

## National Association of Schools of Music

### **An Advisory for Music Faculty and Administrators:**

### **NASM Standards — Purposes**

#### **Introduction**

Every endeavor involves establishing purposes and developing means for fulfilling them. In many fields, purposes are discussed in terms of vision, mission, goals, objectives, and action plans. As described below, these terms identify various levels of purpose, thus enabling clearer conceptual connections between purposes and decision-making. Fundamentally, an NASM review is based on the purposes each music school or department identifies for itself. Although many institutions have purposes in common, no institution's set of purposes is exactly like any other. The field of music benefits from the interactions that result as various music programs fulfill their specific sets of purposes. Statements regarding purposes play an essential role in defining for institutions, their constituencies, and their evaluators what is unique about what they do and what they intend to do.

#### **Character and Use**

NASM strongly recommends that vision, mission, goals, objectives, and action plan statements both reflect and be centered on specific artistic, intellectual, and educational purposes, and the relationships among them. Statements written in *managementese* or that are so generic as to be applicable to virtually any program provide little clarity or guidance.

NASM also strongly recommends that setting purposes be an artistic process rather than a technical exercise. In an artistic process, ends are specific and unique, ends primarily drive means, and creativity permeates the whole. In a technical exercise, ends are general and common, means drive ends, and procedure permeates the whole. To work artistically, it is critical that statements of purpose define the specific and unique ends that will guide specific choices of means.

Statements of purposes should be "as simple as possible, but not simpler." These should provide all readers with a clear understanding of what is expected and what is being attempted.

Purposes statements are required by NASM for the entire music unit; goals and objectives statements are required for specific curricular programs. On principle, NASM does not specify approaches, methods, or formats for developing and stating purposes. These are the responsibility of each institution.

#### **Definitions**

There are numerous specific definitions of common terms, but usually:

- (1) *purposes* is a generic term referring to statements that when reviewed together, define the special, perhaps unique, function of an institution or program in the larger context of educational and artistic endeavor;
- (2) *vision* statements normally define what an entity aspires to be and often, whom it intends to serve;

- (3) *mission statements* articulate broad connections between the institution's efforts in music and the world of art and intellect;
- (4) *goals* are broad statements of aim, the specific needs toward which efforts are directed, normally less remote and more definitive than mission;
- (5) *objectives* are the specific steps for reaching goals, normally measured in time among other indicators; and
- (6) *action plans* are specific means for achieving objectives, normally measured in dollars among other indicators.

The creation of purposes-related statements automatically defines requisite obligations. For example, the decision to teach a specific instrument or specialization carries the responsibility to provide sufficient faculty, library resources, time, curriculum, evaluation mechanisms, and so forth.

### **Basic Relationships**

Purposes are related to everything the music school or department undertakes. NASM standards address these relationships in the following categories:

*Size and Scope* — Essentially, how many people and how many programs at how many levels.

*Finance* — Support sufficient to achieve purposes and serve conditions produced by size and scope.

*Governance and Administration* — Management structure and positions sufficient to fulfill purposes.

*Faculty and Staff* — Qualifications, numbers, and conditions of service consistent with educational purposes, curricular offerings, size, and scope.

*Facilities, Equipment, Technology, Health, and Safety* — Adequacy in terms of purposes; size and scope; and curricular offerings.

*Library and Learning Resources* — Consistency with composite set of artistic, intellectual, and curricular goals and objectives.

*Recruitment, Admission–Retention, Record Keeping, and Advisement* — Consistency with specific curricular goals and objectives.

*Curricular Offerings and Policies* — Relationship to purposes, size and scope, and resources, consistency between overall purposes on the one hand, and goals and objectives for specific curricula on the other.

*Evaluation, Planning, and Projection* — Correlations with purposes in terms of achievement and future adjustments, either with regard to curricular and operational issues or to the texts of purposes statements.

### **The Equation Concept**

Music schools and departments are complex. Purposes and operational and curricular structures and achievements have unique relationships in each institution. The equation concept helps to think of vision, mission, goals, objectives, and action plans on one side of an equal sign, and all other operational and curricular elements on the other side. It can be applied to a music school or department in its entirety or to specific discrete elements of its total program. However the equation concept is used, the main questions are always how the various parts are relating to a particular whole, and whether there is a workable balance. For example, if there is a goal to accomplish a particular thing, to what extent are conditions and policies

concerning size and scope, finances, governance and administration, faculty, facilities, library and learning resources, etc., contributing to the achievement of that goal? On the other hand, if it seems problematic to achieve a balanced relationship between purposes, and curricular programs and resources, balancing the equation may mean changing action plans, objectives, goals, mission, vision, or even purposes. Thinking in terms of an equation can promote a deeper understanding of the extent to which there are productive synergies among the various components of a school or department. The NASM standards indicate that these relationships must be managed so that “policies, practices, resources, and programs are mutually supportive, and demonstratively effective in achieving purposes.”

