Bringing Public Engagement into an Academic Plan and Its Assessment Metrics

Preston A. Britner

"Takes time, you pick a place to go, and just keep truckin' on."
—The Grateful Dead, "Truckin'," American Beauty *(1970)*

Abstract

This article describes how public engagement was incorporated into a research university's current Academic Plan, how the public engagement metrics were selected and adopted, and how those processes led to subsequent strategic planning. Some recognition of the importance of civic engagement has followed, although there are many areas in which further research and support are needed. These experiences are shared in the interest of generating ideas about the roles of leadership, planning, data, and recognition in promoting and strengthening a university's commitment to civic engagement.

Academic and strategic plans are important in setting an agenda for public engagement at research universities when they are considering their road maps for engagement, outreach, and service. A vision is important to set a course for such a journey, and in this article I share insights from the experiences of the University of Connecticut, which joined TRUCEN (The Research University Civic Engagement Network) in 2011.

After reading about so many other universities' academic and strategic plans in articles, chapters, and—most frequently—on those universities' websites, I welcome this opportunity to share some of the stories from the University of Connecticut. Whereas the University of Connecticut has made great strides, it also has much work to do in the realm of public engagement. In the spirit of cooperation and sharing, which is so pervasive among TRUCEN members and in Campus Compact circles, I hope that a glimpse of our efforts and decisions may provide helpful lessons for readers at other institutions.

In this article, I lay out how public engagement was incorporated into the University of Connecticut's current Academic Plan, how the metrics by which we assess progress were selected and how that led to subsequent strategic planning, the benefits accrued from this work to date, and some of the areas in which further research and support is needed.

The Academic Plan

The University of Connecticut is Connecticut's flagship public research university; it is also the state's land-grant university. It has a strong Cooperative Extension system, and a long tradition of service and outreach (i.e., instances in which the university's faculty and staff, and sometimes students, share expertise in the community). Today, however, it strives to become a university that is more civically and publicly engaged with its various communities for the "mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" *(Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011).*

The University of Connecticut's Path Toward Public Engagement

Consistent with the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities *(1999)* report *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, many of the University of Connecticut's faculty members, staff members, administrators, and community partners have wanted to see engagement embraced as a core part of the University of Connecticut's mission. In this section, I review the information, tools, and models we gleaned from national resources, discuss how public engagement was incorporated into the university's Academic Plan, and share ideas we discovered from reviewing other universities' plans.

Information, Tools, and Models from National Resources

Naturally, each university must set its own course, considering its geographic setting and ideas about the "communities" with which it partners as well as its areas of focus and strength. There are lessons to be learned, however, from what has worked at other institutions. Throughout the University of Connecticut's planning processes, we relied on networks of like-minded research universities to learn about organizational structures, institutional portraits, and institutional supports to facilitate public engagement *(e.g., Jetson & Jeremiah, 2009; Stanton, 2008; Stanton & Howard, 2009*; for more on the value of such networks, see *Hollister et al., 2012* on the Talloires Network). Table 1 lists some of these informative networks and sites.

Table 1. National Collaborations and Resources

- TRUCEN [http://www.compact.org/initiatives/civic-engagement-at-research-universities/]
  - *Models of Civic Engagement Initiatives at Research Universities*
  - *Research University Engaged Scholarship Toolkit*
- Association for Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU)
  - Council on Engagement and Outreach [http://www.aplu.org/page.aspx?pid=255]
  - University Engagement [http://www.aplu.org/page.aspx?pid=224]
- Campus Compact, Resources [http://www.compact.org/category/resources/]
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Community Engagement elective classification [http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php]
- Higher Education Network for Community Engagement (HENCE) [http://henceonline.org/]
- National Collaborative for the Study of University Engagement, Michigan State University [http://ncsue.msu.edu/collaborations.aspx]
- National Outreach Scholarship Conference [http://www.outreachscholarship.org/]
- The Talloires Network [http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork/]

The University of Connecticut's Academic Plan

At a 2011 Connecticut Campus Compact statewide strategic planning retreat, I had a lunchtime conversation with a colleague from another university. He asked me how we had made so much recent progress at the University of Connecticut with respect to public engagement. Upon reflection, I replied that much of the momentum stemmed from the involvement of our Public Engagement Forum in guiding parts of the university's 2009–2014 Academic Plan. Public engagement was not an area of focus in the university's prior academic plans, but the persistence, willingness to volunteer and contribute, and the great skills and experience of the members of the university's Public Engagement Forum led to a central role for engagement in the 2009–2014 Academic Plan.

