



CREDO

TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

VALUES REPORT

Executive Summary

Background. This report summarizes the forum group findings conducted as part of Texas Lutheran University's Strategic Planning process.

Context. The purpose of the forums was two-fold: to engage the campus in values brainstorming exercises, and to equip the planning teams with recommendations on values.

Method. Credo professionals facilitated two 60-minute forum sessions with various Texas Lutheran University stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and board of trustee members. Between the two forums, about 80 people participated. These participants represented a wide array of student groups, academic programs, departments, and service areas. Texas Lutheran University staff invited and organized the participant list.

Purpose. Credo professionals prepared this executive report for President Cottrell and the strategic planning committee at Texas Lutheran University.

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Themes

Students. Students are the clear focus of Texas Lutheran University faculty and staff. Over the course of the values forums, being “student-centered” and “student-oriented” were regularly discussed. Faculty and staff are clearly invested in student well-being and ensuring a holistically positive experience for students.

Learning and Growing. Participants defined the culture at TLU as a place where students could “learn and grow” while engaging in an academically rigorous and challenging curriculum. Simultaneously, students enjoy the autonomy needed to explore, discover, and embrace passions. Feedback from the forum groups made it clear that at TLU, student interests are put first, student voices are acknowledged and learning opportunities are abundant.

Resources & Relationships. Participants consistently noted the abundance of resources and support available to students, specifically noting the small student to faculty ratio and “close-knit” student relationships with faculty. It is evident, as one participant shared, that “students matter.” When asked what value the institution consistently adheres to in the face of obstacles, participants provided answers such as “serve students first,” “student well-being,” and “student success.”

Community. Community also rose as a vital element of Texas Lutheran University’s culture. A clear and consistent defining characteristic included connections with others, describing the TLU community experience as “welcoming,” “personal touch,” “caring,” and “family.” It is apparent that members of the TLU community are committed to each other, students, its liberal arts tradition, and Lutheran heritage.

Recommendations

Credo recommends that the leadership and community at TLU seek clarity around:

Lutheran identity. When asked, “What does being Lutheran mean at Texas Lutheran University?” responses widely varied. While some groups offered answers revolving around community, exploration, inclusivity, service, tradition, and vocation, others offered “not much,” “lack of understanding of what Lutheran means,” and “the ‘L’ is limiting to donors and students.” While “faith” and “faith-based” were frequent cultural characteristics, there does not seem to be a clear understanding of how the Lutheran identity is lived out at Texas Lutheran University. Credo recommends further exploration around what “faith” and “Lutheran” means to the TLU community. Furthermore, Credo encourages intentional marketing and communication of those meanings to all stakeholders, including prospective students, alumni, donors, partners, faculty, staff, students, and other constituents.

Commitment to diversity and inclusion. While many participants noted diversity and inclusion as strengths and defining characteristics of the Texas Lutheran University culture, others noted them as a “work in progress.” Additional comments included that the “faculty and staff demographics do not represent student population” and that TLU has an “opportunity to be more inclusive with student organizations and clubs.” While “commitment to diversity” was listed as a strength for one group, another offered that “donors think added diversity threatens Lutheran heritage.”

Location value. Several comments about Texas Lutheran University’s location surfaced throughout the values forums. While some conversations and comments were positive (i.e., “Central Texas!!”), others offered that “Sequin doesn’t have much for students,” and TLU flies “under the radar.” Credo recommends that Texas Lutheran University explores unique elements of its location in Sequin and Central Texas and leverages “students believe we are rural” into opportunities to attract students.

Appendix A | Forum Questions

1. What defines the culture at TLU?
2. What are TLU's greatest strengths?
3. What do our students and stakeholders believe about us?
4. What value does our institution consistently adhere to in the face of obstacles?
5. Consider your favorite TLU story -- one that captures your experience here. Pair it down to one word or term.
6. What does being Lutheran mean at TLU?
7. What do you think TLU's three core values are?

Appendix B | Definitions

Credo co-founder Joanne Soliday offered the below definitions in her book *Surviving to Thriving: A Planning Framework for Leaders of Private Colleges & Universities*:

- **Mission:** A statement of **what you do**, the purpose you serve. The mission is often focused around an unmet need in higher education.
- **Values:** Values are **why you do what you do**. Values are foundational, support the mission, and provide principles that guide your work.
- **Value Proposition:** This is the perception of cost as compared to outcomes. Schools with a strong value proposition are not necessarily inexpensive, but their cost is perceived as an excellent value for the outcomes provided by the experience.
- **Vision:** A statement on **where you are going**. Vision gives you a clear and preferred picture of an aspirational future, the desired experience at your institution. Vision has its foundation in mission, is informed by values and positioning, and provides direction.

Core Values

What do you believe are TLU's 3 core values?

