



The Values we Prize: A Comparative Analysis of the Mission Statements
of Canadian Universities

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Abstract

Because of the challenges currently facing Canadian universities, an important question to explore is “which ideals or values do Canadian universities use to guide themselves?” In an attempt to find an answer to this question, we examined the values expressed in the institutional mission statements of fifty-eight Canadian universities. While mission statements cannot serve as proof of institutions enacting the goals and ideals they portray to the public, these statements do shed light on the values institutions consider important. The total of twelve values identified through inductive content analysis of mission statements documents were: Service, Truth, Equality, Community, Spirituality, Freedom, Human Dignity, Tradition, Justice, Leadership, Lifelong Learning, and Learning and Development. These were then rank-ordered to evaluate the priority assigned to them by different types of Canadian universities. On the basis of this exploratory study we make suggestions for future research.

Introduction

Universities in Canada, as elsewhere, face multiple challenges including changing demographics of the student population; increased demands for accountability; the changing nature of the workplace; the global nature of major problems leading to the need for international collaboration; increased international competitiveness; and declining government funding for higher education (National Panel Report, 2002). Given these multiple challenges in the context of the often-conflicting demands on universities as expressed by various stakeholder groups, which ideals or values do Canadian universities use to guide themselves?

One way to explore this question is to review public documents that universities themselves have drafted which describe the institution's purposes and functions. Of these, institutional mission statements are particularly interesting to consider as they typically express the institution's vision, ideals, and values. Little research currently exists on the content of mission statements of Canadian universities. A sentiment that likely accounts for the lack of research in the area is that institutional mission statements are not considered particularly meaningful documents to study. One question calling for more thorough examination, therefore, is whether university mission statements are worthwhile sources of information.

Are university mission statements worthwhile sources of information?

A broad range of opinions exists regarding the significance and usefulness of university mission statements. Detomasi (1995) suggests that "It is widely recognized that most college or university mission statements are embarrassingly vague, and largely comprised of academic pieties, dull platitudes, and odes of self-congratulation" (p.31). Similarly, Newsom and Hayes (1991), after conducting an analysis of 114 college and university mission statements in the United States, conclude that "most mission statements are amazingly vague, evasive, or rhetorical, lacking specificity or clear purposes" (p. 29). Carver (2000), too, criticizes college and university mission statements for not clearly articulating specific outcomes. However, Detomasi (1995) cautions that increasing demands for accountability at the provincial and federal level render the articulation of institutional objectives a delicate if not difficult issue; a point that serves to explain much of the language used in mission statements. Barnett (1994) is also aware of potential problems with specifying educational outcomes too clearly. He asserts that "so-called mission statements are either a statement of the trite and bland, failing to demarcate different activities of institutions, or they are so detailed and specific that, if taken seriously, they would impede the autonomy of an institution's academic staff" (p. 14).

Although mission statements are easily (and frequently) criticized on such terms, a second look at the literature on university mission statements reveals more optimistic views regarding their merit. For example, according to Tierney (1999) mission statements are very useful as they "help people make sense of who they are as an institution and where they want to go" (p. 65). Similarly positive is Young (2001), who argues that university mission statements reflect the values of an institution, and these values, in turn, represent the institutional "self that is prized, chosen and acted upon" (p.66). Likewise, Bangert (1997) observes that "mission statements are the most common way that organizations express their purpose, vision, and values" (cited in Young, p. 67). Even Barnett (2003), despite his previously illustrated cynicism, suggests in a recent book that universities have a moral responsibility to identify the values and ideals by which they choose to orient themselves. In his comprehensive philosophical examination of core academic values, Young (1997), too, encourages the university "to shed its stance as a 'values neutral' agency and determine its values, present them to the public, and manifest them more effectively" (p. xiii). Several years later, Young (2001) conducted a study of

73 mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities in the US, analyzing them to determine the extent to which they expressed the set of core academic values he proposed in an earlier book: service, truth, freedom, individuation, equality, justice and community. Though Young acknowledged at the time that “studies of what these institutions *do* are, ultimately, more helpful to our understanding ...than studies of what *they say they do*” (p.79, emphasis added), he also provided a three-fold argument for why analyses of university mission statements are valuable. First, Young contends that mission statements are “public declarations of values, some manifested and some idealized” (p.79); hence, studying the content of mission statements provides insight into at least some of the values these institutions consider important. Second, he observes that mission statements “condense the meaning and direction of institutions into a few paragraphs or pages of writing” (p.67) that are easily accessible. Last, he suggests that “they are road-maps for the high road that help institutions meet their goals” (p.67). On this final point, Newsom and Hayes (1990) argue that if university mission statements specified the institution’s distinctive role in society, “then they can be a proper beginning for activities like a planning exercise, program reviews, curriculum design, and admissions” (p.30). Both Detomasi (1995) and Craver (2000) offer similar observations.