### **Analysis, Decision-Making, and Evaluation**

Purposes statements provide a fundamental means for common analysis of music schools and departments and the curricular programs they offer. There are many approaches to analysis. A simple but effective way to begin is to compare practices and policies in each operational facet and each curricular program against current statements associated with purpose, and develop along the way a sense of the extent to which there is correlation. More advanced approaches involve looking at multiple interactions of elements and programs. Still other approaches use speculations about the effects of proposed changes as the basis for determining the extent to which correlation will increase or diminish if a particular change is put into place. A major analytical question should be: “Do we have the resources to accomplish what we intend?” The answer leads to further questions about the extent to which adequate resources will be forthcoming in the immediate future or the extent to which an inadequacy of resources will be addressed in the future.

Such analyses based in purposes—vision, mission, goals, objectives, action plans—lead to decision-making about next steps to secure and improve a music school or department and its programs. Such analyses create a set of information for prudent decision-making about program expansions and contractions, resource development, and particular applications of energies in the next planning period. As already noted, they may also result in changes.

Clear statements, in-depth understanding of the relationship of purpose statements to operational and curricular issues, attention to the equation concept that develops from understanding of parts-wholes relationships, and the use of all these as the bases for analysis and decision-making create optimum conditions for evaluations that truly serve the advancement of the music school or department or its programs. The results can also provide powerful justifications. What has been developed to serve the community within the music unit can now be used to explain it to others.

Within the music school or department, all sorts of evaluative information can be used to judge progress with regard to purposes and the operational and curricular elements engaged in fulfilling them. Externally, these approaches can document an orderly and structured means of linking accountability to the nature and expected results of the work that is being done. Normally, it is far preferable for musicians to produce such evidence using their own methodologies rather than having outside methodologies imposed upon them.

### **Suggestions**

There are many published methodologies for establishing and using purposes statements. While it may be useful to become familiar with a number of these, NASM strongly recommends that purposes statements be centered in the ways music and music study work as applied to the specific purposes of each school or department. The field of music is deeply involved in setting goals, finding means to reach them, and maintaining continuous evaluation, and has been for centuries.

Usually, it is not necessary to change approaches in these areas that are natural and basic to music in order to convince non-musicians that you are acting responsibly with regard to setting and fulfilling purposes. Instead, start with what exists or what you propose and describe it in basic terms that can be understood by those outside of the field as well as those within it. Establishing statements of purpose and evaluating operations and resources against them should be consistent with the nature of the field and support increasing achievement within the field. If it does not, the approach being used is working against the fulfillment of artistic, intellectual, and curricular purposes associated with music.

Try to seek an appropriate level of detail. Statements that are too broad are insufficient to provide guidance or to be the bases for evaluation. Statements that are too detailed can stifle creativity and inhibit the kind of flexibility essential for dealing with dynamic conditions. At some stages of development it is more appropriate to be detailed, particularly when setting specific objectives. There is no hard and fast rule for what will work in all situations. Each music school or department must find the appropriate level of detail for each particular time and set of conditions.

Use work with purposes to create common understanding of the relationships at work in all aspects of the music unit. This can help to produce a healthy sense of reciprocity among faculty, particularly in music schools with many curricular objectives and degree levels.

Remember that NASM visitors and Commission members will use your statements of purposes as the basis for their review and written analysis of all program aspects. Purposes decisions indicate which specific NASM standards are applicable. They are the basis for NASM's assuring the public that each institution is delivering what it says it is delivering. Your statements of purpose enable the NASM evaluation to be tailored specifically to the nature, purposes, and achievements of your program.

Work with purposes and statements about them in a way that transcends management fads and jargon. Be creative and ensure that whatever approach you take, the result furthers the artistic and intellectual aspirations of your music school or department as a uniquely important entity in the entire field of music.

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### Resources:

Look at the statements on purposes or mission, goals, and objectives in NASM assessments documents such as *The Assessment of Undergraduate Programs in Music* and *Sourcebook for Futures Planning*.

**Music units with further concerns about the intent of these standards  
are invited to contact the [NASM National Office staff](#):**

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