

HOW TO WRITE A MISSION STATEMENT

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Mission statements are pretty abstract concepts. Most people couldn't produce the mission statement of any organization on command - they are typically not catchy phrases that everyone has on their lips. So what's the point? Why do we ask for mission statements from clubs? How can you write a good one that will last many years after you're gone? This document starts to answer those questions, and will hopefully make the mission statement writing process easier.

1. What is the point of a mission statement, anyway?

In the context of Olin clubs, I see mission statements as serving three purposes.

- Provide guidance for future club presidents. When the club founders are all gone, their successors will need to know what the goals of the club are. We want all of the institutions we create at Olin to survive past the first four graduating classes. Good mission statements will help guide future student leaders.
- Providing focus for purchasing decisions of the club. The sky-diving club probably shouldn't be buying new pool cues for the game room. We need some basis for deciding if club purchases are reasonable.
- Help CORE test for duplication. When we approve a club, we have to make sure it doesn't do the same thing as another club. Broad or poor mission statements make it really hard for us to do that well. Does the sky-diving club conflict with the extreme sports club? We'll have to check the mission statements.

From that list, it seems sort of self serving - we want good mission statements to make our lives easier. This is true, but the first point is perhaps the most important. It seems clear to us now what all the clubs do and how they are different, but it be clear in 20 years? We want to build a student organization system that lasts long after we're gone, and part of that means helping clubs build clear mission statements to guide them in the future. We also want to strive to have active clubs and organizations that add value to the College. Well crafted mission statements can keep clubs active - a perennial problem at other schools.

2. How do I write a good mission statement?

Focus on the *purpose* of your organization. Your mission statement might answer the question "Why does this club exist?" It might also follow-up with "What is the ultimate goal of the club?" From a language perspective, this usually means harnessing the power of infinitive verbs. Phrases like "increase awareness of", "promote acceptance of" or "provide a venue for" create a sense of ongoing mission. The exact methods of fulfilling that purpose may change from year to year, but the purpose is something that should be much less variable.

For example, perhaps the purpose of the Magic (no, not the card game) Club could be "To promote the practice of stage magic on campus." The club might start out holding small workshops on how to do common card tricks. In a few years, it might be more useful to hold large scale magic shows to get people really excited about magic tricks. Both of these activities would lend themselves to the ultimate purpose of promoting the practice of stage magic. It would be a shame if the mission statement had instead

limited the group to a single type of activity. Separating goals from implementation is vital.

Having clubs that fulfill real needs is important. We want to maintain active clubs so as to focus our funding. It is important to make sure your purpose isn't already being met by another organization. There might not be a need for the Digital Art Club if Seeing and Hearing already meets the need of promoting digital art on campus. As CORE, we don't make such judgments about the approval of clubs, so we have to rely on you to create clubs that will outlast all of us.

To review!

- Use infinitive verbs like promote, foster, provide or enable. These verbs promote goals that are longer term.
- Avoid describing exactly how you are going to meet those goals. Let that be a flexible aspect of your organization.
- Immediate plans, like "I'm going to buy a model airplane with club funds," don't really fit in a mission statement.
- Make sure the purpose contained in your mission statement fills a real need on campus that is not otherwise met.