Mission statements cannot serve as proof that institutions do enact the goals and ideals through which they portray themselves to the public. An exploration of mission statements is nonetheless worthwhile, as they allow a perspective of those values institutions deem important. Thus, we submit that mission statements are useful data from which to *begin* an inquiry into the values of Canadian universities. This study was exploratory in nature and pursued two purposes. Since little research currently exists on the content of mission statements of Canadian universities, one purpose was to subject the mission statements of universities across Canada to inductive textual analysis with the goal of identifying the values made explicit in these statements. The second purpose was to compare these identified Canadian values to those identified and proposed by Young in previous philosophical and empirical research on university mission statements.

Collecting and Analyzing Mission Statements Documents

Our primary tool for accessing the mission statements of the 73 Canadian universities and colleges listed in the Telecommunications Directory of our university was the Internet. We looked only for the word “mission statement” and used no related term(s) such as “strategic plan”, “vision statement”, “guidelines for the future”, or “learning and teaching strategy”. In fewer than ten instances, we had to contact the university to request a mission statement we were unable to locate. We were able to obtain mission statements from 58 universities. The length of the mission statements ranged from one paragraph to over seven pages.

Once the mission statements were located, we sorted them according to institutional type. Statistics Canada, the AUCC, and *Macleans* magazine each use somewhat different definitions to differentiate Canadian universities by institutional type. We decided to follow the *Macleans* classification system, which distinguishes between primarily undergraduate institutions (universities with fewer graduate programs and usually no doctoral programs), comprehensive institutions (many master’s and doctoral programs but no medical school) and medical-doctoral institutions (research-intensive institutions with many graduate programs and large doctoral/medical faculties). We also obtained mission statements from various colleges that operate as part of an existing university, or are institutions that have held their independent

degree-granting powers as a function of being federated with a degree-granting university. Furthermore, we included some institutions that recently moved from college to university college status. All institutions of this fourth category had a religious affiliation. For the purpose of this study only, we labeled these latter institutions “university colleges” (recognizing that the term “university colleges” represents a very specific institutional type in some provinces). The distribution of universities across types was relatively even, with fourteen medical/doctoral, thirteen comprehensive, eighteen primarily undergraduate institutions and thirteen university colleges represented in the sample. As full disclosure, Appendix 1 offers a complete list of institutions whose mission statements were included in this study. Anonymity was not a concern as mission statements by their very nature are public documents.

Analyzing the mission statements

We began our investigation by engaging in a textual analysis of the material. In line with the purpose of the study, our analysis was guided by the question: *what values are expressed in these mission statements?* Two investigators independently read each mission statement at least twice and engaged in a process of open coding by identifying key concepts, which were then grouped into larger value categories or themes. The identified themes were subsequently compared to those proposed by Young (1997, 2001). When Young (2001) conducted his empirical study of mission statements of 73 Catholic colleges and universities in the U.S., he used the seven core academic values identified in his 1997 study as an anchor for analysis; however, he found not seven but a total of nine values expressed in the mission statements of these institutions. These are summarized as: service, spirituality, truth, community, human dignity, equality, tradition, justice and freedom. While Young (2001) approached his study of mission statements primarily *deductively* using the initial seven democratic core values as *a priori* codes for his analysis, our analysis began *inductively* using open coding. Considerable overlap between Young’s nine values themes and those revealed by our analysis led us to adopt Young’s nine value categories rather than suggesting new labels. Confidence in the similarity of the identified values permitted us to compare the results from our study to those reported by Young. However, our analysis of mission statements of Canadian universities had uncovered three additional value themes: learning and development, lifelong learning, and leadership.

