

# The University's Purpose and Values: Who We Are, What We Do, Why We're Here

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Through an inclusive process that involved faculty, staff, students, alumni, community members and others, the University of Arizona has identified a core purpose and values, which articulate why the University exists and what it stands for.

"Our purpose reflects the enormous potential we have to enable significant and positive change in the world – especially when we tear down barriers and truly work together to solve the complex challenges of our time," President **Robert C. Robbins** wrote in a letter to members of the campus community. "Our values articulate and celebrate what unites us as a community and set clear expectations for our everyday contributions to the institution. Together, they serve as a compass to guide our decision-making and our resolve to create meaningful impact."

The process underlying the development of the purpose and values was described in detail earlier this month at the ONE Conference, an annual event that brings together marketing and communications professionals across campus for a day of learning, professional development and collaboration.

The effort to identify and define the UA's purpose and values was led by The Purpose Institute, based in Austin, Texas.

Haley Rushing, one of the organization's co-founders, cited relevant research around purpose and employee engagement, and explained the process that led to "a very authentic and meaningful purpose and values for the University."

## Purpose

Purpose, Rushing said, is "a definitive statement about the difference you're trying to make in the world."

It is derived by looking at strengths (what an organization is built to do), passions (what it loves to do) and impact (what the world needs it to do). An organization's purpose, she explained, lies where those three areas intersect.

The Purpose Institute collected input on each of the areas through in-depth interviews with UA leaders, a thorough review of the strategic plan, meetings with faculty, staff, students and others, and focus groups with current and incoming freshmen.

The **passions** that were identified were: working together; transforming the lives of students; tackling and solving important problems that affect the quality of life in our communities and on our planet; and being of service to the world. The **strengths** that were identified were: science and liberal arts; an interdisciplinary approach to solving complex problems; partnerships; addressing the skills gap in the labor market through Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies; and 100% student engagement. Areas of **impact** were identified as: empowering students to prepare for and succeed in the future; studying climate change; pioneering the next generation of health care access and delivery, in partnership with Banner Health; space exploration; and addressing equity and justice issues.

From that information, the UA's purpose emerged: **Working together to expand human potential, explore new horizons and enrich life for all.**

## Core Values

To determine the University's core values, The Purpose Institute looked at: existing expressions of values within colleges and departments; the "authentic values" one would find when the UA is at its best; values that were routinely cited as making the University culture special or remarkable; and values that naturally support or align with the strategic plan.

Six core values emerged, with integrity being the top-rated value.

**INTEGRITY** – Be honest, respectful and just.

**COMPASSION** – Choose to care.

**EXPLORATION** – Be insatiably curious.

**ADAPTATION** – Stay open-minded and eager for what's next.

**INCLUSION** – Harness the power of diversity.

**DETERMINATION** – Bear Down.

Rushing offered two questions for the ONE Conference attendees to consider. How might you look at something on your to-do list as a potential opportunity to fulfill the University's purpose? What should be on your to-do list to help the University fulfill its purpose in more meaningful ways?

## Incorporating the Purpose and Values

Living the core values, Rushing said, requires that members of the campus community **communicate** (by clearly articulating the values and providing clear expectations), **cultivate** (by ensuring leaders "walk the talk" and address organizational impediments) and **celebrate** (by recognizing and rewarding people whose behaviors exemplify the values).

To ensure that the University follows its purpose and lives its values, teams will be working to incorporate them into the culture of the University, Robbins wrote in his letter to campus. The effort also has a place within the strategic plan – a Pillar 5 initiative titled "Living Our Core Values."

"I invite you to think about how your work contributes to the fulfillment of our purpose and how you personally live our values as well as cultivate them in the students you serve," Robbins said.

*To learn more, visit the [Purpose and Values](#) <sup>[1]</sup> website. To see the presentation Rushing gave at the ONE Conference, held at the Tucson Convention Center on Aug. 8, visit [brand.arizona.edu](#) <sup>[2]</sup>.*

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### Links

[1] <https://www.arizona.edu/purpose-values> [2] <https://brand.arizona.edu/>