



ANALYSIS OF CENTERS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING MISSION STATEMENTS

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Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to analyse the mission statements content of the 100 top universities' Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The study covers universities all over the world and the CTL's mission statements were collected out of their official websites or brochures. Analysis showed that CTLs try to meet contemporary requirements and aim to support the academic community in several areas, such as: promoting a culture of continuous improvement, delivering several services, providing support to teaching staff, students, faculties of departments, creating a culture of collaboration, networks and connections, fostering innovation and excellence, establishing a student-centered approach, setting inclusion as a priority, forming a research-based and evidence-informed approach, integrating ICT and innovative teaching methods, investing in assessment and reflection, development of educational resources and quality assurance. Furthermore, a large proportion of CTL through their mission promote the overall educational vision of the institution they serve.

Keywords: Centers for Teaching and Learning, mission statements, university support

1. Introduction

Contemporary learning theories alongside the use of technology-enhanced pedagogical tools, call for more active student learning and a shift in the role of modern higher education institutes (Wells & Edwards, 2013).

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Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL) are relatively recent support structures, operating within academic institutions. They first appeared in the second half of the 20th century, but they grew remarkably just in the last two-three decades. According to McDowell et al. (2007), the Centres for Teaching and Learning were proposed as a way for good teaching and learning practices to be recognized, rewarded, and disseminated, as well as a vehicle to support teaching innovation in higher education (Plota & Karalis, 2019). Given the particularity and variation among academic institutions around the world, there are significant differences both in terms of mission, functions, organizational structure (Hurtado & Sork, 2015), and in terms of the name used for these: usually we find them under the name Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) or Centre for Enhancement/Excellence of Teaching and Learning (CETL). Sometimes terms such as "innovation" and "support" are also included.

CTLs are structures that aim to upgrade the education provided by higher education institutions. They try to achieve their goals by strengthening teaching staff, offering support services to students, creating educational networks and partnerships, creating learning communities, fostering and rewarding innovation and quality assurance in education, strengthening research and integrating research data into the educational process, creating learning resources, creatively utilizing ICT, providing counselling and support to teaching staff and students, prioritizing inclusion (see also Benito et al., 2017; Frantz et al., 2004).

According to Bayrak (2020), through the mission statement, a higher education institution presents its reason for existence, how it works, its targeting, and the strategies it uses. More generally, the mission statement defines the purpose, the context of its operation, and the relevant choices made. Organizations with a clearly stated mission statement are expected to be more productive and valuable than others, and mission accomplishment reveals that an organization possesses characteristics that give it an advantage over others (Shogo et al., 2022).

2. Methodological Issues

We based this study on "The World's Top 100 Universities, 2020" and the "QS World University Rankings 2020" (that is the list of top Institutions before Covid19 crisis) and we examined the main priorities of CTLs by looking at their mission statements. Out of these lists, we included the first 100 institutions with a CTL or similar support structure. Data on CTL mission statements used in this study were obtained from their websites or their brochures. We first used a qualitative method to approach this data. To analyze the texts, we first identified the major dimensions included in those mission statements. Then, we determined the statements and messages related to each dimension, and through content analysis we identified the key statements, categorized them (as priorities), placed them into the categories presented below, and added a quantitative step by calculating their percentage. Table 1 presents the percentage of the frequency of these categorized key statements.

3. Presentation of Findings

A percentage of 41% of CTLs declare that their services and actions promote the general purposes and the educational vision of the Institution to which they belong. Statements like *“CEI supports the University’s mission of advancing learning and knowledge...”* (Center for Education Innovation – Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), *“The mission of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Outreach is to work toward this (the University’s) vision”* (Center for Teaching, Learning, & Outreach – California Institute of Technology), *“To help advance cutting edge, evidence-based, impactful teaching and learning practices in ways that support the educational vision of NUS”* (Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning – National University of Singapore) support such a note.