The Public Engagement Forum (the Forum), begun in 2003 as the outreach forum, represents the constituent units of the university, with its volunteer membership drawn from a dedicated pool of faculty, staff, administrators, students, and community partners. Other key offices represented on the Forum include the Office of Community Outreach (which coordinates student volunteer experiences), the Office of Service-Learning (which supports the pedagogy of service-learning), and the Office of Institutional Research (which oversees data systems and reporting). Many Forum members have community engagement responsibilities within their own school, college, or unit. For more on the Forum and all public engagement endeavors at the University of Connecticut, see http://engagement.uconn.edu/.

The University of Connecticut's provost has been supportive of the Forum's work, including the creation of an annual awards program, an annual symposium on a public engagement topic (e.g., community partnerships, engaged scholarship), and a growing faculty service-learning fellows program. The provost led the university-wide drafting of the 2009–2014 Academic Plan; he welcomed the contributions of the Forum. Members of the Forum took an active role in drafting language for goals and strategies for public engagement in the Academic Plan. These recommendations were informed by the Forum members' experiences and discussions; reviews of peer institutions' public engagement programs and structures; and by a Forum-sponsored series of four colloquia on public engagement, engaged scholarship, programs and partnerships, and measurement. The cohesive and unified voice of the Forum members may well have led to the advancement of its vision within the Academic Plan.

Ideas from other universities' plans.

Scrutiny of other universities' academic or strategic plans can be informative. These were instructive in illuminating their intent, as research universities, in advancing their engagement endeavors. For example, the University of California, Los Angeles' 2010–2019 Academic Plan has a focus on local and global civic engagement, in addition to academic excellence, diversity, and financial security *(http://evc.ucla.edu/reports/academic-plan/)*; it includes helpful thoughts regarding how a research university defines "community." The University of Minnesota's 2008 10-point plan for advancing and institutionalizing public engagement *(http://engagement.umn.edu/university/ope/tenpointplan.html)* outlines strategies for moving from individual publicly engaged programs to a campus-integrated focus on engagement. The "Excellence in Public Engagement" section in Cornell University's 2010–2015 Strategic Plan (http://www.cornell.edu/strategicplan/) calls for the development of rigorous and systematic evaluation.

A vision for public engagement in a university's academic plan is a crucial first step. Is a vision, however, sufficient to instigate change? Conversations with colleagues at other universities suggest that their campus leaders have begun to "talk the talk of engagement," but have not started to "walk the walk." Their institutions have not yet increased financial support or named leaders (e.g., a vice provost for engagement) at the highest levels of the organizational structure, nor have promotion and tenure policies been revised. In short, two difficulties in articulating a vision are how public engagement will be executed and how it will be assessed.

Public engagement in the University of Connecticut's Academic Plan.

In the 2009–2014 Academic Plan for the university, approved by its board of trustees, public engagement was highlighted as one of five major goals. Language drafted by members of the Forum was influential in the finalized goal and its strategies. Goal 5 (public engagement) aims to "[e]nhance contributions of UConn faculty, staff, and students to the state, nation, and world through appropriate collaboration with partners in both the public and private sectors" *(University of Connecticut, 2008, p. 19)*. The plan explicitly describes strategic steps to achieve a level of public engagement, which interrelate with the university's other four goals—undergraduate education, graduate/professional education, research/scholarship/creative activity, and diversity—to demonstrate "true partnership . . . with groups beyond our campuses in areas of mutual concern" *(p. 19)*.

Public Engagement: Assessment Metrics

With public engagement approved as one of five major goals in the University of Connecticut's Academic Plan, the development of valid and useful assessment metrics to measure progress was needed to implement the plan. The development process included concerns with the initial set of the campus' metrics, steps to consider alternative metrics, and adoption of university-approved metrics.

The metrics to assess Goal 5 (public engagement) of the Academic Plan that were initially approved by the board of trustees were problematic. Although the language of the Academic Plan reflected public engagement, the metrics reflected traditional one-directional outreach (e.g., numbers of arts events, outreach programs, Extension contacts, faculty consultancies). Members of the Public Engagement Forum recognized that the metrics were "countable" but not sufficient to reflect the goal of reciprocal engagement in the areas of student development, engaged scholarship, and programs and partnerships.

