

Development of a *shared* vision and mission statement for the Department of Human Kinetics and Ergonomics at Rhodes University.

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Background:

The Department of Human Kinetics and Ergonomics was established in the 1940s, originally as the Department of Physical Education. Since then, it has undergone substantial transformation and a change in name and focus in 1981; to the Department of Human Movement Sciences and then again in 1996 to the Department of Human Kinetics and Ergonomics. With each of these changes, the curriculum has changed but not in an organized and systematic manner but rather on an individual lecturer level. To further compound this, we are a multidisciplinary department focusing on human movement and so we have modules within our course covering physiology, biomechanics, anatomy, ergonomics, to name a few.

The department is the only department of its kind in South Africa and adopts a multidisciplinary approach to the investigation of humans and their interaction with their environment. Our department incorporates a holistic, integrated approach to the study of “man in motion”. Four broad domains serve as the cornerstones of our model which was proposed by Charteris *et al.* in 1976. These include the biophysical (study of the structure of the human body), the physiological (study of the function of the human body) and the psychological (how humans perceive their particular situation) domains. The final domain, which is of a conceptual nature, emphasises the importance of integrating all the domains to obtain a greater understanding of humans and how they interact with their environment. The approaches are therefore varied and include aspects of positivism, interpretivism and constructivism. Our research however, takes a predominantly positivist approach and is hypothesis-driven although it does acknowledge that subjective responses (the psychological domain) play a key role in determining

performance. Translated to teaching, students are expected to have an understanding of all four domains although these are taught as separate modules.

Each staff member has expertise mostly in only one of these areas. While we expect students to integrate their understanding of humans using all of these modules, we do not specifically teach integration.

While the initial focus of this research was on a curriculum overview and then redesign, it was realized that this was premature and that before this could occur we needed to establish a vision and a mission. The vision and mission statements should be designed to answer the following basic questions: statements that explain who we are as a department, statements that explain our direction, purpose and reason for being and statements that make us unique. The Vision statement is very broad and forward looking and should also be inspiring. It should mean something to everyone within the department and not just the individual driving the process as a common and shared sense of purpose. The vision statement can serve as key piece of communicating to stakeholders, employees, and customers (students, researchers, etc) what the department is all about and how it can affect each of them positively.

Vision and mission statements are said to be an indispensable part of strategic planning (Darbi, 2012). While a few studies have found they have no impact (Piercy and Morgan, 1994; Simpson, 1994), most studies have commented on their effectiveness (Rigby, 1994; Lynch, 2000; Darbi, 2012). Mission statement are believed to be antecedents to any strategic plan (Wheelen and Hunger, 1998). They encompass the purpose of the department in line with the values and expectations of stakeholders (Johnson et al., 2008). They are broad and an overarching framework to develop a vision, strategic goals and objectives (Lynch, 2000; Darbi, 2012). They also communicate a strategic direction which is important for our stakeholders. Relevant stakeholders who could participate in the process of developing a vision and mission statement include, students (past and present), lecturers of the course, the university, employers of our students, relevant national and international organizations such as the International Ergonomics Association and the South African Medical Association, to name same.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop a *shared* vision and mission statement for the Department of Human Kinetics and Ergonomics.

Method:

The sample for this study included past and present students, current academic staff members and industry partners. The study was divided into four phases:

Phase one was an educational phase. Several sessions were held with the staff within the department explaining to them the ideas behind a curriculum review and the importance of first establishing a shared vision and mission with which to align our curriculum. The main purpose of this was to get ‘buy-in’ from the staff with respect to the importance of the project.

The second phase focused on the sharing of vision and mission statements from the university more broadly and then from like-minded departments both nationally and internationally. These were collected by the principal investigator and shared with the sample during a face-to-face session.

The third phase focused on brain storming sessions where the sample were asked certain questions pertaining to our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The three groups of students, staff and employers did this exercise separately. This was followed by a session looking at answering more specific questions such as: Who are our students/’customers’? What services/products do we provide? What do we do best?, What do we do than no one else can do? What values govern our work?

The fourth and final phase only included the academic staff working in focus groups to develop vision and mission statements for the department. Scribes were assigned to each group to identify common threads and these scribes rotated between groups after every 5 minutes – this was facilitated by the principal researcher. The scribes then consolidated these into one shared vision and mission statement which was then refined by the group as a whole. This phase is still ongoing.

Results:

Although the project is still ongoing, preliminary findings suggest that the sample identified similar strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These were divided into three themes of research, teaching and community engagement.

Teaching: Our biggest strength in those three was identified as our teaching. Strengths highlighted included our academic rigour particularly at the undergraduate level and MSc/PhD levels. One of the biggest weaknesses identified was our honours curriculum.

Research: Research strengths were mainly in physical activity and health as well as sports science. Our biggest research weakness was ergonomics. This is despite the fact that we are the only ergonomics unit in the country which was seen as a unique selling point. It was felt that enhancing research in this area would increase the credibility of the department and enhance the teaching of that area.

Teaching and Research: Although our multidisciplinary focus was seen as a positive our greatest weakness was that we do not integrate the modules sufficiently and expect students to do this themselves.

Community Engagement: Our community engagement was seen as promising and definitely an area which had seen the most growth in recent years.

Focus group findings: Recently completed

Shared Vision Statement: Still in process – with aim of finalizing in the next 2 weeks.

Shared Mission Statement: Still in process – as above.

Challenges: Formulating a shared vision and mission has been challenging largely because of (i) our multidisciplinary focus and (ii) our application in the three spheres of physical activity and health, sports science and ergonomics. This process is still ongoing and the shared vision and mission statement is currently being developed.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of taking a systematic approach to curriculum redesign starting with a shared vision and mission involving all stakeholders.

References

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