

Chapter 4

Data–Driven Readability Assessments of Jesuit Business Schools’ Mission Statements

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author provides quantitative readability assessments of mission statements belonging to collegiate business schools and programs within the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU). These assessments can help higher education’s internal stakeholders discern the skill, ability, and effort required for various audiences to read and understand a given mission statement. The author finds that the institutions vary somewhat in how well they articulate their chosen “enduring statement of purpose” for public engagement in terms of tone, gender, reading ease, and other factors. Readability measures are presented for business schools and programs for which a mission statement could be located. These measures include, for example, word count, syllable count, grade level, and a variety of readability indices. This chapter’s contents may be useful to business schools planning to develop, review, or revise their mission statement for internal and external audience engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars in higher education have made occasional inquiries about the mission statements of colleges and universities. For example, Meacham (2008) considered the question, “What’s the use of the mission statement? Similarly, Smith, Heady, Carson, and Carson (2001) contemplated whether missions accomplish their missions. On a basic level, mission statements explain an institution’s reason for being and inform its way of operating. At some point, we must consider how institutions look in terms of the mission statements possibly seen and read by various audiences. (Taylor & Morpew, 2010) that mission statements provide a basis for how baccalaureate institutions aim to represent themselves to potential students and other external constituent groups.

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In this chapter, the author makes an inaugural effort to describe quantitatively the readability of mission statements of business schools and programs affiliated with US Jesuit colleges and universities. This effort extends limited existing work on the topic in general (Ozdem, 2011; Palmer & Short, 2008; Sattari, Pitt, & Caruana, 2011); it also expands attention to the topic as it relates to religiously-affiliated institutions (Firmin & Gilson, 2009). Woodrow (2006) has referred to institutional mission as the “soul of Christian higher education.” Thus, the present chapter might help gauge whether and how well audiences can actually read and understand mission of business schools at such institutions.

Jesuit higher education, a branch of Catholic higher education, has existed for nearly 230 years in the United States of America (Figure 1). Its oldest institution is Georgetown University located in Washington, District of Columbia. Its youngest institution is Wheeling Jesuit University in Wheeling, West Virginia. Overall, the 28 institutions comprising the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) have existed for an average of about 143 years (Table 1).

Business schools and programs accredited by Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE), and other organizations have been encouraged to identify how their chosen mission makes them special. Most AJCU institutions have a collegiate business program that is AACSB-accredited. Wheeling Jesuit University's Department of Business is ACBSP-accredited. Saint Peter's University's School of Business is IACBE-accredited. College of the Holy Cross has a small professional program in business. Given the importance of mission to Jesuit business education, a few questions about readability seem particularly relevant:

- How readable are mission statements of collegiate business schools and programs?
- Might a mission statement's word choice, syllables, sentence length, and other factors limit people's ability or desire to engaging with the mission's message?

Looking forward, this chapter's contents could prove useful to business schools planning to create, review, or revise their own mission statement. In that regard, this chapter directly acknowledges the need for a framework to guide the re/development of mission statements (Cochran, David, & Gibson, 2008). Rajasekar (2013) advises, “Creating a mission is a priority, and an organization should prioritize articulating it” (p. 131). As mission statements are “enduring statements of purpose,” David and David (2003) have recommended that they be subjected to periodic review, revision, and/or redrafting as circumstances change around the organization.

The chapter leans towards the notion of readability initially formalized by Thorndike (1921) and continued by others (Chall & Dale, 1995; Coleman & Liau, 1975; Flesch, 1948; Kincaid, Fishburne Jr, Rogers, & Chissom, 1975; Spache, 1953). It considers but goes beyond a focus on the mere length of business schools' mission statements (Orwig & Zachary Finney, 2007). It also avoids narrowly targeted analysis of specific content (e.g., ethics) within those statements (Buff & Yonkers, 2004). While such efforts are important, this chapter aims to provide an objective and replicable approach for describing the readability of mission statements. This data-driven approach analyzes mission statements based on their words, syllables, tone, sentences, reading time, and other factors. Accordingly, no assumptions are made about what missions statements should say or what goals they should identify. Rather, emphases are placed only on how well these statements might be understood by audiences that read them. In this regard, the work in this chapter draws inspiration from Sherman (1893), who asserted not only that literature was an appropriate subject for statistical analyses but also that shorter sentences, simpler

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