

The Mission and Purpose of TRUCEN (The Research University Civic Engagement Network)

The mission of The Research University Civic Engagement Network (TRUCEN) is to advance civic engagement and engaged scholarship among research universities.

Most universities were founded with a civic purpose. They have a fundamental obligation to apply their skills, resources, and energy to address the most challenging issues in society. Research universities have a special role to play. Through scholarship that combines rigorous academic standards with community collaboration, broadly defined, research universities can deepen our understanding of issues and develop practical solutions that will make a difference. Through teaching that combines deep understanding of issues with engagement in community and global problem solving, they can give students the knowledge, analytical skills, and civic disposition required to address our greatest challenges.

Research universities have been criticized for not taking advantage of these opportunities—community-focused and collaborative research and teaching—to make a big enough difference in the world. They often respond defensively with a list of their many important, traditional outreach activities, and in most cases the list is long. That misses the point. Research universities have a responsibility to help us understand our world and that understanding is enhanced through engagement with communities in solving the world's greatest problems. Those of us privileged to work in these institutions should dedicate ourselves to putting in place the structures, processes, and incentives to make it happen. It is our moral responsibility as scholars, it is our democratic responsibility as citizens, and it is our route to excellence in our scholarship and instruction. We must embrace this responsibility as an expression of our core academic, social, and civic values. TRUCEN is committed to helping research universities understand and meet this responsibility in ways that will make them better institutions of higher learning making a greater difference in the world.

Goals

TRUCEN has adopted the following goals for advancing civic engagement and engaged scholarship as part of the core mission of all research universities.

Goal 1

Encourage community-engaged scholarship by identifying its dimensions and demonstrating how it satisfies criteria for rigorous scholarship established by and expected from research universities.

There are many overlapping definitions of engaged scholarship and reasonable people can disagree about exactly how it should be conceptualized in practice. TRUCEN has identified three core dimensions, however, and each represents a continuum of possibilities that a campus should address in determining whether scholarship is more or less engaged. The *purpose* of the research must be to benefit society, broadly defined, as opposed to developing new knowledge solely for its own sake. The *process* must be collaborative, but the overall level of engagement among faculty, students and community members will vary depending on the degree of collaboration at each stage of the research. The *impact* of engaged research must benefit society and extend beyond making a difference only within an academic field.

Engaged researchers must meet the same rigorous standards applied to traditional scholarly inquiry, and in addition meet standards related to how they involve community members and/or organizations as respected partners in research design, implementation, reporting, and evaluation. This kind of collaborative work can be deeply challenging and time-consuming. The reward for meeting these additional challenges, however, is the satisfaction that comes from researching issues with urgency and potential to improve peoples' lives, creating new knowledge that has value and impact in both the community and the academy, and in engaging citizens as partners in the research process.

Goal 2

Encourage research on different forms of civic engagement and give greater visibility to this growing field of scholarship.

Democratic societies cannot realize their highest ideals without a diverse and vibrant civic life. There is wide agreement about that proposition. There is less agreement about how to create the kind of civic life that leads to constructive and effective engagement by

our citizens. TRUCEN believes that research universities have a responsibility to help answer that question by conducting research on civic learning and citizen participation in community and public affairs. Civic engagement takes many forms, including a focus on democratic citizenship, community development, public governance, philanthropy, and on many other diverse forms of civic life. Research on civic engagement is a growing area of scholarship with its own specific content focus, and it is often carried out through interdisciplinary centers and institutes. TRUCEN is committed to strengthening democratic practice by promoting and supporting research universities' participation in the expansion of scholarship on civic engagement.

Goal 3

Encourage greater commitment to curricular and co-curricular activities that promote students' civic understanding and engagement, and scholarly efforts to understand and articulate the outcomes, challenges, and best practices for doing so.

In recent years many colleges and universities have created programs designed to give students greater opportunities for service-learning, volunteer service, public leadership development, and engaged research. These programs have multiple goals, including service to community partners, enhanced learning for students through a combination of teaching and practice, and increased civic participation by students. TRUCEN believes that research universities must be more rigorous and systematic in clarifying and articulating the intended outcomes of these different programs, and that they are particularly well positioned to do so. We should encourage investigations focused on: what knowledge, skills, values, and behavior do we seek to promote in students through this work? What practices and conditions maximize student learning and community impact? What factors motivate students and best prepare them for effective participation in democratic society over their adult lives? What are the best practices in working with community organizations that partner with universities to support the civic and community engagement of our students? TRUCEN is committed to encouraging research that will answer these and related questions about the effectiveness of engagement programs and activities for students.