Members of the Public Engagement Forum drafted a new set of proposed metrics by reviewing the text of the Academic Plan, Goal 5, which emphasizes the University of Connecticut's students, staff, and faculty engagement contributions and collaborations; the results of the previously mentioned series of public engagement colloquia held on campus to explore public engagement definitions, examples, goals/plans/obstacles, and metrics; metrics from other flagship and land-grant peer and aspirant institutions;

metrics suggested by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities' (APLU) Council on Engagement and Outreach; and recognition standards from the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement classification, which emphasize university-level organization and commitment for "curricular engagement" and "outreach and partnerships."

Considering national metrics and guidelines.

In 2009, my former co-chair of the Public Engagement Forum and I participated in a comment process on proposed APLU Council on Engagement and Outreach metrics. Those draft metrics included six dimensions: institutional commitment, faculty involvement, student involvement, the institution's reciprocal engagement with diverse individuals and communities, impact and outcomes of engagement activities, and resource/revenue opportunities generated through engagement.

We found the review of those metrics to be helpful in developing metrics for the University of Connecticut. Given concerns about the burden of multiple, incompatible reporting systems, we were pleased that the APLU effort identified overlaps of the APLU proposed metrics with other sets of metrics (e.g., Michigan State University's Outreach and Engagement Measurement Instrument, the Carnegie Community Engagement classification application questions, the National Survey of Student Engagement survey questions). Although we commented that we saw benefit in the various metrics, we were concerned that some were not clearly defined, that some requested data would be difficult to collect (given current systems in place at the university), and that the proposed metrics did little to address community partnerships and outcomes.

The University of Connecticut's Metrics: From Proposed to Approved

For each of the University of Connecticut's proposed Academic Plan metrics, we debated the wording, the best mechanisms for reporting (e.g., aggregating individual faculty/staff annual reports vs. having centralized units report), the unit of analysis (e.g., number of students vs. courses vs. course credit hours), and the realistic target for improvement in the metric (e.g., modest 2% annual growth).

Other qualitative data, like the development or continuation of "signature" programs (e.g., the University of Connecticut's partnership with the Metropolitan Opera), were not ultimately part

of the proposed set of metrics. Following many discussions about assessing community perceptions and impact, it was determined that the university was not yet in a position to propose valid and measurable metrics without new resources for measurement. The university would have to rely on a small number of quantitative metrics for the Academic Plan.

The process of defining this new set of metrics took more than a year to complete. It concluded after extensive discussion by the Forum membership, in consultation with relevant parties throughout the university. The provost subsequently endorsed the new set. The executive director of the Office of Public Engagement presented the metrics to the board of trustees, which approved them in September 2010. The metrics are now in use, as monitored by the Office of the Provost and the Office for Institutional Research, with the consultation of the Forum's membership.

The final, approved metrics are listed in Table 2. They reflect the public engagement goal (and strategies) of the Academic Plan, in the areas of student development, engaged scholarship, and programs and partnerships.

Table 2. Public Engagement Metrics in the University of Connecticut 2009-2014 Academic Plan

Enhance Student Development Through Service-Learning and Community Service

Metric #1: Number of students involved in service-learning courses [Goal: 2% annual growth]

Metric #2: Number of students involved in volunteer community service activities through Community Outreach and through fee-funded student organizations [Goal: 2% annual growth]

Promote Growth and Value of Engaged Scholarship

Metric #3: Number of external outreach/public service/public engagement activities reported by faculty [Goal: 2% annual growth]

Metric #4: Number of active outreach/public service/public engagement grants and/or contracts [Goal: 2% annual growth]

Encourage the Development of Collaborative Programs and Partnerships

Metric #5: Number of externally recognized outreach/public service/public engagement programs and partnerships [Goal: 1% annual growth]

A brief description for each of these five key metrics follows. Although the Forum is monitoring many more qualitative and quantitative data sources, such a detailed level of review is beyond the scope of this article.

Enhance student development through service-learning and community service.

The two student development metrics seek to document the number of students involved in academic service-learning courses and formal community service activities. Service-learning course data come from the university's centralized enrollment database, based on courses designated by departments as meeting service-learning criteria. The language of the second metric conveys the reporting from the university's Community Outreach office, and from annual reports by recognized student organizations. The metric, therefore, is not meant to capture all community service by students.

Promote growth and value of engaged scholarship.

