

OUR MISSION, OUR MESSAGE



Alexander W. Whitaker IV,
president of King University

We prepare students in our Christian academic community to excel as thoughtful, resourceful, and responsible citizens with a passion for serving God, the Church, and the world.

We accomplish this through excellent teaching, high expectations, worthwhile example, and fidelity to our Presbyterian heritage. Our mission is the same for all campuses and sites; for online learning; and for all programs, curricular and extracurricular, graduate and undergraduate.

—King University
Mission statement



What makes King different? I am asked this question frequently by prospective students and parents and by others who may not have been familiar with King. In the minds of most people there exists an image of a generic college or university, so how King diverges from that is what most interests those who show interest in the school. When they ask what is different about King, they are actually asking what our mission is, and how it is distinct. In a nation with so many different colleges and universities, it is an entirely appropriate thing to ask.

I have led and been involved in many strategic planning processes through the years. And sometimes the most effective way to identify the distinctiveness of an organization is to ask what would be missing if it did not exist. How would the lives of those served be diminished? What is it that the organization does—and does so well—that it cannot be replicated, effectively or at all? What is it about our mission and how we accomplish it that makes us truly irreplaceable?

Thinking of mission in this way helps sharpen appreciation of all the good things we do—and can do better than others.

A mission statement is simply a statement of what unique and irreplaceable thing we are sent here to do—the root of the word *mission* coming from the Latin verb *to send*—that which no one else can do as well. A really good mission statement captures succinctly the what, how, and why of an institution.

Crafting a new mission statement in our re-accreditation year

Within higher education, having an appropriate and effective mission statement is an accreditation requirement. Our regional accrediting body, SACSCOC, mandates we have a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement.

As King this year entered our every-ten-year reaffirmation process for accreditation, it became clear that the school's then-existing mission statement—though it had notable strengths—needed to be improved. While it spoke concisely to meaningful

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achievement and transforming the culture through Christ, it did not mention students or the academic enterprise or excellence. Because it was focused on something far off and unmeasurable—a transformed culture—it did not yield itself to criteria that would guide what we do on a day-to-day basis. It could in fact have been a mission statement for all sorts of organizations other than a university. We knew it was time to construct a new mission statement.

At the same time, it was equally important to reinforce that a new mission statement did not mean King had a new mission. Indeed, King’s mission has been remarkably constant through its 151-year history—one even more concisely captured in our motto, *Ecclesiae et Litteris* (for the church and for learning). A new mission statement simply meant a new articulation of that mission that was suitable to today’s context, one that could convey effectively to all of our constituencies what we do, how we do it, and what we aim to accomplish. Done properly, the statement would resonate as true and authentic with those who have known King the best across the decades and today.

Over several months we involved representatives from all those constituencies in constructing a revised mission statement: students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and friends. Each word was chosen carefully. Everyone worked hard to keep the statement focused on the essence of what King does, across the institution. The result of that work was a new mission statement (left) that the board of trustees approved. It was not only a critical undertaking for accreditation purposes, but was also a much-needed opportunity for us all to discuss what King is and should be and where our focus needed to be.

We are committed to having this mission statement guide all we do. Toward that end, we had a convocation to discuss what it means, not only in its aspirations, but also in how it manifests itself day to day. We published a small booklet for everyone who studies and works here, “Who We Are and What We Do” that parses the words of the statement and gives examples of how it is

lived out in practical terms. We have also shared these booklets with alumni at Dogwood and with friends, as they show powerfully what gifts to King are helping to accomplish.

A student-focused mission statement

The statement has two parts: the actual mission statement—a single sentence—and then two subsidiary sentences that describe the distinctive strengths we have at King that help us achieve the mission and that make clear the mission applies across all of our programs. (This last sentence addresses King’s various sites and types of classes.)

I encourage you to join with the campus community in thinking about this statement and what it means. I’ll highlight here some important aspects of the main statement.

First, it is focused on students. The core activity in the statement is simply put: “**We prepare students.**” Students (missing from the earlier statement) are our sole focus and object of our energies. And we are not only engaging them for the moment, but shaping them in anticipation of their lives beyond King.

Second, the place we do this (whether on-campus or online) is **a particular type of place: a community that is both Christian and academic**. Being more than a school, but a community, implies different sorts of relationships and interdependence and obligations than were we merely a place of instruction. And by emphasizing being both *Christian* and *academic*, we make plain that we see these two not in contradiction but as equally important to the work we do developing students.

Third, we want our students **to excel**. We want more than their matriculation and attendance, more than their getting good grades in their classes or wins in their sports. We want a habit of excellence to mark all they do, not only at King but throughout their lives. Excellence has been a hallmark of King graduates since the beginning and must continue to be so.

Fourth, we want our students **to become citizens of a particular sort**. By emphasizing their citizenship, we remind ourselves that we are preparing them to be members of larger civic communities when they depart: we are not simply aiming to make them better as individuals, but as contributors to society. And we have identified three critical attributes we believe can ensure their success and set them apart:

- Being **thoughtful**—that is, thinking deeply about ideas, about the world around them, and about others. Being thoughtful yields inquisitiveness, curiosity, tolerance, understanding, and civility.
- Being **resourceful**—learning to solve problems and gaining the skills and resources necessary to do so, while working cooperatively with others. This translates into initiative, risk-taking, creativity, teamwork, and (through both success and failure) greater confidence.
- Being **responsible**—taking ownership for one’s actions and their consequences, individually and in community. This produces graduates who do not blame others for their shortcomings, who do not make excuses, and who see their roles as ones of action, initiative, accountability, and stewardship.

Finally, we want our students to develop a reflexive **passion for service**—to God, to God’s people (the Church in its broadest sense), and to the greater world. We want them to think outside themselves and always seek not to be served, but to serve.



Who We Are & What We Do
can be viewed at
www.king.edu/about/mission-vision.aspx

Making the mission a reality

Already this statement is guiding decisions at the college, in matters large and small. We ask, for example, does a particular action teach the student to be responsible or not? Are we helping a student become resourceful if we do something for the student instead of having the student figure it out? The statement guides our conduct as faculty, staff, and administrators, too, as we are reminded (the “worthwhile example” part of the statement) that in all we do we are modeling behavior for our students.

If these attributes strike you as out of sync with the current culture and with other universities—well, that’s the point. King is different, and always has been. And if King is to survive and be true to itself, it needs to offer students and the greater world we serve a whole-person education better than that at other schools—with graduates who have been formed in a way that makes them the best employees, superb team players, and great leaders who serve selflessly.

It takes more to make this sort of education happen, however, than a mission statement—no matter how well articulated and fully committed to it everyone on campus may be. As it has from King’s beginnings, it takes resources beyond tuition dollars to hire the sort of faculty and staff who share these values, and to fund the scholarships and facilities that will attract the sort of students best suited for this sort of preparation. In short, this is not a mission simply for those at our campuses, but one that must be shared by the greater community of King alumni and friends as well.

With that steadfast passion and support, we can continue to do this vital work God has sent us to do, and do it well. Our students deserve no less.

Sincerely,

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