Visibility of Entry-Level Doctor of Physical Therapy Program's Mission, Vision, and Value Statement and Alignment with Professional Values

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**Recommended Citation**

Vraa, Matthew; Crew-Noble, Coral; Frausto, Orquidia; and Kerimova, Rada (2024) "Visibility of Entry-Level Doctor of Physical Therapy Program's Mission, Vision, and Value Statement and Alignment with Professional Values," *Journal of Innovation in Health Sciences Education*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 1. Available at: [https://soar.usa.edu/jihse/vol1/iss1/1](https://soar.usa.edu/jihse/vol1/iss1/1)

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Abstract

Introduction: This study aimed to assess the accessibility and alignment of core statements (mission, vision, and values) in entry-level Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) programs across the United States with the core beliefs of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA).

Methods: Two independent reviewers searched publicly available resources for the core statements of 271 Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education accredited DPT programs. The statements were cross-referenced against APTA Standards of Practice and Core Values. Descriptive statistical analysis assessed the public availability of program statements and their alignment with APTA core beliefs.

Results: Among the programs, 95.6% had mission statements, 63.5% had assessable vision statements, and 58.7% had easily assessable value statements. The most common APTA core beliefs were Education, Excellence, Responsibility, and Evidence-Based Practice. Altruism, Advocacy, Duty, and Patient and Client Management were less prevalent.

Discussion: The visibility and accessibility of core statements in DPT programs across the United States are low. Given their role in program accreditation, promoting transparency is crucial. Limited visibility hindered the concluding alignment of core statements and APTA core beliefs. Nonetheless, this information can motivate schools to enhance core statements for better alignment. Our study emphasizes the need for increased transparency of core statements in DPT programs, fostering informed decision making.Addressing these issues can facilitate better alignment with APTA principles in physical therapy education and practice.

Key Words: Mission Statement, Vision Statement, Value Statement, Health Education

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Introduction

Organizations understand the significance of a clear vision, purposeful mission, and guiding values in decision making, goal setting, and daily actions. Coherence in these aspects ensures focused efforts toward a shared purpose, giving the organization direction and significance (Allison, 2019; Gurley et al., 2015; Masland, 1985; Slate et al., 2008). Mission, vision, and values are considered foundational pillars for enterprises and academic programs, anchoring and guiding them even in times of rapid change (Bowen, 2018; Carey, 2019; Jonyo et al., 2018; Macleod, 2016; Scott & Petrosino, 2008; Stemler et al., 2011). Accredited academic programs, including entry-level Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) programs in the United States, must incorporate these core statements to define their direction and prioritize competing interests (AdvancED, 2006; Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education, 2020; Hiatt, 2006; Kuh et al., 2010; Ozdem, 2011).

The importance of mission, vision, and values is well-documented in the literature. A mission statement succinctly expresses an organization's purpose and intent, while a vision statement captures its desired future state, motivating excellence in employees (Eşi, 2016; Stemler et al., 2011). The value statement outlines the core principles governing the organization's culture and serves as a moral compass for the organization and its employees (Eşi, 2016; Stemler et al., 2011). Ensuring the accessibility of these statements to all stakeholders is crucial for fostering alignment and understanding (Eşi, 2016; Stemler et al., 2011).

This research study examines the accessibility of mission, vision, and value statements in entry-level DPT programs in the United States, which play a crucial role in shaping the future physical therapy workforce (Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education, 2020). As graduates must attend a Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE)-accredited institution to practice as physical therapists in the United States, the alignment between these programs and the broader profession is significant.

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) sets core values and standards of practice for physical therapists, emphasizing their embodiment by all members (American Physical Therapy Association, 2019, 2021). While CAPTE requires programs to have mission statements, it does not explicitly mandate alignment between the APTA core ideas and a program's core belief documents (mission, vision, and value statements) (Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education, 2020). However, given APTA’s influential role in guiding the profession, it is reasonable to expect some alignment between educational programs and the organization's core beliefs. This research aimed to fill a critical knowledge gap by investigating the degree of concordance between DPT programs and APTA core ideals and the accessibility of core belief documents to prospective students on program websites. The findings will contribute significantly to understanding the correlation between professional education and the fundamental beliefs of the physical therapy profession.