Following Young’s (2001) lead, we also explored differences across institutional types. For each of the twelve themes we counted the number of times the theme was referenced in the mission statements of medical/doctoral institutions, comprehensive institutions, primarily undergraduate institutions, and university colleges. These frequency counts illustrate the relative priority institutions assign to each value, and consequently allow us to rank values and comparison by institutional type (see Table 1). By comparing *rankings* rather than *frequencies* we circumvented the problem of unequal distribution of universities across the four types of institutions (recall the slightly higher number of primarily undergraduate institutions in the sample). Most (10 of 12) value themes were further divided into two to five sub-categories; we counted the number of times each sub-category was mentioned (see Table 2). Two exceptions were the values *lifelong learning* and *leadership*, which were further divided into sub-categories. The total number of references each statement made to each of the twelve values was used for the ranking (Table 1). References in sub-categories were counted only *once* per mission statement, that is, a given sub-category was either noted as “expressed” or “not expressed” in the statement but not added to the count of statements in that category.

It should be acknowledged that frequency counts do have their limitations in this study. Though counting has rather technical/objective connotations, the two investigators relied on their *subjective* judgement to determine whether certain phrases in the mission statements made reference to one of the sub-categories or value themes. Other investigators, therefore, might have interpreted some phrases differently and hence reached different number counts on some sub-categories or values. Further research on values expressed in mission statements of Canadian universities is encouraged for this reason.

Presentation of Findings

Table 1 shows the ranking of the twelve identified values based on frequency counts. Table 2 provides deeper insight into the values themselves by including sub-categories.

Table 1
Rankings by Number of References made to Values by Institutional Type
(The three new values identified in this study are shown in italics)

	All	Medical/ Doctoral	Comprehensive	Primarily Undergraduate	University Colleges
Service	1	3	1	1	1
Truth	2	1	2	2	3
<i>Learning and Development</i>	3	2	3	3	4
Equality	4	4	4	5	7
Community	5	5	5	4	6
Spirituality	6	11	10	6	2
Freedom	7	7	6	8	10
Human Dignity	8	9	7	7	11
<i>Leadership</i>	9	6	<i>11</i>	<i>11</i>	8
<i>Lifelong Learning</i>	10	8	8	9	<i>12</i>
Tradition	11	12	12	10	5
Justice	12	10	9	12	9

The rankings reported in Table 1 are best appreciated in relation to Young's (2001) findings. When considered in the context of Young's study of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, four observations can be made based on our results. At the most general level, it is evident that the nine values proposed by Young were appropriate for capturing most of the values expressed in mission statements of Canadian universities (recall that we added three new value themes: learning and development, leadership, and lifelong learning). Second, the overall relative ranking of these nine value themes was similar in both studies with references to *service* and *truth* being found considerably more often than references to *tradition* and *justice*. Third, *spirituality*, the value ranked second in Young's study, ranked this high only for university colleges in Canada, which, in this study, all had a religious orientation. Perhaps not surprisingly, for medical/doctoral and comprehensive institutions in particular, this value ranked rather low. For primarily undergraduate institutions, however, spirituality ranked unexpectedly high

considering that they do not have a religious affiliation. Though some of these universities did make explicit statements regarding religious spirituality, the majority made reference to moral and ethical awareness (see Table 2). Fourth, the value of *freedom* ranked lowest (ninth) overall in Young's study but seventh (out of twelve) in the Canadian study. This latter observation perhaps reflects the difference in the level of institutional autonomy universities in these two countries have traditionally experienced (e.g., Skolnik & Jones, 1992).

Focussing specifically on the Canadian results, we observe that the greatest differences between institutional type were identified for the group of institutions we referred to as university colleges. Next to *spirituality*, it was the value of *tradition* that ranked considerably higher for these institutions. This finding is clarified if one notes that the theme value *tradition* includes the sub-category "rooted in the Christian faith". We also note as an important finding of this study that the differences across the three other institutional categories (medical/doctoral, comprehensive, and primarily undergraduate institutions) were relatively minor. This observation is interesting given international discussions about the desirability of greater institutional differentiation in the university sector (DfES, 2003; Boyer Commission, 1999).

Overall, we observe that twelve main values are expressed in the mission statements of Canadian universities. It should be noted that the ranking order only refers to the relative priority institutions assign to these values. The regular presence of all twelve values in the mission statements suggests that these values are of some relevance to all Canadian universities.

