

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE**

General University Policy
(Final; Information)

GP.11.05 Proposed Statement on Unit Mission Statements and Activities

BACKGROUND

Advocacy for particular views, supported by evidence and argument, is a hallmark of academic freedom in research and teaching. Academic freedom is a basic right of college and university teachers (see AAUP Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure:

<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/1940statement.htm>).

Academic units in public universities (colleges, departments, centers, programs, institutes, and so on), however, have a broader and more encompassing responsibility:

they are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition (AAUP, 1940).

Although academic units might “advocate” for some issue in the broad sense that by identifying it as a focus of study they consider it important, these units should not be organized around advancing specific views about such issues. To do so is inconsistent with the fundamental principles of free inquiry, open debate, and institutional intellectual integrity.

PROPOSED POLICY

The purpose of a mission statement is twofold. First, for external purposes, a mission statement provides a concise description of the priorities and goals of an academic unit (including, but not limited to, colleges, departments, centers, programs, and institutes). In specifying such goals and priorities, a mission statement typically constitutes a coherent and distinctive academic purpose that justifies the need for that unit (i.e., “Why do we exist?”).

Second, for internal purposes, a mission statement provides current or prospective members of that unit with a clear sense of how their work relates to the scope of issues and approaches suitable to that mission. There is a balance here between sufficient specificity to give the mission statement a distinctive character, and sufficient breadth to provide scholars within it a range of autonomy consistent with their individual academic freedom and the principles of free inquiry, open debate, and institutional intellectual integrity.

To this end, an academic unit’s mission statement, and the nature and scope of activities operating within it, must respect open-ended inquiry, debate, and diversity of views. Mission statements or policies that presuppose the unquestioned superiority of particular theories, doctrines, or “isms,” or are based on assertions that prejudice or restrict the outcomes of free academic inquiry, are inconsistent with the above-mentioned principles, to which the University of Illinois is committed.

GENERAL UNIVERSITY POLICY

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