

Standard One: Mission and Purposes

Overview

Brandeis is the youngest private research university in the United States and the only nonsectarian university in the nation founded by members of the American Jewish community to embody its highest ethical and cultural values. Established in 1948 and named for the late associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Louis Dembitz Brandeis, the University is unusual in combining in a single institution the academic excellence and intellectual rigor associated with top research universities with the personal interaction and attention characteristic of the finest liberal arts colleges. Its culturally diverse student body is drawn from all 50 states and more than 100 countries. While Brandeis maintains a special relationship with the Jewish community, it is not affiliated with any religious organization, offers no theological instruction, and “welcomes students, teachers and staff of every nationality, religion and political heritage” and “strives to reflect the heterogeneity of the United States and of the world community.”¹

Description

In keeping with the emphasis on the “personal encounter” with knowledge found in the University’s mission statement, all Brandeis faculty members are expected to teach and encourage undergraduates—and in appropriate fields, postgraduates—to participate in scholarship, research, and artistic activities. Brandeis students, whether they are undergraduates, graduate students, or adult learners, seek a Brandeis education because they desire to be leaders in their field, are self-motivated, appreciate learning from diverse peers, and believe in the values of open inquiry and social justice. The University seal carries the Hebrew word *emet* or “truth,” and the Brandeis motto is “Truth even unto its innermost parts.”

The mission statement, formally adopted by the Board of Trustees in 1984, though informally observed since Brandeis’s founding in 1948, is summarized as Four Pillars that support and define the University, its purposes and identity: academic excellence, non-sectarianism, social justice, and sponsorship by and service to the Jewish community. The mission statement is routinely found in admissions and other materials, in the *Brandeis University Bulletin*, and on the website. It forms part of the framework of the student handbook, *Rights and Responsibilities* and is also present in academic planning, the University’s various programs, centers and institutes, and the culture of the campus.

¹ Brandeis University mission statement in Appendix 1A.

Appraisal

Some examples of the ways in which the University's mission, particularly its commitment to excellence and social justice, influences academic planning and programs include new majors for undergraduates in Health: Science, Society and Policy; Creative Writing; International and Global Studies; and East Asian Studies; new master's degrees in Coexistence, and in Education, and in International Health Policy and Management; and new programs and research for the community, embodied in the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life; the Crown Center for Middle East Studies; the Institute for Investigative Journalism; a new Office of the Arts, and the Al-Quds University partnership.

The University's commitment to social justice is also reflected in administrative policies. For example, Brandeis has always had a need-blind admissions process in order to attract and admit a diverse and excellent class. In 2004, the University approved a new policy of financial aid portability that made it possible for all students to participate in study abroad programs regardless of their families' financial means. While this policy involves a significant cost for the University, it has increased the number of students from different income levels studying abroad. Other examples include the initiative to pay contract housekeepers the same wage as the housekeepers directly employed by the University, efforts to upgrade staff salaries to market levels, and the steps taken to equalize staff benefits. In April 2006, the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, in response to a student initiative and at the recommendation of the administration, voted to prohibit direct investment of the University's endowment assets in the government of Sudan or in companies judged complicit with Sudan's genocidal policies. During the AY2006-2007, the Justice Brandeis Jubilee commemorating the sesquicentennial of the birth of the University's namesake, Louis D. Brandeis, will be a yearlong, campus-wide exploration of the varied dimensions of social justice.

Underscoring the University's commitment to building a diverse campus community, new niche graduate programs, such as the M.A. in Sustainable International Development at the Heller School, and part-time graduate programs, such as the M.S. in Finance from the International Business School, and the M.S. in Bioinformatics from the Rabb School, have drawn more international students and industry professionals to the campus. The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Brandeis, a division of the Rabb School of Continuing Studies, brings mature learners, often alumni and friends, to campus for peer learning. Since 2002, Brandeis has been a member of the Massachusetts Campus Compact, comprised of 38 private and 23 public institutions dedicated to fostering civic engagement on campus and preparing informed citizens. This membership has contributed to Brandeis faculty and student research in the arts, in sociology, and in the Waltham schools, and has provided interns to support service learning on campus. All of these programs, centers, partnerships, and offices are part of the University's commitment to enhancing the various communities it serves.

In keeping with the interdisciplinary tradition reflected in its programs and centers, the University applied for and received two, five-year Interdisciplinary Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT) grants from the National Science Foundation, first in the area of computational neuroscience and then in biological physics/quantitative biology. These grants focus on the creation of new knowledge at the intersection of several scientific fields and enable teams of students at various levels to work together with faculty. A Brandeis liberal arts education emphasizes the ability to analyze material from a cross-disciplinary perspective and provides students with opportunities to engage with individual faculty to foster their intellectual growth. The Dean of Arts and Sciences is working with departments and centers to expand opportunities for students to “experience” and “create” through internships and intensive hands-on learning in studios and laboratories.

Grants received, faculty awards, memberships and publications, and program/school rankings are measures of the success of the University’s commitment to academic excellence through scholarship and its research mission. In the last two years, The Boston Foundation invited Brandeis, together with the other seven major research universities in Greater Boston, to participate in two studies that quantified the educational and economic effects of research universities on the region. The results were *Engines of Economic Growth*, which detailed the combined \$7 billion economic impact on the region and *A New Era of Higher Education-Community Partnerships*, which focused on the eight universities’ contributions to education, policy and communities. Recent University decisions to provide more administrative support and infrastructure for scholarship through the creation of new positions, restructured offices and additional funds for faculty leaves and conferences, as well as the largest capital investment in science facilities in the University’s history, are tangible signs of Brandeis’s deep commitment to research.

While the University has not formally reviewed the mission statement since 1984, the statement has helped guide the growth and development of the three professional schools, the formation of new research centers and institutes, and curricular change within Arts and Sciences. Academic planning activities consistently re-articulate the components of mission, focusing at times on different aspects. For example, during the past year and a half, faculty, staff and students on the Provost’s Steering Committee on Campus Diversity Issues worked on a diversity statement that articulates how the University’s roots as a nonsectarian Jewish-sponsored institution exemplify its historical commitment to the principles of inclusion, equal access, and the centrality of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives to the academic mission.²

Projection

While the University does not anticipate changes in its fundamental mission, it will undoubtedly make changes and additions to its programs and curriculum. Its values and goals are timeless; how it defines and achieves them will change. Therein lies the very vitality and dynamism of the University.

² University Diversity Statement in Appendix 1B.

Institutional Effectiveness

The mission of Brandeis is as vital and integral to the University today as it was at its founding. Its distillation in recent integrated planning, designed to provide a framework for resource allocation and to guide the University until 2012, and its amplification in the form of a new diversity statement, demonstrate its living evolution and continued relevance to Brandeis. The integrated planning process involved considerable discussion of the University's mission and priorities by senior administrators and trustees for about two years, while the articulation of the diversity statement over a comparable period involved faculty and student interpretations of the University's history and a vision for its future. In both these cases, which are part of normal planning processes, the University questioned, clarified, re-asserted, and occasionally quantified its mission and purposes. Both of these planning efforts also include future University commitments that will need to be evaluated over time.