



Play 0.1: Guided Worksheet - Discovering Your Graduate Program's Purpose Statement

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You can complete this worksheet on your own or collaborate with your program team. Set aside 60–90 minutes. There are no right answers — only honest ones.

Part 1: Your Program's Learners

Start with the people the program exists to serve.

- 1 Who are the people who come to your program? What do they bring with them — professionally, personally, and experientially?
- 2 What do most of them not yet see or know about themselves when they arrive?
- 3 What do you want to be true about them when they leave — not just what they know, but who they are?
- 4 What do you want to be true about them 1, 5, or 10 years after they leave?

Part 2: Your Program's Values

Name what your program actually stands for.

- If your program had to choose three values to guide every decision it makes — about recruiting, teaching, operations, and alumni engagement — what would they be?
- Where in your current program are those values most visible? Where are they hardest to see?
- What is the specific meaning of equity as it pertains to your program's purpose? How is it built in — not bolted on?

Part 3: Your Program's Commitments

Specify the obligations of your program along with the individuals or groups entitled to them.

- What does your program owe its learners? What is the promise you are making when someone enrolls?
- What does your program owe the communities and fields your graduates will serve?
- How do you hold yourself — as a program — to the same standard of excellence you expect from your learners?

Part 4: Your Measure of Success

Decide how you will know if the mission is working.

1. How will you know if a learner has truly grown during the program — beyond grades and credentials?
2. How will you stay connected to graduates long enough to know whether the mission is being lived out in the world?
3. What would it look like if your program fully succeeded — not just for one learner, but for all of them?

Part 5: Your Draft

Use your reflections above to complete the following prompts. Do not worry about making it perfect — just make it honest.

We believe every person who enters our program arrives with _____.

Our purpose is to _____, so that learners can _____.

Our program commits to _____, _____, and _____.

We measure our success not just by _____, but by _____.

Part 6: The Compass Test

Before you complete your statement, ask these four questions:

- Would this statement help an admissions team decide who is a fit for this program?
- Would this statement help a faculty member design a learning experience?
- Would this statement help a staff member decide how to support a struggling student?
- Would this statement give an alumni coordinator a reason to continue in a relationship with graduates?

If the answer to all four is yes — your purpose statement is ready to work.

Why Play 0.1 Works

This worksheet is effective for six reasons.

1. It starts with reflection rather than writing, so leaders arrive at the drafting stage with something real to say.
2. The learner, rather than the institution, is the starting point, altering the fundamental basis for all subsequent development.
3. It brings to light what program leaders already understand internally but haven't had to voice publicly.
4. It builds shared ownership by inviting every voice in the program into the process.
5. By connecting the program's purpose to real-world decisions from the start, it's built for practical application, not just as a source of inspiration.
6. It is honest by design, keeping the program's purpose grounded in what the program actually does and what it's committed to becoming.
7. Submit a comment by letting me know what you think of this play. Was it helpful? Any suggestions for improvement?

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