

Beloit College Statement of Culture

We, the students of Beloit College, are defined by our respect for our peers, this institution, and the surrounding Beloit community.

We claim our education and adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty. We take pride in the integrity of our ideas and opinions.

We fulfill our responsibilities on and off campus by being prepared for and engaged in our learning. We are committed to the development of our abilities to critically engage every answer, authority, change, and condition we confront.

We embrace accountability for our actions as adults and hold our peers accountable for theirs, regardless of the resultant praise or criticism.

We trust in the integrity of an individual and we refrain from hastily prescribing judgment. We are informed individuals seeking positive change in a global context.

We achieve strength in our supportive community and through our personal convictions. We are dedicated to pursuing what we believe is right.

We accept and honor these common values and goals by celebrating the richness and diversity present in every person, humbled by the knowledge that this community is as gifted, flawed, and human as we are.



Greg Anderson

Cameron Dieter '16, left, is the president of Beloit Student Congress, Beloit's student government organization. Nadir Carlson '16 heads up the Congress's Student Policy Committee, which is promoting Beloit's newly revised Statement of Culture.

We the [Beloit] People

By Carolyn Stransky '15

Five years ago, students chafed at the idea of a traditional honor code. Then they took matters into their own hands.

EACH BELOIT COLLEGE STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE can be vastly different. But whether that experience involves live-action role playing on Chapin Quad, performing at open mic nights in C-Haus, or pulling all-nighters in the lab, everyone living and working on campus is part of something larger than him or herself: a community with some degree of shared values and norms.

Of course, the college has a mission statement, but until recently, the sense of what Beloit *students* value remained largely unspoken.

In 2009, members of Beloit Student Congress's Student Policy Committee drafted and approved a document that became known as the "Statement of Culture." Then this spring, current student government leaders reexamined, revised, and unanimously voted to endorse and promote the statement.

What prompted the action originally was the idea of an honor code, something college administrators were putting on the table at the time. John Winklemann, director of residential life, explains that considering an honor code really had to do with asking students to think about what it means to own their actions, as well as their responsibility to the community in which they live and learn.

Former Dean of Students Bill Flanagan, who co-advised the Student Policy Committee with Winklemann, recalls wanting to establish some sort of code that could address students' academic and social behavior, while making sure the students were the driving force behind it.

"I felt the only way to change student behavior and culture was to empower students to own what the norms should be," says Flanagan. "They did an extraordinary job after much thoughtful discussion, debate, writing, and multiple edits."

Those deliberations included a series of discussions about how students would react and work within an honor code system. After educating themselves on the pros and cons of such a code, student leaders came to the conclusion

that a traditional code of honor was not appropriate for Beloit.

"Something as rigid as an honor code raised a lot of hackles among the more free-spirited parts of the student body, so it became clear that a formal honor code just wasn't going to fly," says James Bleckley '11, chair of the Student Policy Committee when the original Statement of Culture was drafted.

Bleckley says a document similar to the Statement of Culture had been floating around student government offices during the years preceding his time on campus. Those drafts formed the backbone of what students eventually created. Once the new document was drawn up and vetted, it was approved by BSC's general assembly and adopted by the college administration and the board of trustees soon after.

"The real creation, where it took off, was a complete surprise," says Bleckley. "Honestly, I think it was the efforts of the administration that made it a document remembered today, and only the slightest coincidence that my name appears at the bottom."

Written in a style similar to that of a constitution, the Statement of Culture evokes meaning in every clause.

"It is more than a collection of needlepoint platitudes," says President Scott Bierman. "At its core, it asks what kind of community we want to have at Beloit College—what do we collectively and individually value?"

Themes of community and common values weave through the entire document.

"What I like about the Statement of Culture is that it reaches to the values we hold in the community and how to orient ourselves around them," says

Ann Davies, provost and dean of the college. "It feels more authentic and capable of a more organic, common ownership, possibly, than an honor code might."

Davies is convinced that this sense of ownership also has the ability to extend beyond the students who crafted the statement: "It's very much owned by this group of students, but I believe that alumni could pick it up and be like, 'yeah, these are things that mattered to me and continue to matter to me.'"

As an alumna herself, Christina Klawitter '98, Beloit's dean of students, echoes this sentiment. "The Statement of Culture says that students have always owned and continue to own their education at Beloit," she says. "It acknowledges that we're complex in our learning, in our interactions with one another; that we're human and flawed, though gifted and important. It strikes a balance between what is and what we want to be."

The creation of the Statement of Culture has also been recognized as a quintessential example of Beloiters banding together and taking initiative.

"It shows ultimately that we are college students, and we have something to say about our education," says Skyler Tiannong Dong '16, BSC treasurer. "As Beloit students, we would rather define our own culture instead of having someone else define it for us."

The document was revised in February 2014 in recognition that all of the students who shaped the original document had graduated.

"We wanted to make sure [the statement] was still applicable to this new generation of Beloiters. So, we reexamined it to be sure that it was up to date



and in line with our current values,” says Cameron Dieter’16, BSC president.

The revision process began with the Student Policy Committee reviewing the document, then surveying more than 200 current students on their thoughts about it. With the information gathered over nearly an entire semester, the committee made edits and presented it to the rest of BSC.

“The changes that we made were mostly cosmetic,” says Nadir Carlson’16, chair of the Student Policy Committee. “The fact that there was little change shows how the people may change, but what brings us together, and the culture of campus, does not.”

Throughout the five years of its existence, the Statement of Culture transitioned from a vague idea to one of the defining documents of the college. Today, the college includes it in housing assignment notices, presents it to new Beloiters at New Student Days, and uses it in residential assistant training and new faculty/staff orientation. College leaders are now considering whether it should be referenced in disciplinary cases.

“The Statement of Culture offers an orienting device for us as individuals, but it also gives us the task of holding one another accountable,” says Davies.

Like any document, the Statement of Culture has its limitations.

“There’s a really important question around whether it actually works,” says Bierman. “Is it just a bunch of words on a sheet of paper, or does it provoke the community to be more reflective and thoughtful and for each of us to hold ourselves to these standards? I’d like to think of it as a working document in that way, one that really guides students while they are at the college and still orients their lives after Beloit.”

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