Table 2 describes each value in greater depth. The numbers in parentheses in the text refer to the number of times reference was made to a certain value or sub-category of a value.

Service

As indicated in Table 2, many mission statements made explicit their commitment to the provision of higher education through good teaching. These mission statements spoke about seeking to achieve excellence in teaching (44) with the goal of meeting the needs of students (20). However, excellence in teaching cannot be achieved without the resources required for appropriate learning; hence, many mission statements also spoke about providing teaching facilities, resources, and a general environment that is conducive to learning (17).

A significant number of mission statements made reference to providing service beyond the student population and expressed their support of the local community (25). Some of the statements also suggested that the university provides support for and opportunities to a specific geographical region (e.g. the northern part of the province, the Maritimes, etc.). A few made reference to sharing research with the community where the institution was located. Institutions with a relationship to a particular church indicated a commitment to service to the church community and to God.

Truth

In this study the value of *truth* comprised four sub-categories. Many mission statements made reference to academic excellence (36). The concept of intellectual rigor (16) and the notion of harmonizing truth, faith, and reason (12) were also included in this value. References to research, discovery, inquiry, and using empirical means to pursue truth (41) were those most often made. McMaster University's mission statement declares that the institution is "committed to creativity, innovation, and excellence", and the University of Calgary mission statement

Table 2
Number Counts of References made to main Values and their Sub-categories
by Institutional Type

	Doctoral	Comprehensive	Undergraduate	University Colleges	Total
Service					
Provide excellent teaching	10	12	16	8	44
Promote employability of the graduates	4	2	2	1	9
Provide conducive intellectual and physical environment	2	4	6	5	17
Support local community	6	5	9	5	25
Responsive to the needs of students	0	8	9	3	20
Total	22	31	40	22	115
Truth					
Intellectual rigor	7	3	5	1	16
Research, discovery, Inquiry	12	11	13	5	41
Harmony of truth, faith and reason	0	2	3	5	12
Academic excellence	11	8	7	8	36
Total	30	24	32	19	105
Learning and development					
Cultivate critical intellect	9	8	11	7	35
Fostering creativity	6	6	9	3	25
Foster social responsibility	9	8	8	2	31
Total	24	22	28	17	91
Equality					
Diversity	8	5	9	5	27
Equity	7	7	8	1	23
Access	4	7	6	2	19
Total	19	19	23	8	69
Community					
Community of faith	0	0	4	3	7
Academic and learning communities	6	10	10	2	28
Cooperation and collaboration	8	7	12	6	33
Total	14	17	26	11	68

Table 2 cont'd

	Doctoral	Comprehensive	Undergraduate	University Colleges	Total
Spirituality					
Religious spirituality	0	2	6	10	18
Moral and ethical awareness	3	2	9	9	23
Total	3	4	15	19	41
Freedom					
Academic freedom	6	6	5	3	20
Institutional autonomy	2	6	5	0	13
Total	8	12	10	3	33
Human Dignity					
Respect for the worth of the individual	2	6	5	2	15
Reverence for others	3	3	8	0	14
Total	5	9	13	2	29
Leadership					
Total	11	3	7	5	26
Lifelong learning					
Total	6	8	9	1	24
Tradition					
Rooted in the historic Christian faith	0	0	5	12	17
Preserving, transmitting and enhancing Canadian heritage	2	1	3	0	6
Total	2	1	8	12	23
Justice					
Peace and harmony	1	4	2	1	8
Social justice	3	3	3	3	12
Total	4	7	5	4	20

declares that “our mission is to seek truth and disseminate knowledge”. It should not be surprising to find these references to truth in Canadian university mission statements, given the strong influence of the Humboldtian ideal of the research university in Canada. Sir Robert Falconer, a former president of the University of Toronto, asserted in an open address delivered as early as 1922 that “the university exists to seek and impart truth” (Greenlee, 1988, p.263).

Learning and development

This value refers to the growth of the learner. Three sub-categories were noted. The mission statements that made reference to this value addressed both personal and intellectual development. While emphasis was placed on developing critical thinking (35), some statements indicated preparing students for careers.. This is not unexpected given present concerns about the employability of Canadian graduates (Axelrod, 2002). For example, the mission statement of UBC states that “the graduates of UBC will have developed strong analytical, problem-solving and critical thinking abilities; they will be knowledgeable, flexible and innovative”. The mission statement of McMaster University states that: “we inspire critical thinking, personal growth, and a passion for learning”. Other mission statements also made reference to their aspiration to promote creativity in their students (17). References to preparing students to become good citizens were made often (31). As such, students were expected to develop a sense of social responsibility, to work with and for their communities, and also to be agents of positive change. Perhaps surprisingly, however, only two mission statements of university colleges made reference to this last sub-theme.

