



UNITY CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Identity Piece

September 26, 2017
16341 South Park Ave
South Holland, IL

Mission Statement & Values

Mission Statement

This mission statement will be a public declaration that we will use to describe our founding purpose and major commitments—i.e., what we do and why we do it.

UCA's mission is to empower a diverse community, united by Christ, to achieve excellence in education for the flourishing of all creation.

Values

These values come out of our mission, further explaining what we do and how we will do it. For now, we are proposing that we document our values and identify a vision statement later.

Empowered

Our students graduate with increased confidence and clarity about their future. The UCA learning process encourages all students to recognize and develop their unique gifts and to boldly use them for the good of others.

Diverse

We seek to admit and serve students and families from all social, economic, ecumenical and cultural backgrounds. A diverse learning community deeply committed to one another stands as a powerful testament to the Gospel and prepares students to seek restoration in a world marred by conflict and injustice.

United

The school we create together enthusiastically affirms the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it is by this hope alone that we seek unity in diversity. The love of Christ compels us to work together for the restoration of this world.

Excellence

As a result of our obedience to Christ, we promote relational, rigorous, and relevant scholarship that integrates faith and learning. Students and teachers must invest all the knowledge, skills, and gifts they have been given so as to glorify God. The pursuit of excellence is worship.

Flourishing

The purpose of education is ultimately wrapped up in God's mandate for human beings to create, improve, and seek the fulfillment of His creation. We do this by learning, working, building culture, and having faith that God will finish His good work.

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Theological Foundations

All of education is the discovery of who God is, who we are in relationship to Him, and how He has created us to serve in His world. We believe that this discovery process must be undertaken in light of God's creation, our Fall, Christ's redemption, and the world's eventual restoration.

What happened at Creation?

When God created the world, all things were good and everything was in its proper place. He created a world teeming with life and the potential for flourishing. Our first parents were created and given charge over the world and all its potential. Human beings were given control over the ingredients and processes necessary to create countless wonders of culture. We believe that education ought to flow out of this potential as well as the recognition that God created humans in His own image.¹ This recognition has important implications for education, primarily that the process must not violate the dignity, capacity, and relational nature of human beings.

What happened because of the Fall?

Our first parents were not satisfied to work in the Garden of Eden and be with God. They sought power apart from God instead. Even now we rebel and are alienated.² After the Fall, our relationship with God, ourselves, each other, and the earth was distorted by our sin. The Fall has had profound implications for all of life, including the realm of education. Our understanding of truth, memories, motives for seeking knowledge, and interpretations of people and events are clouded by sin. Because of this, UCA's educational program is built on the foundation of returning to "Square One."³ We must continually return to the knowledge that we are finite. We must say to ourselves and to each other, "we are not in control." From this point, we can admit that while finite, we serve an infinite God who has created us to seek after Him and the good

¹ Genesis 1:26-31

² Genesis 3:1-19

³ Peterson, E. H., Lyster, J., Sharon, J., & Santucci, P. (1997). *Subversive spirituality*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans.

things He has given us. Approaching education from this perspective gives us a freedom that we could otherwise never know. We are free to boldly seek, wonder, question, and experiment. Another result of the Fall that has had a profound impact on education is our bent toward individualism. We were not created to be alone or to live unto ourselves. Through God's covenant of grace, "we are the Lord's"⁴ and "we are members one of another."⁵ We are members of a covenant with God and because of this, we are exhorted to offer spiritual encouragement⁶, bear one another's burdens⁷, and speak truth to one another⁸. We can seek this type of community only because of Christ's Resurrection.

What does Christ's Redemption mean for us?

Thankfully, our rebellion and ultimate powerlessness was not the last part of God's plan. Jesus Christ came to earth as God incarnate. He is the Word. He is the Light. In Him all truth, beauty, goodness, and justice is found. Our relationships with God, ourselves, each other, and the earth are redeemed through faith in Christ's Resurrection. This is precisely why UCA orients its entire educational program around the person of Christ. We pursue learning acknowledging that in Him all things hold together, even things like justice and mercy. We also acknowledge that God does not carry out his plan only through the lives of those who profess His name. UCA will not dismiss the contributions of non-Christians, whose work can reveal many truths about God's world. We do not make arbitrary distinctions between sacred and secular Truth. We celebrate all Truth. After the Resurrection, God also sent the Holy Spirit to counsel and lead us. Through the Spirit's guidance, we can seek truth, beauty, goodness, and justice. "Square One" humility reminds us that this pursuit is still fraught with difficulty but we look forward to the day when we will see the fullness of God and His eternal plan.

⁴ Romans 14:7-8

⁵ Ephesians 4:25

⁶ Hebrews 10:24-25

⁷ Galatians 6:2

⁸ 1 John 1:8

What does God's promise of Restoration look like now?

