

Summary

We are proposing to amend the Harvey Mudd College mission statement to include an explicit commitment to global engagement and social responsibility. This document outlines in detail the reasons this change is appropriate, the student support for such a measure, and the practical implications it has for the future of HMC. The final section addresses several potential lines of criticism and seeks to refine the scope of discussion for the Strategic Planning meetings.

Breaking the Mudd Bubble

Last year the student deans took about sixty seniors out for dinner discussions to get feedback on their overall experience at HMC. The dinners were an outlet for students to express what they most enjoyed about Mudd, what they feel was lacking, and how they would improve the Harvey Mudd experience. The seniors at each meal consistently communicated regret that their ideals of social service were not more actively supported by the college. Many called for institutional changes to bridge this disconnect by advancing institutions through which students can express and act on these passions and ideals.

Students at HMC are active, engaged, passionate, and aware. They are aware that 2.8 billion people live on less than two dollars a day. They are aware that about one fifth of adults are illiterate. They are aware that over one billion people do not have access to purified drinking water, and more than two billion lack acceptable sanitation. They are aware that 20,000 die every day from starvation. Mudd students have a desire to engage these problems, many to do so using the technical skills and social understanding they develop as undergraduates. Yet many feel that social service is not encouraged or facilitated strongly enough at HMC. Many Mudders feel helpless – trapped under "the Mudd Bubble", unable to focus on both their passions and their studies. We feel that HMC can embrace the humanitarian passion of its student body and give them the opportunities for service and action they need.

This October, an impromptu committee of HMC students began circulating a petition among the student body. The petition was a general call to include some kind of explicit commitment to "social responsibility" and "global engagement" in the HMC mission statement. While the petition made no specific recommendation, and hence cannot be taken as support for any specific plan, it revealed the overwhelming desire of the student body to advance in the direction of social service with a global perspective.

Practical Implementations and a Clear Picture of a Renewed HMC

To give a clearer picture of the type of community we see HMC becoming, this section addresses some practical changes Harvey Mudd could make to bring about the desired change.

- Research – In the next ten years, the Biology and Chemistry departments could bring in professors who have researched or are currently researching micronutrient fortification, epidemiology, and general malnutrition. The

Engineering department could draw in professors who have worked on water purification and transport systems. We could be doing research on global warming and climate models, renewable energy sources, responsible disposal of nuclear waste, and the development of durable, portable technology systems for use in the third world. We can be fighting these battles at HMC right now, through research. There is no reason for global activism and academic rigor to be mutually exclusive at an institution with the resources and ideals we have at Harvey Mudd College.

- Courses – An important effect of hiring this type of faculty would be the courses that they would make available to students based on their fields of expertise. Such courses could offer students further technical knowledge in areas they feel passionately about.
- Clinic – Currently, about two-thirds of HMC's engineering clinics are contracted out to the defense industry. Through Engineers without Borders and similar organizations, HMC could allow students frontline experience in using their technical skill to solve high-impact social problems while at HMC.
- Funding for Social Service Projects – This past year, HMC subsidized two social service projects. Mudders Making A Difference received funding complementing their own fundraising to purchase vans and airline tickets for a trip to aid recovering victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans . Professor Mashek's "Building Community" class went to Mexico on a home construction trip. These are isolated incidents, but if funding were set aside each year for social service projects, active involvement in such projects could become the norm for HMC students.
- Admissions Goals –We see the Harvey Mudd College of the future as a gathering ground for individuals passionate about both science and social justice. By making this an explicitly stated goal of this institution, we hope to attract student leaders with those passions. This will help maintain an open dialogue on campus on the effective pursuit of our civic responsibilities.
- Funding for a Lecture Series – HMC could set aside a pool of resources to bring in speakers who could inform students and inspire them to engage the great humanitarian problems of today. Speakers from the field of social service and from the frontlines of research on global issues could be well-received by the student body, and could help HMC students to form connections with leaders in the areas they felt most passionate about.

These are just a few of the ways the institutions of HMC could be more aligned with a commitment to social responsibility and global engagement. There are countless other specific improvements and innovations that could be made to encourage a Mudd community of social service.

Another important clarification is in what we do not want. These are some specific changes many students envision at hearing of the ambiguous phrases, "social responsibility," and "global engagement," that we do not feel would be beneficial to HMC.

