

**Stetson University**  
**Values Research Project**  
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Submitted by:

Christopher M. Kandus, Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students  
Emily Mieras, Associate Professor of History and American Studies

(Edited and approved by President's Cabinet)

**Overview**

One of the University's strategic goals is to *Increase Awareness and Understanding of Stetson's Core Values*, and our Strategic Map's foundation rests on *Deepening the Way We Live our Core Values*. To work towards achieving this goal, Emily Mieras, Associate Professor of History and American Studies, and Christopher Kandus, Vice President of Student Affairs, were asked by President Libby to co-facilitate a study to explore the University's current values, determine if the current values were aligned with our institutional mission and vision, develop an updated values statement based on community feedback, and offer recommendations regarding how to operationalize these values. This study began with a University-wide survey that was sent to current faculty, staff, and students, as well as to alumni and governance board members. The initial survey yielded over 1200 responses. These responses were used to initiate the conversation with members of the DeLand campus on Values Day in October, 2011. As a community, we began to ask ourselves the following questions: What are the Stetson University values? How do we incorporate values into our work, the curriculum, and daily interactions? How do we honor the past and look forward to the future? Can we all unite under the same values? To begin this process, faculty and staff volunteers facilitated focus groups that discussed these questions and gleaned valuable feedback.

Following Values Day, Dr. Mieras and Vice President Kandus continued a yearlong study that incorporated the entire Stetson University community. Over the academic year, community members participated in break-out sessions and open forums. These sessions included current Values Council leadership, students from the undergraduate Student Government Association, leadership in the fraternities and sororities, and members of the Multicultural Student Council. In addition, the co-facilitators held open forums to discuss the project on the DeLand campus, presented at a faculty meeting, presented at the Quality of Service Lunch and Learn program, met twice with College of Law faculty and staff, and presented to the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Boards. Throughout the process, updated information was posted on the University's planning site to facilitate feedback and encourage input from our Hatter alumni and current community members.

Throughout the academic year, some major themes started to emerge. These themes included making the values active, putting the values into practice more effectively, emphasizing interconnection, categorizing the values to show relationships between similar concepts, and inviting the students to explore the values (rather than imposing them on students). Additionally, the members of the community challenged each other to define the word diversity and to make certain this value is actively practiced.

Community members also held a lively debate about the words religion and spirituality, emphasizing the importance of honoring Stetson's Christian roots while acknowledging changing conceptions of religion and spiritual meaning for current students and other community members. Many community members discussed the importance of a statement regarding academic excellence and emphasizing global awareness. Many participants stressed the necessity to look at how the University strives to develop the whole person. Throughout, participants emphasized the importance of continuing and enhancing the University's commitment to civic engagement and social justice.

Though much community response focused on effective ways to put values into practice in student life, people also discussed the importance of institutional and administrative commitments to these values and the need to put them into practice at the macro-level. Discussion also focused on effective ways to continue incorporating values exploration in academics (as currently occurs, for example, through elements of the General Education curriculum, community-engaged learning initiatives, and the community-based research program, as well as through several vibrant interdisciplinary programs that place issues of social justice at their center).

### **Recommendations**

The current University values statement includes Gender Equity, Diversity, Environmental Responsibility, Religious and Spiritual Life, Community Engagement, Health and Wellness, and Ethical Decision-Making. We recommend that the revised and renewed values statement be organized around three core values: Personal Growth, Intellectual Development, and Global Citizenship. The system formed by these three core values should also place Personal and Social Responsibility at its center.

Thus, we propose a revised, University-wide values statement:

***Stetson values the development of the whole person committed to engaging and building life-long connections with the larger world through Personal Growth, Intellectual Development, and Global Citizenship. To that end, the University fosters policies, practices, and modes of inquiry to support and explore these values areas.***

***Personal Growth*** encompasses the understanding that no single formula defines the journey to personal success, but that passion, the drive to increase self-knowledge, and the quest for balance are important tools in this process. Intercultural competence, religious and spiritual exploration, self-awareness, and wellness are components of personal growth.

***Intellectual Development*** is a commitment from the University and from students to achieve excellence in academics, to foster the spirit of exploration that drives an engaged and active mind, to cultivate rigorous methods of academic inquiry, to model and support absolute integrity, and to value creativity and professionalism.

***Global Citizenship*** is an important part of Stetson's mission to prepare students to be informed, active, and engaged citizens of both local communities and the world. Global citizenship includes University and individual commitments to community engagement, diversity and inclusion, environmental responsibility, and social justice.

## **Implementation**

Effective values practice will entail continued dialogue, visibility, and vibrant events to foster deep reflection on values issues. To this end, we suggest both a permanent structure for integrating values practice throughout the University and a conscious effort to make the University values an integral part of Stetson traditions, marketing and recruiting efforts, and physical space.