“Whatever is foreseen in joy must be lived out from day to day.”⁹ The education we strive to live out at UCA is rooted in the joy of God's promise to restore this world in glorious excellence. Part of being God's own is to participate in the restoration of His world even now. He created us with unique abilities, loves, and experiences to be part of this process. God's relationship to us is a powerful reminder of how we ought to go about education, which is a deeply relational endeavor. All those involved with UCA – teachers, students, assistants, families, bus drivers, coaches, cooks, board members and more – get to work together to build a school striving toward the truth of Christ.

The UCA Vision for Christian Education

What does a distinctly Christian education offer?

UCA exists to glorify, enjoy, and serve God through learning. We believe that God is pleased when we rigorously pursue an education that nurtures our mind, body, and spirit. We believe that education is the pursuit of Truth, beauty, goodness, and justice, all of which is perfected in the identity and work of Christ. Scripture shows that God created humans with purpose.¹⁰ The grand Biblical narrative reveals that humans were created to worship, to work, and to enjoy God and His Creation. Part of the wonder of creation is that God uniquely created each of us with different abilities, loves, and to have different experiences. Through God's continued revelation and work of the Holy Spirit, we get to glimpse how He might utilize the particularities of our humanity to help carry out His good work. This is the very reason why UCA exists as a Christian learning community. To this end, education at UCA will prompt us to discover who God is, who we are in relationship to Him, and how He created us to serve in His world. We believe that learning for this purpose provides enjoyment and enables us to carry out our vocation with confidence and meaning.

⁹ "X" by Wendell Berry, from *A Timbered Choir*.

¹⁰ Genesis 1:26-31

Why would students want to participate in an education like this?

We believe that human beings naturally wonder about the purpose and connectedness between themselves and God's world. Anyone who has spent time with toddlers ought to recognize this desire in the incessant "why" questioning. Moreover, the most learned minds throughout history have boldly asked "why." Educating ourselves, then, is a way of honoring our natural inclinations by trying to find unity in the diversity of God's world. The UCA learning community will be structured in such a way that students have the resources and relationships to pursue their inquiries.

What does the name Unity mean?

We are Unity Christian Academy because we aspire to live out the truth of 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul describes the value and purpose of Christ's diverse body. Enlightened by the Spirit, we see that the diversity of gifts found in community all find their unity of purpose in pursuing Christ. At UCA, this is reflected in our understanding of the equality of vocations to which God will call our students. As a Christian learning community, we seek to push students toward excellence in a variety of fields. We believe that the electrician, the farmer, the musician, the trash collector, the lawyer, and the academic hold equally important positions in God's Kingdom and that God will use servants in these areas to accomplish great things. We must be forever clear, however, that pursuing excellence in any vocation must not be considered an end in and of itself. All vocations reflect an equally divine purpose "on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God, of being done humbly 'as to the Lord'."¹¹ Furthermore, the name Unity is meant to reflect the microcosm that is South Holland. South Holland is a community defined by socioeconomic, vocational, racial, and ecumenical diversity. UCA wishes to celebrate and embody this reality.

How does the UCA learning community view Truth?

As a Christian learning community, we must be serious about the pursuit of Truth. We start this pursuit by acknowledging what Jesus said about Himself. He proclaimed "I am the way, the truth, and the life"¹² and invited people to follow Him during His earthly ministry. Jesus

¹¹ Lewis, C. S. (1996). *The weight of glory and other addresses*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹² John 14:6

invites us to see that Truth is personal. We also echo the Gospel of John. Speaking of Christ, John writes that “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”¹³ Christians seeking Truth are not excused from seriously studying diverse subjects like Literature, Biology, Mathematics, Politics, Astronomy, and the list goes on. The life of Jesus also demonstrates that Truth is relational. Once they heard of Jesus’ ministry, many people sought Him out. A study of the Gospel reveals that even as people pursued Jesus, He, the Truth, pursued them. Similarly, as we study God’s world, Truth is not merely a set of propositions to which we assent. Truth acts upon those who seek it. We cannot help but be changed when we encounter the Truth of Christ. In a learning community, if we understand Truth as relational, we allow ourselves to be transformed by the things we learn. For example, if we learn that history is full of distant events with no bearing on our lives today, we have not heard the Truth. Lastly, Truth is communal. Paul describes the preeminence of Christ in his letter to the Colossians. Christ “is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” We cling to this Truth as a diverse learning community. There are plenty of examples of things seemingly not holding together. History, world events, and our own experience testify to the shallow ignorance and conflict that can result when diverse people attempt to relate to one another. We believe that “if truth is personal and communal, then our search for truth – and truth’s search for us – will neither actively suppress nor passively concede our differences, but will invite them to interact in faithful relationship.”¹⁴ We believe that the Truth of Christ will hold the UCA learning community together and prepare us to use our gifts for the transformation and flourishing of all creation.