Table 1: Main statements as CTL priorities

Statement	No. of CTLs (total 100)
Promoting the general educational vision of the institution	41
Promoting a culture of continuous improvement	22
Delivering several services	34
Providing support to teaching staff, students, faculties, or departments	66
Creating a culture of collaboration, networks, and connections – a community	56
Fostering innovation and excellence	62
Student-centered approach	15
Inclusion as a priority	29
Research-based and evidence-informed approach	49
Integration of ICT and innovative teaching methods	39
Assessment and reflection	25
Development of educational resources	21
Quality assurance	19

22% of CTLs (about 1/5) claim that they promote a culture of continuous improvement. As a result, we find statements like: *“We focus on continuous improvement and scalability to ensure the learning experiences we create are effective”* (Teaching & Learning Lab – Harvard University), *“The Center for Faculty Advancement (CFA) is devoted to faculty support and development – from recruitment to career advancement – throughout the faculty life cycle”* (The Center for Faculty Advancement - New York University), *“The mission of the Center is to explore ways of improving and updating the function of the university education with a strong emphasis on curriculum, teaching and learning development in a rapidly changing society”* (Center for Research and Development of Higher Education – Osaka University).

1/3 of CTLs (34%) state service delivery as one of their main functions. Accordingly we detect statements such as: *“...by promoting innovative, at-scale solutions and services to our educational community”* (Teaching & Learning Transformation Center – University of Maryland), *“We offer a wide variety of programs, workshops, services and supports to all members of the McMaster community”* (MacPherson Institute – McMaster University), *“Services range from consultations about effective methods to large-scale projects...”* (Center for Research on Learning and Teaching – University of Michigan).

66% of CTLs (2/3) aim to provide support to teaching staff, students, Faculties or Departments. So, in their mission statements we find statements like *“The Centre for Teaching and Learning sits within the University’s Academic Administration Division as a professional service to help departments and faculties facilitate the achievement of their educational ambitions”* (Centre for Teaching and Learning – University of Oxford), *“We are working to provide educational inspiration, training and support...”* (The Centre for Educational Development – Imperial College London), *“We support educators in their development as expert teachers and help students enhance foundational academic skills”* (The Centre for Teaching and Learning – University of Toronto).

More than half of CTLs (56%) say they try to create a culture of collaboration, create networks and connections, and offer services within the institution's educational community or the wider community. That’s why we detect statements such as: *“Our vision is a Cornell teaching community that embraces the research on learning, catalyzes innovative instructional practices, and creates learning environments where every student can thrive”* (Center for Teaching Innovation – Cornell University), *“The Centre is a network incorporating all partners within the university that work on the continuous improvement of academic teaching”* (Centre for Academic Teaching – Utrecht University), *“...building communities which advance educational and research practice...”* (Queen Mary Academy – Queen Mary University of London).

62% of CTLs (almost 2/3) highlight fostering innovation and excellence as one of their main characteristics. In fact, for many CTLs, these terms are even reflected in their name: *Center for Teaching Innovation* (Cornell University), *Center for Education Innovation* (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), *Center for the Promotion of Excellence in Higher Education* (Kyoto University), *Institute for Teaching and Learning Innovation* (University of Queensland), *Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation* (Carnegie Mellon University). Of course, this is also stated in their mission statement: *“The Teaching and Learning Lab (TLL) supports and develops innovative and effective approaches to teaching and learning at the Harvard Graduate School of Education”* (Teaching & Learning Lab – Harvard University), *“Our vision is to inspire excellence and innovation in educational and research practice, supporting Queen Mary’s vision”* (Queen Mary Academy – Queen Mary University of London), *“The core practice of IATL is to support educational innovation through collaborative teaching and student research»* (Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning – University of Warwick).

15% of CTLs emphasize their student-centered approaches through their mission statements: *“We partner with MIT educators, staff, and administrators to create an educational environment where students are academically challenged, actively engaged, and personally supported”* (Teaching and Learning Lab – Massachusetts Institute of Technology), *“We facilitate the development of teaching expertise and learner-centered approaches in teaching...”* (Center for Teaching and Learning – Stanford University), *“Learner Centered Design: We put the learner at the center of everything we create. Through focus groups, user testing, and rapid prototyping we strive to understand the needs of our learners”* (Teaching & Learning Lab – Harvard University).

Among the values displayed by about 1/3 of CTLs (29%) is that of inclusion. We identify statements such as: *“Our particular priorities and areas of focus over 2019-2025 are to ... encourage and facilitate the adoption of inclusive curricula and practices...”* (Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning – University of Cambridge), *“The Poorvu Center supports teachers and learners of all backgrounds and abilities and helps develop practices that promote inclusive teaching”* (Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning – Yale University), *“We promote pedagogy that is inclusive, learner-centered, and research-based”* (Center for Teaching and Learning – Columbia University).