Equality

In this study, the value of equality comprises diversity, access, and equity. These concepts were expressed primarily in reference to the institutions’ campus culture. Some mission statements spoke about welcoming diversity (27). Words such as care, safety, and freedom were often used in these descriptions of campus culture.

In addition to issues of diversity, the concept of access was frequently mentioned. The term was used to describe the institutions’ intent to make learning open to as many people as possible. Many institutions specifically addressed how they enhance accessibility, emphasizing opportunities for part-time study, alternative modes of delivery (e.g. online), and off campus study. A few institutions made direct reference to specific groups of people who may be considered marginalized (e.g. women and aboriginal people). The intent to “remove barriers” was articulated in some mission statements. A commitment to widening participation is evident in most mission statements.

Community

The value of community ranked fifth in priority and was noted 68 times. Comments were made about academic and learning communities (28) and also communities of faith (7). At the core of the value of *community*, however, is the notion of working together (33). This idea of cooperation at times referred to working together within the university (for example, through interdisciplinary approaches) and at other times to collaborative initiatives that are not limited to the university (for example, through partnership with another university or college, industry, or the community). McMaster University’s mission statement, for example, states that “we value team work in whatever we do”. Mission statements also talked about fostering a spirit

of community and helpfulness on campus through appropriate social activities that would complement intellectual aims.

The notion of working together also applies to the notion of ‘internationalization’. Some mission statements spoke to the universities’ goal of achieving a reputation and status not only on a national but international level, and referred to partnerships with universities in other countries. For instance, the mission statement of University of Montreal says: “The University of Montreal is in contact with the whole planet”. While some statements that spoke to internationalization did so within the context of research, some spoke to attracting and recruiting international students.

Many mission statements highlighted the notion of the scholarly community. This idea took various forms. For example, the mission statement of St. John’s College reads: “our mission is to foster community, in which students, fellows and staffs are brought together in an intimate, humane and supportive environment”. Other mission statements indicated that through interdisciplinary activities, various universities were able to integrate national and international perspectives in their instruction, research, and service to the society. Other mission statements spoke to the idea that alumni serve a bridge between the institution and external communities.

Spirituality

The value of spirituality was ranked sixth overall (a ranking skewed by the importance university colleges attach to this particular value). Spirituality was expressed either in terms of human spirit (18) (referring to a person’s character and feelings) or in terms of religious belief (23). References to the goals of “enhancing students’ personal and spiritual growth” were found. For instance, the mission statement of St. Paul’s College states: “St Paul’s College is committed to moral and spiritual growth of its community”; the University of Winnipeg refers to hoping to make a difference in the development of powers of empathy; and Brandon University seeks to promote self-confidence in the unique and inherent abilities of each student, and to instil a love of truth that will become an integral part of each person’s future. In addition to references to moral development, references to religious spirituality were seen in some mission statements. Statements such as “we are animated by the spirit of Christ”, “we are grounded in the belief that success depends upon spiritual maturity”, or “we foster a Christian lifestyle and religious vitality” were identified. Cameron (1991) reported that the mid-nineteenth Century was described as “the Golden age in the history of the Church colleges” (Masters, Protestant Church College, cited in Cameron, 1991, p.18) in Canada. That legacy can still be located in these mission statements. Some mission statements declared that spiritual and intellectual growth should always go together.

Freedom

The value of freedom was ranked seventh. In this study the value of freedom is linked to academic freedom (20) and specifically to the rights to freedom of speech and freedom of research. Mission statements indicated that ‘freedom and independence’ in the open pursuit of knowledge need to be respected and promoted. The mission statement of the University of Manitoba, for example, states that “we seek to preserve and protect academic freedom and intellectual independence”.

Some mission statements spoke about the autonomy of the institution (13). The mission statement of the University of Calgary emphasizes their need for institutional autonomy by stating that “the purposes of efficiency and enterprise by which the university is defined will be threatened if our accountability is interpreted as subjection to political or bureaucratic control”.