What kind of learning community does UCA hope to be?

We have a model for community in the Trinity Himself. God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit abide in community, each glorifying the other. Abiding in community, though, must be understood in terms of Christ’s work. He came to a physical place and preached the Truth of God’s Kingdom. Beyond preaching, His message was carried out through tangible acts of grace toward the “Others” in His midst. Jesus sought out Samaritans, sinners, women, tax collectors, and the marginalized while also challenging the position of the powerful. Submitting

¹³ John 1:3

¹⁴ Palmer, P. J. (1993). *To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

to the Will of God, Christ offered Himself to death so that we might be redeemed in God's sight. Christ's death is an example of the economy in God's Kingdom. The way up is down. The weak are lifted up. Furthermore, we are reminded that we cannot have true community unless we come to see the "Others" in our midst as God's glorious creation. The UCA community seeks education as part of the process of knowing each other in this way. Jesus' ministry of tangible service is also the foundation for UCA's desire to be change agents in the community. We believe that learning is deeply intertwined with action.

Why does UCA desire to be deeply rooted in community?

An essential part of what it means to be human is a strong connection to place. The Bible is replete with examples that place is a crucial medium through which God interacts with His people — through inhabitation, worship, promise, and blessing. God created us for connection to physical spaces and the neighbors who inhabit the same spaces as us. We believe that the desire for connection to place is even more clear when contrasted to the messages of our current age, which offers the illusions of infinite mobility and technological self-sufficiency. It is not an accident that amidst an increasingly optimizable, individualistic culture more people report depression, anxiety, and a lack of purpose than ever before. We believe that flourishing is most possible when human institutions, like schools, are intertwined with a particular place, a community. UCA's "place" is South Holland and the broader south Chicagoland area. In founding UCA, we have challenged ourselves to create a uniquely contextual learning environment with curriculum and activities that reflect the identity and needs of our community. UCA is founded upon the conviction that flourishing is dependent on our ability to seek out the people, places, and institutions of our community as rich resources. We also desire to be a resource to the community, capable of providing a place for authentic dialogue on important topics and generating valuable solutions to community problems. We desire that UCA will be a "place" in the Biblical sense. The students, teachers, and administrators of UCA will labor together on behalf of the community, creating a place where God is known and enjoyed, where His people know, enjoy, and serve each other, and out of this joy, share abundance with our community.

What does discipleship through education look like?

Given the purpose of education at UCA (to seek the truth of Christ and how we are called to live in the world) it is natural to view the educational process through the lens of discipleship. At UCA, we understand discipleship as the process of placing oneself under the authority of another in order to learn and grow. That said, we desire that all members of the UCA community grow as ever more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, the only person worthy of and able to disciple us. Teachers at UCA do not seek to teach students as their own disciples. Rather, they develop relationships with students and together seek to become more like Christ. To this end, Education at UCA is not primarily something that teachers do and students receive. Learning is not a top-down endeavor. All members of the UCA community must have authentic opportunities to shape the learning process. Education is a dynamic process whereby all members of the UCA learning community pursue truth, beauty, goodness, and justice. Furthermore, discipline at UCA is viewed through the lens of discipleship. We believe that the goal of any disciplinary action should never be compliance alone. We seek the transformation of teachers so that they might have the mind, heart, and life of Christ—that is, to be Responsive Disciples.

What does UCA believe about educational excellence?

As a result of our obedience to Christ, we promote relational, rigorous, and relevant scholarship that integrates faith and learning. We believe that seeking excellence in education is a form of worship which also has practical outcomes. Students and teachers must invest all the knowledge, skills, and gifts they have been given so as to glorify God. The motivation for pursuing excellence matters. While educational excellence often does produce positive outcomes, UCA does not exist primarily to ensure high standardized test scores, get students into college, or help students get a good job. We believe schools that exist primarily for these reasons sacrifice the fullness, authenticity, and joy of learning. We do believe, however, that UCA exists so that students can discover who God is, who we are in relationship to Him, and how He has created us to serve in His world. We desire that students graduate from UCA with confidence and clarity about how their loves, abilities, and achievements coincide with the Kingdom's greatest needs.

What do we believe about the student?

At UCA, we believe that God created each and every student with dignity, value, and intelligence, and that He calls each of them to important work within His kingdom. We also believe that God created them with unique abilities, loves, and experiences. We recognize and encourage the power inherent in this truth. UCA exists so that students are better able to use their power more excellently for the cause of Christ. Fulfilling this goal necessitates that students are given many opportunities to participate in meaningful Kingdom work now, while they are in high school. UCA desires to provide an educational program that connects learning to work and worship. Students will get the opportunity to bring their learning and unique abilities, loves, and experiences to bear on important topics and problems. UCA will build on students' creativity, desire for purpose, and motivation for mastery by providing meaningful and appropriately challenging learning opportunities.

