



THE RISING WOKENESS OF MEDICAL SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When people show you who they are, believe them. The same is true of medical schools. When they write mission statements articulating their values and priorities, view those documents as real indications of the direction those organizations are headed.

Based on our analysis of the mission statements of 158 MD-granting medical schools in the United States, the direction those organizations are headed is toward a greater commitment to “wokeness.” In 2024, 77 percent of medical school mission statements could be characterized as “woke,” up from 68 percent only three years earlier. There was no meaningful change in the scientific emphasis of those mission statements during the same period.

Higher ranked medical schools were more likely to increase the wokeness of their mission statements between 2021 and 2024.¹ But the partisan leanings of the states in which medical schools are located were uncorrelated with changes in the wokeness of mission statements.² Medical school mission statements are related to national status but are unrelated to the preferences of state policymakers.

This study adds to previous research documenting the extent to which schools that should be focused on providing future doctors with rigorous scientific training are increasingly diverting their focus to indoctrinating future doctors into a radical social and political agenda.³ This shifting focus raises concerns about the quality of healthcare and the increasing politicization of previously respected and apolitical institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) collects information on medical schools to help prospective applicants select the right school and organizes that information on the Medical School Admission Requirements web site. As the AAMC describes it, “The Medical School Admission Requirements™ (MSAR®) is an online database that enables you to browse, search, sort, and compare information about U.S. and Canadian medical schools and more.”⁴

One of the things that MSAR provides to help guide prospective applicants to the right medical school is “a compiled list of mission statements for the United States and Canadian medical schools.”⁵ That list was last updated on December 9, 2024, and contains the mission statements of 158 MD-granting institutions in the United States.⁶ Using the Wayback Machine of the Internet Archive, it is possible to find previous versions of that list, with the earliest having been compiled on April 6, 2021, with the mission statements of 155 MD-granting schools.⁷

The mission statements collected by the AAMC in December 2024 are not always the same as those currently found on the medical schools’ own websites. It is unclear whether some medical schools have simply failed to update their websites to reflect the mission statements provided to the AAMC or if those schools intend to communicate different messages to different audiences. But we are confident in treating the set of mission statements collected by the AAMC as authoritative and examining those.

The AAMC is the main association representing the interests of medical schools, so what the medical schools tell the AAMC is what they are communicating to key stakeholders. In addition, the AAMC collected the mission statements as part of a guide for prospective applicants, so these mission statements are the ones the medical schools are using to attract students.

We measured the extent to which these mission statements emphasized woke values versus scientific values. To measure wokeness, we asked the artificial intelligence software, Copilot, to assess the degree to which each mission statement emphasized four values: diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. We also asked Copilot to offer a summative assessment of how “woke” it thought the mission statement was.



To measure how focused each mission statement was on science, we asked Copilot to assess the degree to which the statements emphasized these four qualities: excellence, scientific research, truth, and professionalism. Copilot assigned a value between 1 and 5, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree, to measure the extent to which each mission statement emphasized the 5 woke and 4 scientific values that we asked it to assess.

In a prior research project, we used both human reviewers and Copilot to analyze the content of text and both approaches yielded similar results, so we have confidence that Copilot is a reliable and accurate tool for assessing mission statements.⁸ Copilot has the added benefit of lacking awareness of the hypotheses of the project and is therefore more objective in the assessments it offers. Additionally, using Copilot is extremely efficient in analyzing hundreds of mission statements.

There are desirable qualities to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice, but when these terms are presented together in the context of a mission statement, they are markers for a particular worldview. That “woke” worldview indicates a significant departure from the traditional American emphasis on individual responsibility and equal treatment in favor of emphasizing differentiated treatment by group identity and social rather than individual justice.⁹

We combine the five measures of woke concepts – diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice and the summative score for wokeness – by taking the sum of the scores Copilot assigned, with 25 as the maximum score possible for these five concepts. We do the same for the scientific concepts, but because there are four items, the maximum score is 20. For ease of presentation, we sometimes dichotomize the results and refer to mission statements as “woke” if they received over 50 percent of the possible points for the five measures of woke concepts.



CHANGING MISSIONS

In 2024, 77 percent of medical school mission statements could be characterized as woke, up from 68 percent in 2021. Of the 155 medical schools for which the AAMC had mission statements from both 2024 and 2021, 78 schools had made at least some changes during that three-year period. Of those that made changes in the text of their mission statement, 32 did not alter how woke the statement was, 36 made the statement more woke, and 10 reduced how woke the statement was.

Not only were the mission statements more likely to become more woke than to become less woke, but the magnitude of the change in the woke direction was much greater than in the less woke direction. The average mission statement in 2024 received 19.3 out of 25 possible points on the woke measure, up from 18.2 in 2021. The average score of mission statements that became more woke went up by 5.33 points out of 25 possible points. The average score for those that became less woke went down by 3 points.

During this same period, the average score measuring how science-oriented medical school mission statements are remained virtually unchanged. The average mission statement in 2024 received 17 out of 20 possible points on the science measure, up slightly from 16.8 in 2021.