Since its inception, the Values Council model has helped make University values an integral part of the Stetson DeLand community, particularly by promoting policy initiatives, assessing the University's efforts in different values areas, and fostering events centered on values issues. The campus conversations over this academic year suggested that some values areas have worked more effectively than others in this regard, and that while the Values Council model worked in some ways, it also might benefit from some streamlining. Thus, we recommend the following University-wide structure in place of the DeLand Values Council model:

**Values Commitment Steering Team (VCST):** Seven-person team composed of the Values Commitment Leader (VCL) and Core Values Co-Chairs (CVCC). The VCST identifies ways to incorporate values exploration into University policy and practices, into our curriculum and co-curricular experiences, and into other areas of University life such as Stetson administrative operations. The team's efforts draw on existing departments, committees, and task forces that already do significant work in the values areas. We suggest that the work of existing groups be highly considered as the VCST explores action steps. The VCST also takes the primary role of implementing the placement of Personal and Social Responsibility at the center of our values commitment. The Team prepares an annual report to the University community on the work of the VCST.

**Values Commitment Leader (VCL):** Appointed by the President for a three-year term and working with the Cabinet, the VCL chairs the VCST and supervises and coordinates the work of the CVCCs. The Leader collaborates with the CVCCs in setting the annual charge(s) for each of the three core values areas and in identifying appropriate current University resources to enable Stetson to integrate more fully the values into practice.

**Core Values Co-Chairs (CVCC):** Appointed for two-year terms through discussions among the VCL, the President, and the Provost, two individuals (one faculty member, one staff member) will oversee the implementation of each core value and also serve on the VCST. These co-chairs are also responsible for setting up initiative-focused, action-oriented task forces within their core value to work on specific issues and implementation recommendations. It is anticipated that the composition of these task forces will be dynamic; that is, the composition will change depending on what issues are under study at any particular time. We do not anticipate the life of any one task force to be very long, and within each value area, there may be more than one task force operating at any one time.

To move swiftly to address pressing issues of importance to the community, we recommend that Core Value Co-Chairs begin by developing a task force right from the start.

- ❖ For the value of Personal Growth, we recommend a task force to further explore religion and spirituality. Through conversations with the community, we've learned that we need to deepen

our understanding of this topic and how we support further conversation, programming, and facilitation of interfaith initiatives.

- ❖ For the value of Intellectual Development, we recommend a task force to explore the current undergraduate cultural credit requirement and strongly recommend modification of this system to a University-wide, values-based requirement that integrates commitment to our values with intellectual development and the many ways we learn and grow as a community. For example, this system might require that sponsors for events submitted for the credit explain how the event will promote reflection, practice, engagement, or questioning in a particular values area.
- ❖ For the value of Global Citizenship, we recommend a task force on diversity and inclusion that specifically concentrates on the recruitment of diverse faculty, staff, and students.

Moreover, several University traditions should incorporate Stetson's values statements. These traditional activities include Orientation, Convocation, Commencement, and major student recruitment events. These events are significant ones and often introduce Stetson to new community members. The leadership of these traditions would be charged with determining how the values should be appropriately incorporated. We would support the development of more traditions for the community and continuing efforts to increase bringing values-centered speakers to our campus communities.

We propose the VCST start its work by meeting with key people across Stetson who work in the various academic, student life, and administrative divisions that intersect with the values areas. Although the VCST will be tasked with moving projects forward, it does not, and should not, hold sole responsibility for these values commitments. We have learned from this project that the Stetson community wants to see ownership of these commitments across the University. All departments should consider independently how to incorporate these core values into their work, and the VCST should be open to, and perhaps actively solicit, suggestions from the wider community.

We suggest considering means to make the values visible on our campuses—whether through signage, rotating exhibits in central spaces, posters, or other initiatives to provoke discussion, reflection, and awareness. Additionally, University-wide policies that included previous values councils and/or members as part of administrative policies will need to be re-evaluated and/or revised.

Finally, we recognize that the Values Council structure and its members have done vital work at Stetson over the past years. We encourage the VCST to draw upon the expertise of these individuals. We also recommend that the President convey the updated Values plan to the current council chairpersons before sharing it with the wider community, and that the eventual expression of this plan to the whole community includes a formal thank you to current and past chairpersons and council members for their dedication and commitment to Stetson University.

It is our hope that this reconceptualization of the values statements will serve the goals--voiced by a majority of the Stetson community--of updating the values for our twenty-first century challenges, streamlining the mechanisms for values practice, and continuing to emphasize the imperative to put ideals into action in every area of the University.