What do we believe about the teacher?

At UCA, the teacher serves as a guide through curriculum, co-learner with students, and imitator of Christ. As disciples of Christ, teachers can live out and illustrate tangible examples of God's grace. The learning process allows many opportunities to do this. In a spirit of humility, teachers seek to serve UCA students and be influenced by them. Again, truth is communal and relational. A co-learning relationship between teachers and students assumes that both groups have something to teach the other. As masters of their discipline, teachers are responsible for providing a coherent and engaging curriculum. This is essential in order for students to become co-learners. Having provided a coherent and engaging curriculum, teachers work with students to develop curiosity, ask questions, identify problems, generate understanding, and move toward action. Furthermore, teachers must continually seek a more thorough mastery of their discipline. Teachers should also serve as an example in love of learning about creation, recognition of the need for forgiveness, and engagement in God's kingdom. Teachers will challenge students towards the fullness of their God-given potential, support them in reaching difficult goals, and celebrate with them in their achievements. Teachers will also challenge students to reconsider their thinking, examine their motives, and critically evaluate their positions as people who are growing in their faith. In the pursuit of fostering learning, teachers must not become overly obsessed with students' academic outputs. The teacher must be

actively involved in seeking the heart of students. Scripture says that from the heart “flow the springs of life.”¹⁵

GRADUATE PROFILE

¹⁵ Proverbs 4:23

The skills, qualities, habits, and dispositions outlined below are meant to reflect our deep aspirations for students who graduate from UCA. They identify what it looks like to achieve academic excellence, interpersonal maturity, deep knowledge of self, and a renewed understanding of what it means to follow Christ.

1. UCA graduates **seek**:

- a. They seek redeemed relationships with God, others, self, and creation.
- b. They seek Biblical justice in their own midst and abroad. To this end, UCA graduates will develop creative and innovative solutions in the midst of confusion, chaos, and injustice. They understand that creativity and innovation are long term, cyclical processes.
- c. They seek to understand and celebrate social and cultural diversity. In doing so, they find ways to experience enjoyment, create new ideas, and offer innovative solutions. As UCA graduates seek diversity, their first response is to listen and understand.
- d. They seek truth, exercising discernment in order to know when good is called evil and evil is called good.
- e. They seek balance in the spiritual, physical, and emotional aspects of life. UCA graduates evaluate and prioritize demands on their personal and family resources.
- f. They seek out how their loves, abilities, and experiences inform their sense of vocation. UCA graduates seek to confidently live out their vocation for the glory of God's kingdom.
- g. They continually seek high quality standards for academics and vocation. To this end, UCA graduates present themselves professionally, ethically, reliably, and punctually. They accept accountability and use feedback in order to grow.
- h. They seek opportunities for self-direction and take initiative. In doing so, they go beyond basic mastery of skills and curriculum to explore and expand their own learning and opportunities to gain expertise.

1. UCA graduates **abide**:

- a. They abide in God's truth, living out of confidence instead of fear.
- b. They abide in the work that Christ has done on their behalf.
- c. They abide as individuals in a larger community, united by the Spirit. To this end, they exercise flexibility and a willingness to compromise when working as a team. Also, as uniquely equipped individuals responsible to a community, they seek restoration by being

leaders of thought and action. An essential aspect of UCA student leadership is leveraging the strength of others to accomplish goals.

d. They abide in Biblical humility regarding their own abilities.

2. UCA graduates **serve**:

a. They serve in their friendships, families, school, community, and churches.

b. They serve by creating spaces and situations defined by hospitality. In doing so, they challenge each other to be hospitable toward the “other.”

c. They act as servants to promote reconciliation in their communities. They do this by engaging in appropriate communication to resolve disagreements peacefully and productively.

d. They serve together to be better disciples of Christ.

3. UCA graduates **engage**:

a. They engage in inquiry, analysis, and synthesis as a means of understanding, appreciating, and applying new knowledge.

b. They engage knowledge by identifying, defining, and solving authentic problems and using inquiry to engage essential questions.

c. They engage ideas, relationships, and community effectively, using oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts. They are able to use their communication skills to facilitate understanding, open dialogue, and reflect hospitality.

d. They engage in reflection about their own thinking and emotions. They see reflection as an essential means of personal growth and the development of empathy.

e. They engage in hard work, applying a growth mindset, displaying resilience, and celebrating each other’s victories.

f. They engage in difficult situations with grace, resilience, and determination.

a. They engage in a broad range of experiences in and out of the classroom.

Theological Foundations

What happened at Creation?

What happened because of the Fall?

What does Christ's Redemption mean for us?

What does God's promise of Restoration look like now?

The UCA Vision for Christian Education

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