- **Mandatory Community Service Hours** – We are absolutely opposed to requiring HMC students to fulfill hourly community service obligations. We feel our students are already hard pressed for time, and requiring community service hours would detract from HMC's capacity to effectively implement a rigorous curriculum. Furthermore, we feel that mandatory community service precludes students from assuming ownership of expression of their own personal ideals. We feel that only sincere personal passion compels students to take meaningful steps towards meeting their social responsibilities.
- **Limiting Non-Related Academic Fields** – We are not recommending mandating that all professors in every field teach courses or focus their research exclusively on humanitarian issues. We affirm the excellent tradition of scholarship at HMC for its own sake. We do not support restricting the study of any discipline due to its lack of humanitarian applications.
- **Ideological Alignment** – We reject outright the concept of a politically or religiously affiliated Harvey Mudd. We want a passionate and engaged student body, not an ideologically homogenous one.

From Here to There: The Harvey Mudd Mission Statement

We see a clear desire in the student body for a more active commitment to social service. We also have a vision for what a Mudd with that commitment might look like. The question is: how do we get there?

HMC's mission statement reads: "Harvey Mudd College seeks to educate engineers, scientists and mathematicians well-versed in all of these areas and in the humanities and the social sciences so that they may assume leadership in their fields with a clear understanding of the impact of their work on society." At most colleges and universities, the mission statement is either a broad statement of direction for the college, or a brief description of the college as it currently operates. If HMC's mission statement is of the former type - and we feel it is - then amending it is a serious and powerful way to influence the college. Changing the mission statement can bring us from here to there, and for that reason we ask you to consider its amendment. It is the values expressed in our mission statement that form the foundation for our institutions, which in turn shape our community. If you are concerned HMC's mission statement is more descriptive than prescriptive in nature, please view this document as a general recommendation to the administration, and judge its proposals by their spirit rather than their method.

Mission statements are vague in their wording for good reason - to allow for degrees of discretion in their implementation. However, it is important to clarify the distinctions between the ambiguous terms already present in the mission statement, and the spirit we wish to embed in it. We feel the phrase "understanding of the impact of their work on society" suggests an awareness of environmental impacts, the history of fields offered, the importance of non-destructive work, and how to communicate with those not in the technical professions. The type of awareness we would like the administration to pursue is one of the global human condition, one of life outside academia, outside our comfort zones, and one actively motivating us to action. We would like our awareness and global perspective to influence what work we do and what

research we undertake, rather than merely ensuring we are aware of how American society will react to our work. It is this type of awareness that we feel is passionately pursued by much of the student body, but could be better encouraged and strengthened by the institutional framework of the college. We implore you then to join us in recommending the formation of a committee to amend the Harvey Mudd mission statement to include an explicit commitment to global engagement and social responsibility.

Common Oppositions

In the many engaging conversations we had while circulating the petition supporting this measure, we encountered several common streams of opposition. Much of the disagreement was based in semantics or in method, and we would like to refine the discussion of this measure at strategic planning to the direction in which we hope HMC would advance.

Is changing the mission statement effective?

This is a valid concern, and one many circulating the petition share. However, these disagreements are secondary to finding an overall consensus on what direction the college should take. Methodology can be addressed in a committee formed at the request of this body. The most pressing issue to address in the short time we have here is whether or not we desire HMC to more closely and actively embrace the ideals of social responsibility and global engagement.

Is this type of change possible?

Again, an important concern, but we should be addressing whether or not this type of change is desirable. The committee formed may find in the end that it is simply not plausible to create the community we envision. In short, we will cross that bridge when we come to it. We reject the fear of failure as a justification to forego any attempt at improvement.

HMC should not impose a morality on its students

We agree. No actions should be taken to coerce currently apathetic students to act on the ideals of social responsibility and global engagement. Nor do we wish to require that already passionate students act on their convictions in any prescribed way. If we are to take the school in this direction, we prefer a gradual process to a jarring change in curriculum and purpose. The goal of this measure is to make HMC a greater engine for social change in the not-too-distant future, not to attempt to change the ethic of current students.

HMC should not go in this direction

If these are your feelings, please, express them. This is what we'd like to discuss. Any criticisms on this line are welcome. We would like the conversation at Strategic Planning to hinge on this point exclusively if possible.

Sources

We got our information and statistics from the following sources:

Harvey Mudd Senior Dinner Summary

The United Nations Development Programme (<http://www.undp.org>)

ProLiteracy Worldwide (<http://www.proliteracy.org/resources.asp>)

US Department of State International Information Programs (<http://usinfo.state.gov>)