Review of Literature

The DPT is crucial in the healthcare system and has gained increasing significance in our rapidly changing society. Over the last few decades, the physical therapist degree has evolved from a bachelor's degree to a master's
and currently a doctorate (Grignon et al., 2014). As of December 2022, there are 271 accredited (entry-level) DPT programs available in the United States, making transparency about program core beliefs vital in attracting students.

Mission Statements

Mission statements are pivotal in determining an organization's purpose and driving its collective efforts (Macleod, 2016). When crafting a mission statement, maintaining conciseness and clearly articulating the organization's reason for existence is essential (Bowen, 2018; Martin et al., 2018; Scott & Petrosino, 2008). An effective mission statement should be short, simple, actionable, and measurable, providing a specific and focused view of the organization's principles.

Stemler et al.'s (2011) research reinforced the significance of school mission statements in conveying the institution's purpose and emphasis on learning. The study highlighted the importance of promoting mission statements online, providing easily accessible, fast, and reliable data for informed decision making. Their research aligns with previous studies showing that mission statements can be systematically and reliably coded using content analysis techniques (Stemler et al., 2011). Additionally, Jonyo et al.'s (2018) related study found a significant correlation \( R = .796 \) between organizational performance and the presence of mission and vision statements. This collective evidence underscores the value of mission statements as concise declarations that effectively communicate an organization's core goals, mission, and values, fostering a shared purpose and direction for enhancing overall performance and effectiveness. Accrediting bodies, private, public, and enterprise organizations also recognize the importance of mission statements in shaping and guiding their endeavors (AdvancED, 2006; Cognia, 2022).

Expanding on the significance of mission, vision, and values, Campbell and Tumin's (2021) research shed light on their vital role in student recruitment, particularly regarding minority representation in medical education. The research revealed that mission statements with bold and assertive social stances were particularly effective in attracting minority students \( (p = .003) \), while institutions that explicitly addressed diversity in their statements experienced a higher proportion of minority students \( (p = .047) \). These findings underscore the necessity of carefully formulating mission, vision, and value statements to positively influence diversity and inclusivity within the student body. Additionally, they emphasize the role of these statements in enhancing recruitment strategies and ultimately fostering a more inclusive and diverse learning environment, making the institution more responsive to the needs of all students.

Vision Statements

Institutional vision and mission statements endure over time and serve as reminders of an organization's unique identity and legacy (Abelman & Molina, 2006). A vision statement articulates the organization's future aspirations (Fumasoli et al., 2015) and reflects the nature of the learning community, defining the institution's perceived purpose, priorities, and promises (Abelman, Atkin, et al., 2007; McQuestion & Abelman, 2004). To be effective, a vision statement should be clear, concrete, compelling, and capable of inspiring action while uniting the key stakeholders, including students, faculty members, and administrators, who crafted it. Despite being future-oriented, vision
statements are rooted in the institution's historical, fiscal, political, and cultural contexts (Abelman, Atkin, et al., 2007; Jette et al., 2020; McQuestion & Abelman, 2004). As living documents, they require regular review and revision to address evolving needs, challenges, and opportunities in the changing world. Vision statements endow institutions with distinctive purpose, coherence, direction, and meaning, differentiating them in a competitive marketplace (Abelman, Atkin, et al., 2007; McQuestion & Abelman, 2004).

Educators must be familiar with and integrate the school's vision into daily operations. However, in a study of 109 schools, including private and public colleges and universities, Abelman, Atkin, et al. (2007) uncovered a significant disconnect between institutional vision and academic advising operations. Many vision statements did not effectively guide student services, were rarely utilized during advisor training or advising activities, and were deemed inaccurate reflections of actual advising operations by those in charge (Abelman, Atkin, et al., 2007). These findings reinforced the work of other scholars, suggesting that vision statements should be shared with individuals to foster ownership and responsibility in achieving the shared vision (Abelman et al., 2007; Kantabutra, 2010; Keller, 1995; Posner et al., 1985; Stemler et al., 2011).

