

STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSES

The institution's mission and purposes are appropriate to higher education, consistent with its charter or other operating authority, and implemented in a manner that complies with the Standards of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. The institution's mission gives direction to its activities and provides a basis for the assessment and enhancement of the institution's effectiveness.

DESCRIPTION

The Mission Statement of the University of Rhode Island has undergone several revisions over the years, but in principle the various mission statements have reflected the original founding purposes of the University embodied in Section 16-32-3 of the General Laws of Rhode Island:

16-32-3 Purposes of university. *The board, as now constituted, and their successors, for the terms for which they have been or for which they hereafter may be appointed regents, shall continue to be a body politic and corporate for the purpose of continuing and maintaining the University of Rhode Island as a university where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach any branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life, as provided in the act of the congress of the United States, approved July 2, 1862, entitled "An Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories Which May Provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts," and for the purpose of continuing and maintaining an agricultural experiment station as a department of the college under and in accordance with, and to carry out the purposes of, the act of congress approved March 2, 1887, entitled "An Act to Establish Agricultural Experiment Stations in Connection with the Colleges Established in the Several States Under the Provisions of An Act Approved July 2, 1862, and of the Acts Supplementary Thereto."*

In January 2005, the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE) passed a motion requiring the Rhode Island institutions of higher learning to review and revise their mission statements. An *ad hoc* committee of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs was subsequently convened in May 2005 for the purpose of revising the University of Rhode Island (URI) Mission Statement, which had remained unchanged since 1996.

The *ad hoc* committee chaired by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs consisted of faculty members representing a diverse spectrum of educational specialties, a representative from student affairs, and representatives from student leadership and administrative staff. The committee met several times over a two-month span to create the new Mission Statement. The Joint Strategic Planning Committee (JSPC), a joint standing committee of the Faculty Senate and the President, reviewed the final draft and made minor revisions. The final version of the new Mission Statement was endorsed by the University's Faculty Senate on October 20, 2005, and it was approved by the President on November 1, 2005. The Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education formally approved the new Mission Statement on January 24, 2006 (<http://www.uri.edu/accreditation/TrusteeApprovalofMission.pdf>).

The 2006 Mission Statement is found on the University web site as well as in hardcopy and online publications of the 2006–2007 *Catalog*.

UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT

The University of Rhode Island is the State's public learner-centered research university. We are a community joined in a common quest for knowledge. The University is committed to enriching the lives of its students through its land, sea, and urban grant traditions. URI is the only public institution in Rhode Island offering undergraduate, graduate,

and professional students the distinctive educational opportunities of a major research university. Our undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, research, and outreach serve Rhode Island and beyond. Students, faculty, staff, and alumni are united in one common purpose: to learn and lead together. Embracing Rhode Island's heritage of independent thought, we value:

- *Creativity and Scholarship*
- *Diversity, Fairness, and Respect*
- *Engaged Learning and Civic Involvement*
- *Intellectual and Ethical Leadership*

COLLEGE AND DEPARTMENT MISSION STATEMENTS

In preparation for the NEASC self-study, each college and academic department at the University was requested to provide a current mission statement. As of June 2007, all nine of the degree-granting colleges, including the Graduate School of Oceanography, as well as the 46 academic departments provided mission statements. (Appendix 1.1 Mission Statements of Academic Units)

Mission statements from University College as well as 23 other major non-academic units were available at their respective web sites as of June 2007 (available in the workroom).

APPRAISAL

The Self-Study Subcommittee on Mission and Purposes reviewed the current University Mission Statement and found it to be clear and concise. The role of the University, defined by its charter as a research-based institution dedicated to educational, research, and outreach efforts, is clearly stated. The University of Rhode Island is a land, sea, and urban grant university, and that commitment is maintained in the new document. Additionally, the Mission Statement focuses on the important interconnection of students, faculty, staff, and alumni and defines the values that direct the University's priorities. The Mission is fully consistent with the Vision Statement of the University (<http://www.uri.edu/accreditation/VisionStatement.doc>) and its building of a new culture for learning.

The 2006–2009 Strategic Plan for the University (<http://www.uri.edu/pspd>) was developed subsequent to the creation of the new Mission Statement. The Strategic Plan has four initiatives: 1) Enhancing student recruitment, retention, involvement, and graduation rates; 2) Improving the fiscal health of the University; 3) Creating a more inclusive environment; 4) Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of research and outreach support. The Mission Statement provides an effective basis for each of these initiatives and their goals.

Although the Subcommittee found that the process used to create, endorse, and approve the University Mission Statement was appropriate, the Subcommittee went further to determine the understanding and acceptance of the URI Mission Statement by faculty, staff, and students.