In his 1922 address, Sir Robert Falconer offered the first clear statement on academic freedom in Canada. He stated publicly that “we can measure the rank and stability of a university by the security given to a professor to pursue and expand his investigations without being compelled to justify himself to those who differ from him” (Greenlee, 1988, p. 280). He added that professors ought to abstain from partisan political activity. It is perhaps surprising that such a fundamental academic value was noted by only about one third of the mission statements included in this study. Further research is necessary to explore whether the absence of this value from mission statements accurately reflects the priorities of institutions.

Human dignity

The eighth most-cited value was human dignity. Human dignity refers to respect for the worth of the individual as well as reverence for others. The mission statements of some institutions declared their dedication to establishing an atmosphere in which all community members are treated with respect and valued as individuals (15). Other institutions affirmed that they inspire “reverence for others” (14). The mission statement of the University of Saskatchewan states: “we value the university as a place of human dignity and fairness”. Emphasis is also placed on the development of the ‘whole person’, as reflected in the mission statement of Campion College. It reads: “care of the whole person is reflected in the College’s encouragement of students to pursue a well-rounded approach to their development – intellectually, spiritually, and socially”. Some mission statements indicate that the institution provides the type of education that enables people to comprehend their humanity.

Leadership

Leadership was ranked ninth. While some mission statements made reference to their commitment to leadership in learning, others made reference to the preparation of people for leadership roles. For example, the University of Ottawa declares a goal “to exercise leadership to the development of teaching, research and professional programs”. Athabasca University states that it provides international leadership in individualized distance education methods and technologies. The mission statement of Western Ontario, on the other hand, states: “we seek faculty who will be acknowledged leaders in their scholarly disciplines and will ensure a quality education which will allow Western’s graduates in their turn to assume leadership positions in public affairs”. Similarly, the mission statement of Trinity College says, “we foster leadership talent and a sense of social responsibility in our students” and the mission statement of Huron University says, “we prepare students for positions of leadership and responsibility”.

Some mission statements were very specific about the kind of leadership they are interested in. For instance, St Jerome’s mission statement says, “We are committed to the formation of leaders for the service of the community and the church”.

Lifelong learning

The value of lifelong learning ranked tenth. Several mission statements made reference to aspiring to improve the educational experiences of people of all age levels and backgrounds. The mission statement of University of Victoria, for example, states that the institution will “serve the local and wider community by providing programs of continuing education that respond to the increasing needs among the population for life-long learning”. Ryerson University declares its mission “to be a leader in innovative, quality, lifelong learning that empowers adults to reach their life and career goals”. Brandon University seeks to engender

in all students a continuing love of learning and a lifelong desire to strive for excellence in any endeavor.

Some of the mission statements made direct reference to how the institution operationalizes its commitment to lifelong learning. These institutions said they would accommodate growing numbers of different categories of students, such as minority groups and mature students. Other institutions declared a commitment to offering lifelong learning opportunities through part-time programs and non-credit courses. For instance, the mission statement of Waterloo University states: “Waterloo University offers continuing education in all areas ranging from complete programs for upgrading to individual courses for the continued personal development of alumni and members of the general public”. Athabasca University’s mission statement expresses commitment to lifelong learning not only by increasing accessibility through distance education, but also by meeting the educational needs of the workplace.

Tradition

The value of tradition was expressed religiously and culturally. Some institutions referred to the traditions of their founding orders, for instance, Catholic or Anglican traditions (17). For example, the mission statement of St Paul’s College reads, “Our mission is to strengthen Catholic identity of the College”. Few references were found with respect to the Canadian heritage (6). However, some mission statements spoke to the link between academia and culture. For example, the mission statement of the University of Manitoba reads, “the university seeks to reinforce its role as an important part of the culture and heritage of Manitoba”. Similarly, the mission statement of Dalhousie University says, “students should become acquainted with concepts central to our own culture”. These universities highlight the need for a learning culture to be mindful of its tradition.

Justice

Justice, the last value on the priority list, comprised two sub-categories: peace and harmony, and social justice. Some mission statements declare that all members of the University community shall promote social justice (12) and peace. For instance, Brock University proclaims that it is its mission to provide, “through conduct of the faculty, students and staff, and through its policies and administration, an atmosphere free from sexism, racism and all other forms of stereotyping, harassment and discrimination”.