Almost half of the CTLs (49%) emphasize the research dimension of the gained knowledge. Their principles and practices are based in research data, so that they are in line with modern scientific approaches. We find statements such as: *“Our approach is evidence-informed: we review international research on teaching and learning engineering and science and this serves as the basis for our work. This means teachers are provided with a solid foundation which they can use when forming their professional judgements”* (Teaching Support Center – CAPE – Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne), *“Our approach is... evidence-based: Identifying and disseminating teaching and learning strategies supported by research”* (Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning – University of California, Berkeley), *“HEFi’s mission is to support staff to deliver innovative and inclusive research-intensive teaching”* (Higher Education Futures institute – HEFi – University of Birmingham).

Several of the CTLs (39%) emphasize teaching with the help of new technologies, the utilization of educational technology, and the integration of innovative teaching methods, including e-learning. So they incorporate statements such as: *“The CTL provides a range of free services including teaching consultations and observations, and educational technology training and support...”* (Center for Teaching and Learning – Columbia University), *“the new centre consolidates teaching, tutoring, and technology-enabled learning programs offered across the University for FBE staff”* (The Williams Centre for Learning Advancement – University of Melbourne), *“CEED provides joined-up learning and teaching support to staff and students, combining educational development, pedagogical workshops, technology enhanced learning and IT skills, and academic and study skills support.”* (Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development (CEED) - University of St Andrews).

One fourth of CTLs (25%) highlight assessment and reflection as important functions to improve the training provided. Thus we come across statements such as: *“CELT helps instructors become reflective practitioners who assess the effectiveness of their teaching practices...”* (Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching – Purdue University), *“The University Center for Teaching and Learning endeavors to achieve this mission by ... Delivering services for the assessment, measurement and evaluation of teaching...”* (University Center for Teaching and Learning – University of Pittsburgh), *“CRLT carries out this mission through ... Assessment: CRLT focuses on projects that generate evidence useful to faculty and administrators for improving courses or curricula”* (Center for Research on Learning and Teaching - University of Michigan).

About one fifth of CTLs (21%) emphasize and coordinate the creation of educational resources. The development of educational resources is a point of reference, especially for distance education, and can be achieved through sharing. We come across

statements such as: *“The primary functions of the CETL are ... to develop a range of pedagogical and professional development resources for faculty and staff”* (Center for Effective Teaching and Learning – University of Manchester), *“Designed to support UNSW staff, the Teaching Gateway is our official online repository of resources and materials relating to university teaching”* (UNSW Teaching Gateway – University of New South Wales), *“Our mission as the University’s faculty development center is to provide the resources and support needed for faculty at all career stages—and from all areas of the University—to thrive and succeed”* (Center for Faculty Excellence - University of North Carolina).

Finally, approximately one fifth of CTLs (19%) state that they operate in the context of quality assurance of the University's services. This is why we note statements such as: *“CTL can help you advance your teaching and ensure the quality of educational experiences for all of your students”* (Center for Teaching and Learning – Stanford University), *“...for the purposes of enhancing educational quality at Kyoto University, and contributes to the advancement of higher education in Japan and internationally”* (Center for the Promotion of Excellence in Higher Education – Kyoto University), *“To support the mission of the University particularly in its concern for the assurance of high quality in teaching and learning...”* (Centre for Learning Enhancement and Research - Chinese University of Hong Kong).

4. Conclusions

The examination of CTL’s mission statements reveals great diversity in the expression of the goals as well as in the content and structure. This is probably because there is no norm or formal obligation to state the mission in a specific way and certain pieces of content. However, they seem to be in agreement with the general purpose of their establishment. The cultivation of a culture of continuous improvement, the support of teaching and research staff, the support of the student population, and the cooperation with Departments or Sectors belong to the basic mission of the creation of CTLs.

Support structures of the academic community are expected to provide the strengthening of innovation and excellence, the didactic application of research findings, the development of educational resources, the provision of services to teaching staff and students, the exploitation of new technologies and innovative methods.

In this light, the strengthening of inclusion, evaluation, and reflection, the quality assurance are fully harmonized with the mission of CTLs and the general framework of the universities. It is therefore not surprising that a large proportion of CTLs clearly include in their mission the promotion of the overall educational vision of the institution they serve.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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