define all University priorities,

from master planning to advancement campaigns, from curriculum development to research support. As the University implements the Plan, its new statements of mission, vision, and core values will be more widely disseminated and embodied in the University's culture and decision-making.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Northeastern had been remiss in codifying its strategic aspirations in its mission statement. This was corrected in 2007 when the Board of Trustees adopted the University's new mission statement and accompanying statements. These statements will align the goals set in the Academic Plan with the decisions made as Northeastern pursues its ambitions.