These results indicate that between 2021 and 2024, dozens of medical schools scrambled to rewrite their mission statements to signal how committed to woke values they were. They were not scrambling to signal how focused they were on science. As our previous research on woke and scientific terms in medical school curricula indicates, the dramatic rise in emphasis on wokeness is inevitably pushing out the focus on scientific rigor in medical education.¹⁰

It is important to note that the change we are observing begins in April 2021, which appears to be the earliest version of the AAMC compilation of mission statements according to the Wayback Machine. Since that is almost a year after George Floyd's death triggered a national panic on racial issues, we likely missed many changes that occurred before April 2021. But the momentum for moving medical schools in a woke direction had not abated by April 2021, so we can still capture some of the dramatic increase in wokeness of those institutions.



EXAMPLES OF CHANGES

It's easier to grasp the changes that are being made to medical school mission statements by considering examples.

Please note that the AAMC's compilation of all medical school mission statements from 2024 can be found [here](#). And the AAMC compilation from 2021 can be found on the Wayback Machine [here](#).

Most of the mission statements that became significantly more woke did so by adding a significant amount of woke verbiage to what had been succinct statements. In 2021, **Columbia University's** medical school had a fairly anodyne statement:

"The mission of Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons is to prepare graduates to be leaders and role models who define excellence in patient care, medical research, education, and health care policy. Their experiences at VP&S will enable them to shape the future and set the standards of medicine in the United States and the world. Their guided exposure and training will allow them to exhibit the highest principles of humanism and professionalism in their responsibilities to their patients, to their community, and to society."

By 2024 this 87-word mission statement mutated into a 567-word woke behemoth. It opens with a nod toward "excellence" and "discovery," but then clearly signals its primary concern:

"At VP&S, we aspire to educate the next generation of physician leaders to serve our neighboring, national, and global communities using the lens of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice to promote the health and state-of-the-art care of patients."

It notes that the curriculum has been changed to reflect these new priorities:

"To best prepare our graduates for their future careers, the college recently updated its medical education program objectives to focus on the domains of: ... Anti-Racism, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity.... The additional competencies of anti-racism, inclusion, diversity, equity, and inquiry support our shared commitment to innovative, evidence based, and equitable approaches to medical education."

Columbia's revised woke mission statement also emphasizes that its new priorities extend well beyond changes in the curriculum:

"In 2021, we formally launched the VP&S Anti-Racism Coalition (ARC), an interdisciplinary effort by students and staff to promote a sustainable culture of inclusion and diversity. Its ongoing goal is to create, adopt, and strengthen anti-racist educational systems and practices and to support equity and justice throughout the VP&S learning environment."

The terms excellence, research, and professionalism don't disappear from Columbia's revised mission statement. They are simply drowned out by sentence after sentence on the priority given to the school's new woke concerns.

The **University of Massachusetts Medical School** similarly had a succinct mission statement in 2021:

"The mission of UMMS is to advance the health and well-being of the people of the commonwealth and the world through pioneering advances in education, research and health care delivery."

By 2024, this apolitical emphasis on "pioneering advances in education, research and health care delivery" gave way to an explicit commitment to turn its medical students into woke activists:

"Our graduates will contribute in a meaningful way to the elimination of health care disparities and the establishment of health equity in Massachusetts and beyond. Our Office of Admissions implements the mission through holistically reviewing each eligible application and placing highest value on applicant characteristics which align with the UMass Chan mission such as commitment to health equity, diversity and inclusion and service to the community. Our VISTA curriculum has an innovative, integrated structure based on foundational, clinical and health systems sciences. The longitudinal focus topics of health equity, societal forces in health and disease and health systems science are woven into all courses and rotations."

Even in deep red states, like Arkansas, the woke revolution in medical school mission statements was embraced without concern for the preferences of the state's policymakers and taxpayers. In 2021, the **University of Arkansas Medical School's** values consisted of teaching, healing, searching, and serving:

"In relentless pursuit of excellence, every day; summarizes the essence of the school's fourfold mission to teach, to heal, to search, and to serve."

By 2024, there was a new set of values:

"Core values include commitment to diversity and health equity supported by diversity of UAMS leadership, faculty, staff, and learners to reduce health care disparities in our state, and honor the unique contributions provided by a diversity of values, beliefs, and cultures."

At the **Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine**, the mission statement did not get longer between 2021 and 2024; it simply shifted the stated strategy for serving its mission from opportunity to identity. In 2021 the medical school sought

“to address the shortage of physicians in West Texas by providing innovative educational opportunities to medical students and residents that are intended to supply competent and compassionate medical professionals for a geographically expansive area.”

By 2024 the mission statement declared that doctor shortages would be addressed by focusing on the identities of their staff and students:

“We seek to recruit students, faculty and senior administrative staff and admit individuals who have ties to West Texas or who come from or have an interest in serving rural areas, including those who may come from socioeconomically disadvantaged or first generation backgrounds.” Prospective staff and students would now be attracted by sharing personal characteristics with the population of West Texas rather than their desire for “innovative educational opportunities.”