Consistent with effectiveness research, more successful schools actively promoted and shared their vision statements (Renihan et al., 1986; Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Sackney, 2007; Scheerens, 1990, 1991; Stemler et al., 2011; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Consequently, it was recommended that institutional vision statements be integrated into advising operations, ensuring easy accessibility for students, reminding them of the institution's commitment and the quality of education they could expect (Abelman, Atkin, et al., 2007; Abelman, Dalessandro, et al., 2007; Abelman & Molina, 2006; Kantabutra, 2010; Keller, 1995).

**Value Statements**

The value statement represents the principles or "moral compass" that guides the advancement of the mission and vision, with the intent to drive behaviors (Donnellan, 2013; Liu et al., 2022; Macleod, 2016). Simultaneously, an organization attracts customers and employees who share similar values, aligning their approaches and the enterprise (Bravo et al., 2012; Chun, 2005; Foster et al., 2010). Hence, an organization's mission and vision are central to the shared values shaping the organizational culture (Henson, 2018). These values serve as unofficial standards and behavioral guidelines, functioning as the moral compass to advance the mission and vision (Calder, 2014; Sivakumar, 2009; Tyler et al., 2008).

Moreover, institutions can use their values to inform their beliefs, goals, and objectives, reducing potential misunderstandings or misalignments in morals, values, or perspectives (Chowdhury, 2016; Kopaneva & Sias, 2015). These values also help define a healthy organizational culture and what is considered “success” for the organization (Kopaneva & Sias, 2015; Sari & Pradhana, 2018). However, a disconnect could emerge between daily activities and the mission and values when discussions of profits lack intentional focus, leading to an unhealthy organizational culture and internal problems (Macleod, 2016; Michell et al., 2001; Mohammad, 2017). Such misalignment could result in external issues, including a poor public image, low donor retention, and negative perceptions from external stakeholders (David et al., 2016; de Chernatony, 1999; Kopaneva & Sias, 2015).

https://doi.org/10.46409/003.YABP5141

*Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2024*

*ISSN: 2831-6576*
Additionally, a clearly articulated vision can significantly influence student learning outcomes (Gurley et al., 2015; Mombourquette, 2017; Murphy et al., 2007; Seashore Louis et al., 2010).

**Summary**

The significance of clear mission, vision, and value statements cannot be overstated for organizations, including colleges and universities, because they serve as the bedrock of purpose and direction (Alegre et al., 2018; Allison, 2018, 2019; Bebell & Stemler, 2013; Camelia & Marius, 2013). These three essential statements act as a roadmap, guiding strategic decision making and fostering a sense of identity and direction among students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders (Bebell & Stemler, 2013; Hiatt, 2006). Extensive research supports the idea that institutions with well-defined missions, visions, and values are more likely to achieve long-term success, with alignment among these components positively impacting organizational and student performance (Allison, 2018, 2019; Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Desmidt et al., 2011; Jonyo et al., 2018; Ozdem, 2011; Renihan et al., 1986; Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Sackney, 2007; Scheerens, 1990; Slate et al., 2008; Stemler et al., 2011). In higher education, the development of a strategic plan hinges on a clear understanding of the institution's mission, vision, and values, as these core statements significantly influence organizational culture (Babnik et al., 2014; Cortés Sánchez, 2018; Jonyo et al., 2018; Masland, 1985; Ozdem, 2011; Warter, 2019). Ensuring that the mission, vision, and values form a cohesive trinity is crucial, because they work together to create a robust foundation for the institution. Alignment and mutual support among all three components are essential, fostering a sense of unity and purpose throughout the institution and guiding strategic decision making, providing a clear sense of direction and identity for stakeholders. Making these beliefs visible to all stakeholders ensures accountability and transparency in the institution's actions.

**Methods**

**Sample**

This study consisted of 271 entry-level DPT programs in the United States, accredited by CAPTE as of December 2022. The Northwest University Institutional Review Board approved the research on January 21, 2022 (#2117).