As part of an online survey of faculty and administrative staff conducted in fall 2006 (Appendix 2.8), four questions directly related to the Mission Statement were asked evaluating: 1) familiarity with the content of the new Mission Statement; 2) if one's understanding of the Mission Statement has a clear impact on how one's work is conducted; 3) if, upon review of the Mission Statement, one's role is reflected in the Mission Statement; and 4) if the Mission Statement reflects one's belief of the appropriate mission of a public institution of higher learning. One hundred and seventy-six faculty and administrative staff responded to the survey. Of those individuals, 67% agreed or strongly agreed that they were previously familiar with the content of the new Mission Statement and a strong majority (85%) believed that the Mission Statement was appropriate. While 79% agreed or strongly agreed that

the Mission Statement reflected their roles at the University, only 49% believed that the Mission has a clear impact on how they conduct their work at the University.

A sample of students was evaluated using brief in-class surveys administered in writing courses in fall 2006 (Appendix 1.2 Student Survey). One hundred and twenty-nine students from diverse majors participated, with all academic years represented: freshmen (22%), sophomores (31%), juniors (22%), seniors (19%), graduate students/other (6%). Four questions were asked, evaluating: 1) knowledge of the existence of the University Mission Statement; 2) familiarity with content of the University Mission Statement; 3) following review of the Mission Statement, if one's role is reflected in the Mission Statement; and 4) if the Mission Statement reflects one's belief of the appropriate mission of a public institution of higher learning. Results from the survey showed that 45% of the students knew of the existence of the Mission Statement, however, only 9% were familiar with its content. After reviewing the Mission Statement, 67% of students believed that their roles at the University were reflected within it, and 89% agreed or strongly agreed that the Mission Statement was appropriate.

The results of the surveys for faculty and administrative staff and for students show a very strong positive response towards the current Mission Statement as well as a strong connection between the Mission Statement and its reflection in the roles of both faculty/staff and students. Despite the Mission Statement's relevance, surveyed students appeared minimally aware of its existence or content. Of additional interest, only half of the faculty and staff who answered the survey viewed the University Mission as having a clear impact upon the conduct of their work.

The Subcommittee reviewed all of the mission statements of degree-granting colleges and academic departments and compared them to supporting documents from the 1996–1997 self-study. In 1996–1997, three of the nine degree-granting colleges had formal mission statements. The rest had paragraphs identifying goals. Of the nine departments documented by the 1996–1997 self-study, five identified philosophies or mission and four were program descriptions. There has been clear progress since that time: as mentioned previously, all of the nine degree-granting colleges and academic departments have formal mission statements. Approximately one-third of the mission statements are available on the University web site.

In order to evaluate the consistency of the college and department mission statements with the University Mission Statement, the Subcommittee created a scale of zero (0) to three (3) representing a range from “not contained” to “strongly reflected” to rate the mission statements of each of the colleges and academic departments. Comparisons included four activities (outreach, scholarship, teaching, civic engagement/service) and four values (collaboration, diversity, leadership, independent thought) that are emphasized in the University Mission Statement. Total scores (out of a possible 24) for the nine degree-granting units ranged from 12 to 24, with an average score of 18.7. The most highly correlated component was outreach, with civic engagement/service and scholarship also strongly reflected. Teaching, independent thought, and diversity were among the least reflected concepts in the mission statements of the nine colleges. In contrast, the academic department mission statements ranged in total score from 2 to 24, with an average score of 14.8. Most strongly reflected was teaching followed by scholarship, civic engagement/service, and outreach. Similar to mission statements of the colleges, the values of diversity and independent thought were among the least reflected concepts in academic department mission statements. (Appendix 1.3 Mission Statement Comparisons)

The Subcommittee observed that there was a wide range of scores among the various degree-granting colleges and academic departments and that the rankings of the individual concepts differed between the two groups. The mission statements of the nine colleges, when compared to those of academic departments, reflect a greater consistency with the University Mission. In the mission statements of both groups, values identified in the University Mission Statement were less well represented than were specific activities supportive of the overall University Mission.

The Subcommittee reviewed the January 24, 2006, letter from the RIBGHE confirming its approval of the 2006 University Mission Statement. In addition to its approval, the RIBGHE charged the University with using the Mission Statement as a foundation for: 1) revising the URI Vision Statement and developing prioritized goals, and 2) the development of college and department mission statements that are clearly connected to the University Mission. The RIBGHE also charged the University with institutionalizing its procedure for regular review and revision of the Mission and Vision statements, goals, and planning documents.

PROJECTION

The 2006 Mission Statement of the University of Rhode Island is reflective of the institution’s current Vision Statement and is the foundation for University’s 2006–2009 Strategic Plan. The Vision Statement, which was created in 1992 and reviewed by the Joint Strategic Planning Committee in 2003, will be formally reviewed in light of the new Mission Statement. The Mission Statement and its importance to the University community will be clearly communicated by the administrative leadership, and it will continue to be integrated into policies and decisions at University, college, and department levels. Individual degree-granting colleges and academic departments will ensure a consistency of their missions with that of the University through periodic review and revision. This is an important thread in determining expectations of student outcomes and the assessment of academic programs. A formal University-wide process will be implemented to assure currency and full disclosure.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

It is clear that while substantial progress has been made in the past decade, a more centralized and directed effort needs to be made towards ensuring the connectivity of the University Mission to the workings of the University. In conjunction with the academic leadership, the Joint Strategic Planning Committee of the University will be the unifying body to champion this effort.