However, several mission statements state that universities also play an important role in building a more just society. For example, the mission statement of St. Paul’s University reads, “by participating in the evangelizing mission of Christ, the institute hopes to contribute creatively to the humanization of society”. Nevertheless, only a few mission statements spoke to peace and harmony (8) and very few to world peace.

Discussion

In our investigation, we sought to discover which ideals or values Canadian universities use to guide themselves. We presented the values they express in their mission statements. Service, truth, learning and development, equality, community, spirituality, freedom, human dignity, leadership, lifelong learning, tradition, and justice were the values identified in the fifty-eight university mission statements analyzed in this study. Some of the values articulated in mission statements will always be idealizations (Young, 2001). Yet, even ideals can provide guidance in helping institutions meet their goals. We reported that several scholars (e.g., Newsom & Hayes, 1990; Detomasi, 1995; Craver, 2000) suggested that to the extent that university mission

statements specified the institution's distinctive role in society, they could constitute "a proper beginning for activities like a planning exercise, program reviews, curriculum design, and admissions" (Newsom & Hayes, 1990, p.30). The values identified in this study could serve such purposes. Whether universities do in fact cherish these values and use them as guides for decision-making is quite a different question.

Two points deserve some elaboration before we move on to discussing the implications of these findings in relation to further research. First, it is encouraging to people who are disturbed by the employability rhetoric present in many government documents to see that employability of graduates was noted far less often as an essential mission of the university than the development of critical thinking skills and creativity. While training students for work-related positions has always been one of the university's functions (recall that medieval universities trained their students as surgeons, priests, and lawyers), this preparation for work, at least traditionally, took place after students had studied both the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, and hence had become proficient in the seven liberal arts. Concerns have been expressed that these fundamental purposes of university undergraduate education are under threat at a time when political and economic pressures are increasingly determining how the purposes of higher education are being defined, and students have less exposure to a "liberal education", where they would acquire the skills of critical reflection and learn to distinguish between an assertion and a reasoned argument (e.g., Axelrod; 2002; Nussbaum, 1997). Nussbaum suggests that philosophers ought to play an essential role in the education of undergraduates by offering philosophy courses or by co-teaching general humanities courses where students learn to think critically and from a Socratic perspective. Axelrod makes a similar point, arguing that the objectives of the liberal arts—to cultivate intellectual creativity, autonomy and resilience—should be integrated into scientific, technical, and professional education.

So what does it mean if universities *say* that they value critical thinking? Ramsden's (1992) research with academic staff across different subject areas is enlightening here. His study indicated that most academics, when asked what they would like to achieve in their teaching, respond that their goal is to help students to think critically, yet his research also revealed that few had any awareness of the approaches they had adopted in their teaching and were unaware that certain of their teaching practices were counterproductive to encouraging students to develop the desired "deep approach to learning" (see Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983). It would seem that institutions that state that they are committed to the development of critical thinking and creativity also need to develop purposeful plans to bring this development about. It is unclear from the data analyzed here that such plans exist.

The second point deserving more in-depth discussion is the fact that institutions emphasized the notion of "truth", referring to research, discovery, and academic excellence. It is indeed surprising that none of the institutions made direct reference to the relationship between research and teaching; yet that they believe such a link exists can be inferred from the values mentioned above. Specifically it can be observed that, at least in their mission statements, these institutions do not articulate a clear vision of how the two primary functions of the university might be brought more closely together. Recent research on the relationship between teaching and research has concluded that positive synergies need to be created and cannot be assumed to exist (e.g., Brew, 2003; Elton, 2005; Jenkins & Healey, 2005). Strategic plans that are designed to bring these two functions more closely together are needed. We do not know whether the universities included in this study have put such plans in place. These plans would be found in separate documents from the mission statements explored here. It is possible, however, that institutions have not yet seriously engaged with this question, a state of affairs that may change

given two recent summits on the integration of teaching, learning and research in Canada (University of Alberta, 2006)

