Purpose and Outcome Statements

Once a school has identified its primary marketplace stance and established internal clarity about its distinguishing characteristics, ISM recommends the school develop or refine a suite of **Purpose and Outcome Statements** comprised of: the school’s Mission, a **Portrait of the Graduate**, and **Characteristics of Professional Excellence** for faculty. While each statement in the suite is used to clearly differentiate the school from its competition, the suite of statements also serves: (1) as a call to a common purpose for all school employees; and (2) as a set of steering documents that underwrite all programmatic decision-making operationally and strategically. Additionally, the three statements serve as the school’s primary message framework and establish a mission-specific common vocabulary that will, over time, create consistency in your word-of-mouth marketing.

While a mission statement is valuable, no matter how beautiful the wording, it is frequently inadequate by itself in distinguishing your school from all others. Fundamentally the mission should answer the essential question, “Why does your school exist?” But a mission statement, even as it may soundly address that question, may still fail to capture the essence of a school or provide any clear distinction from other schools. It may not be definitive enough to provide guidance to the school’s administration and faculty, for example, in their pursuit of programmatic excellence. To address these additional messaging needs, schools should develop the two other definitive documents—**Portrait of the Graduate** and **Characteristics of Professional Excellence** for Faculty—to guide the school in addressing the primary needs expressed above.

The **Portrait of the Graduate** is a list of no more than five items comprising short descriptors of the student you expect to have developed over the years that she/he has spent under your tutelage. Be specific about what skills, knowledge, and qualities a graduate is expected to acquire. Define each quality and give examples of how each is being manifested in the hearts and minds of your students. If one of the aspects of the Portrait is that a graduate will be a leader and contributor to the community, tracking alumni after they graduate to collect and share stories about the leadership positions they have gone on to fulfill validates that what you sought to develop in your students actually occurred.

The Head of School initiates/endorses the development of the **Portrait of the Graduate**, but the work is best done when it involves the full faculty, members of the leadership/administrative team, members of the support staff team, and in the case of schools
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with high school programs, your oldest students. Use your Portrait of the Graduate to emphasize your school’s uniqueness and to differentiate yourself within your competitive marketplace. Once your Portrait of the Graduate is in place, revisit it in conjunction with your quadrennial strategic planning events and/or in conjunction with your reaccreditation cycles.

The third ISM-recommended component of your suite of Purpose and Outcome Statements (along with your Mission statement and your Portrait of the Graduate) is your list of Characteristics of Professional Excellence for Faculty. This is a 7-10 item list (or less) comprising your operational definition of faculty excellence. These statements will relate both to your Mission statement and your Portrait of the Graduate but will differ in that they will instead focus on the specific behaviors, values, and attitudes that must be present in strength among faculty for the Mission to come alive and the Portrait to be realized. Emphasize the importance of including items that will truly be “difference-makers” in the development and maintenance of your faculty culture. This, too, is work that is commissioned/endorsed by the Head of School, but will involve all faculty and academic leaders.

ISM recommends three uses for your Characteristics of Professional Excellence for Faculty, once complete: (1) to combine with your mission statement and your Portrait of the Graduate to form the three-part foundation for all internal and external marketing efforts; (2) to articulate and act as a call to action toward a common purpose that is student-focused and aligns all adult action and decision-making in service of students’ best interests; and (3) to be incorporated into your professional development system in a manner that contributes to mission-focused hiring decisions and a school-wide culture of professional growth and renewal. Characteristics of Professional Excellence may also be revisited in conjunction with your quadrennial strategic planning events or reaccreditation process.