

Chapter 3. The Program Mission Statement

While the program mission statement often gets lost in the busy shuffle of assessment, not to mention that discussions about it often draw yawns, the creation—or clarification—of a departmental mission statement is the vital first step, for it clearly defines a program’s purpose for existence. Among other things, the commitment to formulating a mission statement is critical to a program’s reputation, especially since most successful statements are measurable, definable, and actionable, and as such, can be evaluated by constituents. For example, it makes sense for the Physics department of a large research institution to have a mission statement that calls for both a top tier national score on a standardized test as well as a high percentage of its seniors entering graduate programs. Likewise, the mission statement of a Physics department of a small regional campus ought to call for more diversified goals that lead to a curriculum that will offer students more flexible and realistic career options. The mission statement can be viewed as a launching pad for program assessment; for without it faculty would not have the foundation upon which to create the program’s learning outcomes.

Though departments ought to begin by exploring mission statements on web pages of professional organizations or similar programs across the country, faculty must reach a consensus on the final statement if it is to be meaningful. If a department can’t reach a conclusion, a few volunteers might work outside the larger group and develop a working draft that can then be circulated and discussed over e-mail before meeting again for final deliberation.

Though a program’s mission must have clear statement of purpose, this is not to say that all such statements comprise the same format. Some are long and prescriptive; others are brief and tilt toward the rudimentary. The attached examples from IUS departments reflect the characteristics and preferences of the faculty in the program and teach the students what the program is striving to accomplish.

Examples of Program Mission Statements at IUS

Communication: *Communication Studies exists to produce student learning and to advance knowledge about human communication from both a humanistic and social scientific perspective. The Department will provide a challenging, innovative, and supportive environment that will facilitate students’ intellectual growth, which includes students’ communication (both oral and written), research, and critical thinking skills across an array of contexts. The Department will serve the university, the community, and the discipline.*

English: *The English Department creates, evaluates, and administers programs in writing and literature that foster students’ intellectual growth, collaborative skills, multicultural awareness, effective citizenship, and technological competence. While preserving historic strengths in literary and rhetorical tradition, the department is devoted to an innovative curriculum that encourages readers and writers to situate texts in relation to history, philosophy, and culture through the theory and practice of integrated literacies that encourage lifelong learning.*