MAXIMUM WOKENESS

Of the 158 medical school mission statements available in 2024, 38 had almost reached the maximum level of wokeness by scoring at least 23 out of 25 points, of which 28 scored at least 24 out of 25 and 20 had perfect scores of 25. Of the 20 mission statements with the maximum woke score in 2024, 14 also had perfect scores in 2021. Our method of measuring would not be able to detect any increase in wokeness in the mission statements of these 14 medical schools.

The mission statement of the **University of Maryland’s** medical school provides a good example of maximum wokeness, stating, in part:

“There is a clarion call for the promotion of social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion in our society. We concur with this well-known statement: If not us, who? If not now, when? We will engage in ongoing strategic and intentional actions to advance in a measurable way our vision for social justice, civil rights and civil liberties for all members of our School of Medicine, University and their communities across the United States. Together, we will continuously listen and educate ourselves about systemic racism and structural barriers to success for all, legislative and policy matters, economic inequalities, health care access, and all forms of bias that contribute further to cumulative disadvantages for marginalized groups. We will undertake these actions, with cultural humility, in all school missions to include education, research, clinical care and community engagement. We have committed ourselves to be an organization that embodies diversity, equity, inclusion and in which all members of our community are encouraged to respectfully and empathically voice their opinions, while embracing and supporting the diversity in background and thought of the entire community. In these ways, we will work to create safety and build trust across our community and prepare to face all future challenges with socially just solutions.”

That “well-known statement” originated with the Jewish sage, Hillel the Elder, but the authors of Maryland’s mission statement may be unaware or unwilling to state that fact.¹¹ Of course, they also omit Hillel’s related warning, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” Instead, the mission statement plunges head-first into issues far removed from preparing future doctors, such as “legislative and policy matters,” “economic inequalities,” and “all forms of bias that contribute further to cumulative disadvantages for marginalized groups.” Maryland’s mission statement was unchanged from 2021.

The mission statement of the **University of California (UC) Davis Medical School** pledges to “put our mission into ACTION [sic].” Everyone involved in its admissions process must “take a university provided training related to diversity and inclusion, implicit bias, and anti-racism.” Its “holistic admission evaluation” “utilizes a socioeconomic disadvantaged score, based on AMCAS information, to attach a numeric value to each applicant’s perseverance, grit, and distance traveled.” No mention is made of ensuring that prospective students have the intellectual ability and preparation for becoming doctors – just how hard they have tried and how much they have improved.

The UC Davis mission statement also describes how the school has invested in diversity and inclusion:

“The Office of Student and Resident Diversity supports all students with a focus on groups historically underrepresented in medicine, working to cultivate a safe learning environment in which diversity can be nurtured in an inclusive, accepting and productive manner. This unit is lead [sic] by our newly appointed Associate Dean for Diverse and Inclusive Education and Associate Dean for Diverse and Inclusive Learning Communities.”

The 2024 mission statement was revised from the 2021 one, but the school did not manage to detect and correct that they had misspelled “led.” The revisions also did not increase how woke the mission statement was since the 2021 version also received the maximum score for wokeness.

The **Georgetown University School of Medicine** mission statement refers to “justice” five times but does not once mention research, excellence, or truth. In addition to its “commitment to social justice,” the mission statement declares:

“Led by our values of racial justice and health equity, we are steadfast in our ongoing commitment to eliminate racism in all forms across our campus. We are grateful to the members of the Racial Justice Committee for Change, a dedicated group of students, staff and faculty, for pursuing sustainable change at the School of Medicine and throughout the medical center.”

WILL THE FEVER BREAK?

The fact that dozens of medical school mission statements became significantly more woke between April 2021 and December 2024, and that dozens more have almost reached maximum wokeness, raises questions about whether it is possible for medical schools to maintain the intensity of this woke focus. And if they do sustain this woke fervor, what will be the cost to medical care?

Training future doctors is an intellectually demanding endeavor that requires command of complex scientific concepts. And improving healthcare requires advancing the frontiers of scientific research. Promoting a social and political agenda among medical students comes at the expense of excellence. At some point, patients, hospitals, and insurers will become alarmed if doctors have a stronger command of ideological doctrine than medical science and will demand a rebalancing of priorities.

In addition, medical training is heavily dependent on financial subsidies and regulatory protection from policymakers. The political backlash against DEI that is currently underway will not leave medical schools untouched. The fact that we observe no relationship between the partisan split in state legislatures and the changing wokeness of medical school mission statements suggests that there are many schools in deep red states whose declared mission is out of sync with local priorities. Inevitably, state policymakers will reassert control over the public medical schools in their states and reorient those institutions toward public preferences.

Of course, medical schools have resources and methods for insulating themselves from the concerns of patients and policymakers. But that insulation is wearing thin and the criticism from external constituents is becoming more forceful. By documenting how radical many medical school mission statements have become, this report will strengthen those criticisms, but it may also help medical school leaders become more aware of how they have over-stepped.

The mission of medical schools should not involve the revolutionary restructuring of society. Their mission should be to achieve excellence in preparing future doctors to deliver high quality patient care, advance the frontiers of scientific research for the benefit of all, discover truths about human beings and their health, and uphold the norms of the medical profession. Medical schools should focus on these goals and leave social and political agendas to others.

ENDNOTES

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