**Study Design**

The selection process included consulting the online list of CAPTE accredited DPT programs, publicly available at https://aptaapps.apta.org/accreditedschoolsdirectory/captedirectory.aspx. Between July and December 2022, the researchers conducted a review of 271 CAPTE-accredited physical therapy programs in the United States. The research team visited each institution's website and accessed publicly available documents, including DPT program web pages and handbooks, to extract the program's mission, vision, and values. Specific details about each program, such as the university/college name, website address, and the aforementioned statements, were recorded electronically. The study focused solely on the entry-level DPT program statements to ensure alignment with the program's daily practices and beliefs, avoiding larger institution or department-level statements and improving congruency with the APTA core ideals compared to the larger institutional statements.

The mission, vision, and value statements were then coded using the APTA Standards
of Practice for Physical Therapy (American Physical Therapy Association, 2019) and APTA Core Values for the Physical Therapist and Physical Therapist Assistant (American Physical Therapy Association, 2021) as reference points for the quasi-thematic analysis. These documents had operational definitions, avoiding possible bias and subjectivity associated with qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Guest et al., 2020; Mackieson et al., 2019). Once each entry-level DPT program's mission, vision, and value statements were read, one or more APTA core ideals were assigned to each statement. The core ideals are Accountability, Administration of Physical Therapy Services, Advocacy, Altruism, Collaboration, Community Responsibility, Compassion and Caring, Duty, Education, Ethical/Legal Considerations, Evidence-Based Practice, Excellence, Integrity, Patient and Client Management, Research, and Social Responsibility (American Physical Therapy Association, 2019, 2021). Two reviewers independently appraised each program's statements and coded them using the APTA core ideals as the reference criteria either directly (using specific words) or indirectly (based on the theme of the statements). Disagreements between the reviewers were resolved through discussion and consensus. If consensus could not be reached, a third reviewer was involved in resolving any remaining differences in the coding.

The data were recorded via an electronic form and auto-tabulated, and the percentage of responses was expressed scientifically. This allowed for easy comparison of the data results showing the total number and percentage of mission, vision, and value statements available on program websites and the total number of missing statements. Additionally, the spreadsheet included the total number of times each core belief was directly or indirectly articulated in the statements and the corresponding percentage for each belief across all programs. The quantitative data were analyzed, and conclusions were drawn based on the findings.

Results

Among the 271 CAPTE accredited DPT programs across the United States, a substantial majority of 259 programs (95.6%) had publicly available information about their mission on their respective websites. Vision statements were noted in 172 programs (63.5%), while 159 programs (58.7%) provided descriptions of their values.

We used the APTA Standards of Practice for Physical Therapy and APTA Core Values for the Physical Therapist and Physical Therapist Assistant (American Physical Therapy Association, 2019, 2021) as the coding framework to analyze these program statements. The resulting classification of mission, vision, and value statements based on APTA categories is presented in Table 1.

Additional calculations were conducted to identify the most frequently referenced APTA classifications within the available mission, vision, or values. Notably, the classification of Education was the most prevalent, appearing in 95.0% of the schools’ mission, vision, or values. Following closely were Excellence (84.2%), Social Responsibility (82.6%), Evidence-Based Practice (79.9%), and Community Responsibility (79.9%). The other classifications ranged from 51.0% to 72.2%, with Accountability (41.7%), Patient and Client Management (40.5%), Duty (40.2%), Advocacy (38.6%), and Altruism (34.7%) showing relatively lower frequencies.
Table 1