Implications for further research

This exploratory study was purely descriptive in nature and relied exclusively on a textual analysis of mission statements. For these reasons, it leaves several questions unanswered. For example, questions of who drafted these mission statements, when and in response to what issues, and for whom, were not addressed in this study. We also do not know whether the institution's mission translates into the mission statements drafted by individual faculties and departments within the same university. Clearly, the larger and more devolved the university, the less likely there is to be a single unifying institutional mission expressed in the various departments and sub-divisions of the institution. Furthermore, such university-wide missions, particularly in larger, highly devolved institutions, easily turn into little more than platitudes. Future research, however, could build on the findings reported here and investigate to what extent the goals, ideals and values expressed in generic university-wide mission statements are further clarified in departmental and college-wide strategies, and to what extent they are enacted in the various units and departments across the institution. The values reported here would serve as a useful basis for interviews with university leaders (including the provost or equivalent and other academic administrators), faculty, and students. Do they see themselves to be espousing these values or do they largely make reference to very different values? If they do espouse some of the values as identified in this study, do they see them being practiced or challenged? That is, do they see the values as seriously informing teaching, research and community service, or do they perceive them as being stifled given growing pressures from government and industry on universities to produce knowledge workers and "employable" graduates? If the latter, how committed are they to their values despite external pressures?

An alternative approach to the study of institutional values would include departmental, faculty, or institutional case studies, beginning with faculty or departmental documents. These statements declaring the values, intentions, goals, and strategies of a given unit would constitute only one of several sources of information researchers would consult. A comprehensive institutional case study would rely on various additional sources of data. These would include additional printed documents, such as institutional reports and brochures, information on what is celebrated and rewarded at the institution (information on research and teaching awards and awards for community service), course syllabi, assessment regulations, faculty handbooks, programme evaluation reports, and policies regarding diversity and lifelong learning. These documents would be complemented by observations of the daily operations of individual departments, focusing in particular on the decisions that are made, and by interviews with various stakeholder groups including faculty, sessional instructors, administrators, present and past students, and possibly external reviewers. Such investigations would illustrate the connections and tensions between stated values and institutional practice.

At a time when universities face multiple challenges and are pressured to respond to the often-conflicting demands expressed by governments, parents, students or business and industry, it is of critical importance that institutions engage with the question of values. Clarifying one's values as an institution means establishing one's institutional identity (Young, 1997). For mission statements to serve a purpose beyond mere rhetoric, it is essential that the institution's mission is regularly reviewed by members of the academy (including administrators, faculty, and students), that faculties and departments compare their own mission in relation to the larger values expressed by the generic institution-wide platitudes, and that departments work on

program-specific ways to enact the values specified in their mission. Merely stating values, though an important first phase, does not ensure purposeful practice.

Appendix: Institutions whose mission statements were included in this study

Doctoral/Medical institutions included in the study (N=14)

McMaster University
Dalhousie University
University of Western Ontario
University of British Columbia
Université de Montreal
University of Toronto
McGill University
OISE/UT
University of Ottawa
University of Alberta
Queen's University
University of Saskatchewan
University of Manitoba
University of Calgary

Comprehensive institutions included in the study (N=13)

Simon Fraser University
York University
University of Waterloo
University of Windsor
University of Regina
Memorial University
Concordia University
University of New Brunswick
University of Victoria
Carleton University
University of Guelph
Ryerson Polytechnic University
Athabasca University

Primarily undergraduate institutions included in the study (N=18)

Bishop's University
Brock University
St. Mary's University
St. Francis Xavier University
University of Lethbridge
Lakehead University
Trent University
Wilfrid Laurier University
University of Prince Edward Island
University of Sudbury
Mount St. Vincent

Brescia University
University of Winnipeg
St. Thomas University
Acadia University
Brandon University
Université de Moncton
University of Northern British Columbia

University colleges included in the study (N=13)

Note that this category includes various colleges that operate as sub-components of an existing university, or are institutions that have held their independent degree-granting powers as a function of being federated with a degree-granting university. Furthermore, it includes some institutions that recently moved from college to university college status. All are religious institutions.

St. Paul University, federated with University of Ottawa
St John's College, member college of the University of Manitoba
St Paul's College, member college of the University of Manitoba
Trinity College, in federation with the University of Toronto
St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto
St. Jerome's University of the University of Waterloo
The King's University College (AB)
Campion College at the University of Regina
Luther's college at the University of Regina
St Thomas More College of the University of Saskatchewan
Huron University College, The University of Western Ontario
Augustana University College (AB)
Concordia University College of Alberta (AB)

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