

## Institutional Values Unite Stetson Community

For one day each fall, Stetson University cancels classes, closes offices and comes together as a campus community to celebrate all that the institution stands for. Values Day, as it's called, provides an opportunity for Stetson students, faculty and staff to interact with and learn from one another and to recommit to the university's core values. For Values Day 2012, Stetson had something big to celebrate — a new values statement and a new set of core values, both of which the campus community played a part in creating.

### Values Research Project

In the summer of 2011, Stetson University President Wendy Libby charged Vice President of Student Affairs Christopher Kandus-Fisher with reevaluating the institution's core values. At the time, the university's values statement was organized around seven themes and though each was important, President Libby was looking to simplify matters while more clearly articulating the values the institution holds sacred.

Kandus-Fisher and Associate Professor of History and American Studies Emily Mieras partnered to facilitate a study to explore the current values, determine if they were aligned with the institutional mission and vision, develop an updated values statement based on community feedback and offer recommendations as to how to operationalize the values.

Kandus-Fisher and Mieras began this mammoth task by distributing a survey to the entire Stetson community, from students, faculty and staff to alumni and governance board members. The survey was designed to measure what and how much the campus community knew about the institution's current values. "Perhaps the most striking information we gleaned was that the vast majority of the Stetson community did not know what our values were," says Kandus-Fisher. Results of the survey,

which yielded more than 1,200 responses, were used to initiate a conversation with members of the main campus on Values Day 2011. "We asked some important questions that day," says Kandus-Fisher. "Why are Stetson's values what they are? Do they need to evolve? How can we incorporate our values into our work, the curriculum and our daily interactions? How can we look to the future yet honor the past? Can we all unite under the same values?"

Using feedback and ideas generated from the campus-wide Values Day dialogue, Kandus-Fisher and Mieras forged ahead. Over the 2011-12 academic year, Stetson community members continued the conversation in breakout sessions and open forums. "We really wanted to learn what was important to our students, staff and faculty in a learning environment, workplace and academic community," says Kandus-Fisher. "If we wanted our campus community members to truly embrace and uphold our university values, they had to resonate in some way with each and every individual."



*Members of the Stetson University campus community on Values Day 2012*

The sessions and forums were often jam-packed and filled with lively debate. "Throughout our discussions, members of the campus community continually challenged one another to think outside their comfort zones," says Kandus-Fisher. There were discussions on the meaning of the word "diversity;" conversations around the words "religion" and "spirituality" (Stetson has historical ties to the Baptist church); and dialogue on the importance of a continued commitment to academic excellence, development of the "whole person," civic engagement, social justice and global awareness. Though much of the community-wide discussion focused on effective ways to integrate the university's values into student life, there was also talk of the importance of institutional and administrative commitment to the values.

“Through these campus-wide conversations, it became evident that the Stetson community wanted a set of straightforward, meaningful core values that we could put into practice — not just words on paper — on a daily basis,” says Kandus-Fisher. “Using the feedback from the campus community as our compass, Emily and I drafted a proposal to adopt a revised values statement organized around three core values: personal growth, intellectual development and global citizenship.” In May 2012, Kandus-Fisher and Mieras presented their proposal to the board of trustees, which approved the new framework and recommendations.

## Stetson’s Values Defined

Stetson’s new values statement reads: “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.

## Leading the Charge

A seven-person work team was appointed to facilitate the integration of the new institutional values into Stetson’s curriculum, policies, practices, culture, traditions, marketing and recruiting efforts, and physical space. The Values Commitment Steering Team (VCST) consists of the

chair (who is appointed by the president to a three-year term) and six core values co-chairs (who are appointed to two-year terms and are chosen based on discussions among the VCST chair and the president and provost).

The core values co-chairs (CVCCs) are tasked with overseeing implementation of each core value (two CVCCs — one staff member and one faculty member — are assigned to each of the three core values). Each CVCC team is responsible for setting up initiative-focused, action-oriented task forces and subcommittees (made up of students, staff and faculty) within its assigned core value to work on specific issues and implementation recommendations. Current task forces are exploring issues of religion and spirituality; the institution’s cultural credit requirement for students; and the recruitment of diverse faculty, staff and students.

## Values Day 2012

Last fall’s Values Day served as the kickoff celebration for Stetson’s new core values. Here, the new values and revised values statement were formally introduced to the Stetson community. Programming for the day included three separate breakout sessions and work groups in which each value’s year-one goals were discussed and participants were invited to offer suggestions on how best to meet these goals.

One of the keynote speakers at the event was CUPA-HR President and CEO Andy Brantley. His presentation was titled “A Call to Action: A More Diverse, Inclusive Campus Creates Institutional Excellence.” Brantley also provided guidance and support to members of Stetson’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

“Values Day 2012 allowed us, as a campus community, to learn about our new values and how we can unite around these common principles for the greater good of the institution,” says Kandus-Fisher.

## Gaining Momentum

A year out from adoption of the new values, momentum is still going strong. “The entire Stetson community is truly invested in and has really rallied behind these new institutional values,” says Kandus-Fisher. “There is a genuine interest from students, faculty and staff to explore the values and how they can be infused into our daily work and our daily lives.”

The administration has embraced the values as well. “The core values have become part of the foundation of our

# inclusion cultivates excellence

strategic planning process,” says Kandus-Fisher. “President Libby is committed to ensuring that the concepts of Personal Growth, Intellectual Development and Global Citizenship are at the heart of all that we do here at Stetson.

“The values and discussion surrounding them have really served to bring us together as a campus community and

have allowed us to interact with one another in new and different ways,” continues Kandus-Fisher. “As the Values Commitment Steering Team continues to explore unique and innovative ways to integrate the values into the culture and climate of the university and as each member of the Stetson community continues to explore these values in his or her own way, we will continue to grow and learn, both as individuals and as a collective.” 

## On the Diversity Front

Stetson University’s Global Citizenship core value has many arms and legs, one of which is diversity and inclusion. As part of their year-one objectives, the Global Citizenship co-chairs created a diversity work group to explore ways that Stetson can be more deliberate in its efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

The first thing the group did was revise the institution’s diversity statement and create language related to diversity to include in all Stetson job advertisements. Currently, the group is working on several proposals to further Stetson’s commitment to diversity and inclusion — one suggests creating a diversity scorecard to gauge where the institution currently is and to help chart a course to where it hopes to be; one recommends hiring a recruitment specialist to help bring in diverse candidates; and one offers suggestions related to retaining and promoting those diverse candidates.

“We know that the type of transformational, institution-wide change we are after takes some time — it’s a journey,” says Global Citizenship Co-Chair Joshua Rust. “The action items we’re proposing are just the first small steps on this journey, but we’re moving in the right direction.”

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