Core Belief Classification Found Within Program Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APTA Core Belief Classification</th>
<th>Mission Statement n (%)</th>
<th>Vision Statements n (%)</th>
<th>Value Statements n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>11 (4.2)</td>
<td>16 (9.3)</td>
<td>97 (61.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration of Physical Therapy Services</td>
<td>183 (70.7)</td>
<td>111 (64.5)</td>
<td>61 (38.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>49 (18.9)</td>
<td>39 (22.7)</td>
<td>35 (22.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>18 (6.9)</td>
<td>15 (8.7)</td>
<td>76 (47.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>92 (35.5)</td>
<td>62 (36.0)</td>
<td>103 (64.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Responsibility</td>
<td>159 (61.4)</td>
<td>95 (55.2)</td>
<td>79 (49.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion and Caring</td>
<td>98 (37.8)</td>
<td>43 (25.0)</td>
<td>108 (67.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty</td>
<td>38 (14.7)</td>
<td>30 (17.4)</td>
<td>64 (40.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>211 (81.5)</td>
<td>150 (87.2)</td>
<td>80 (50.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical/Legal Considerations</td>
<td>90 (34.7)</td>
<td>31 (18.0)</td>
<td>47 (29.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-Based Practice</td>
<td>162 (62.5)</td>
<td>59 (34.3)</td>
<td>68 (42.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence</td>
<td>136 (52.5)</td>
<td>84 (48.8)</td>
<td>139 (87.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>21 (8.1)</td>
<td>12 (7.0)</td>
<td>118 (74.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient and Client Management</td>
<td>72 (27.8)</td>
<td>19 (11.0)</td>
<td>37 (23.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>118 (45.6)</td>
<td>90 (52.3)</td>
<td>57 (35.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>145 (56.0)</td>
<td>87 (50.6)</td>
<td>127 (79.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of coded statements (mission, vision, or values) within each core belief classification by the total number of available statements (mission, vision, or values) found.

Discussion

We aimed to measure the accessibility of mission, vision, and value statements in 271 CAPTE accredited DPT programs across the United States. The results revealed that 95.6% of programs had publicly available mission statements, while vision and value statements were present in 63.5% and 58.7% of programs, respectively. Notably, many programs did not make their value statements publicly accessible.

Interpreting the findings, the prevalence of mission statements is promising because they define an institution's purpose and direction. However, the limited availability of vision and value statements raises concerns. Vision and value statements play a crucial role in setting aspirational goals, while value statements demonstrate an institution's commitment to critical principles such as diversity and social responsibility. Therefore, the absence of these statements could potentially impact a prospective student's ability to understand an institution's objectives and values.

We also aligned program statements with the APTA Standards of Practice and Core Values. Education, Excellence, Social Responsibility, Evidence-Based Practice, and Community Responsibility emerged as prominent themes in the statements. Conversely, Accountability, Patient and Client Management, Duty, Advocacy, and Altruism were less frequently represented, indicating areas where programs might enhance alignment with APTA principles.
Several limitations should be acknowledged. A significant proportion of programs did not provide publicly accessible value statements, limiting the depth of analysis regarding alignment with APTA Core Values. Overlapping APTA core beliefs may have affected the specificity of the analysis. Moreover, the study focused exclusively on program-level statements without considering potential variations at higher institutional levels.

Future research could explore the reasons behind the limited accessibility of program statements and investigate potential trends among different types or locations of institutions. Artificial intelligence or natural language processing thematic analysis software could provide an objective perspective on aligning program statements and APTA principles, reducing subjective bias. Moreover, conducting similar research on other healthcare educational programs could shed light on whether specific professional education programs better align with their respective professional organizations. However, direct comparisons across professions or educational programs should be cautiously approached. Nonetheless, our study emphasized the significance of transparent and accessible mission, vision, and value statements in fostering a sense of direction and purpose for institutions and guiding prospective students in their decision-making process. Addressing the identified gaps in accessibility and alignment can improve institutional effectiveness.

Conclusion

Our study of entry-level DPT programs in the United States revealed that while most programs make their mission statements publicly available, there is less reporting of vision and value statements on easily accessible platforms. This disparity may have implications for student enrollment and program performance. To address this concern, we recommend that accreditation standards mandate the public display of mission, vision, and values on the program's online homepage, similar to required student achievement outcomes. Such transparency enhances accountability and facilitates informed decision making for prospective students. Additionally, aligning these core statements with the principles advocated by the APTA fosters a unified and inclusive educational environment. Moving forward, institutions should strive to ensure the visibility and alignment of their core statements with APTA principles, thereby promoting a sense of purpose and direction in physical therapy education and practice. By taking these measures, academic programs can better serve their stakeholders and contribute to the ongoing advancement of the physical therapy profession.

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Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2024

ISSN: 2831-6576
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