Jetson and Jeremiah *(2009)* describe a range of possible examples of engaged scholarship at research universities. For example, data from needs assessments projects or service-learning classes might lead to traditionally valued outcomes, like journal publications and external grant funding. The University of Connecticut's metrics for engaged scholarship reflect scholarly products and grant funding related to university community engagement. Faculty members report annually on external outreach, public service, or public engagement activities. These reports are aggregated by the university's Office of Institutional Research. The metric reflects an aggregate of journal articles, Extension services, consultancies, and other scholarly products (e.g., peer-reviewed presentations at professional conferences). Reports of active outreach, public service, or public engagement grants and contracts are available from the university's Office of Sponsored Programs. With both of these metrics, existing reporting methods are in place, but definitions of "engaged scholarship" within subject matter disciplines will need to be clarified over time; at this point, no fine distinctions can be made in the aggregate statistics as to which scholarly products or grants and contracts would meet a definition of engagement as opposed to service or outreach.

Encourage the development of collaborative programs and partnerships.

The fifth metric is new. The number of outreach and public service (i.e., expertise-driven) or public engagement (i.e., reflecting reciprocity) programs and partnerships recognized by external

media was chosen as a trailing indicator of various constituents' perceptions about new and sustained university-community partnerships. The university's communications staff helped to craft clear definitions of partnerships and programs (i.e., enduring university-community partnerships, and not simple interviews citing a faculty member's expertise); intervals and incidence (i.e., coverage within a 3-month period would be calculated such that a story about one program in 30 media outlets would count as a single instance); and how media outlets would be monitored. Given that it was a new metric and that reputation (media stories) might lag programmatic excellence, we argued for a goal of 1% annual growth for this metric, in contrast to the 2% annual growth for the other goals.

Members of the Public Engagement Forum were pleased to see our recommendations for public engagement metrics adopted by the university's board of trustees, replacing the original "outreach" metrics. Five quantitative metrics are not sufficient to capture all of public engagement at a major research university. Today, other variables and exemplars are being studied, guided by the university's Public Engagement Strategic Plan (described in the following section), which was an outgrowth of the Forum members' involvement in the university's Academic Plan. Next, I briefly describe the process in drafting that strategic plan.

Strategic Planning for Public Engagement

At the direction of the executive director of the Office of Public Engagement, the Forum members undertook the first ever Public Engagement Strategic Plan (2011–2014) in late 2010 and early 2011. The development of the plan was based on a careful consideration of input from a broad array of stakeholders and a wide array of relevant documents. The members reviewed the University of Connecticut's 2009–2014 Academic Plan, documents written over the past 5 years by the members of the university's Public Engagement Forum, and the materials reviewed from national networks and peer institutions. Focus groups were used to solicit information about the types of university public engagement activities that would help meet the needs of community groups, public officials, and students.

A facilitated retreat was held in early 2011 with members of the Public Engagement Forum in order to conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges analysis. The retreat concluded with members using the analysis to develop goals, objectives, strategies, and action steps. The Forum's Strategic Planning

Committee integrated the written feedback from the retreat and presented it at a spring meeting; the plan was then revised and unanimously approved by the Forum at its June 2011 meeting. The plan provides a 3-year timeframe in which to promote the development and growth of public engagement at the university. It is divided into three sections (engaged scholarship, programs and partnerships, and student development), each with a goal, objectives, strategies, action items, and anticipated dates of completion. An executive summary of that plan is available at the public engagement website (http://engagement.uconn.edu/).

The University of Connecticut's Public Engagement Strategic Plan is consistent with the institution's Academic Plan (and metrics), as well as with TRUCEN's goals to encourage engaged scholarship, research on civic engagement, and commitment to student curricular and co-curricular civic engagement activities. The objectives in the strategic plan are to

- educate the university community about the scope and value of engaged scholarship;

- increase the quantity and visibility of high-quality engaged scholarship conducted by faculty and staff;

- foster relationships among faculty, staff, students, and community partners, including alumni who are interested in public engagement;

- maximize the impact and sustainability of community programs and partnerships;

- increase undergraduate, graduate, and professional students' opportunities to participate in service-learning and community service, and provide incentives to encourage them to take advantage of these opportunities;

- enhance student leadership preparation and opportunities for service-learning and community service; and

- increase knowledge and awareness about student service-learning and community service opportunities among faculty and staff, and provide them with incentives to increase their participation and involvement in these endeavors for the benefit of their students.

Committees of the Public Engagement Forum have been tasked with specific actions in the plan and now regularly report to the Forum on progress related to the plan.

Beneficial Effects of Planning

The author's experience with extensive planning exercises (e.g., Academic Plan, Public Engagement Strategic Plan, Carnegie Community Engagement classification application) over the past few years has led to a number of lessons learned, highlighting the positive effects of the processes.

Learning Through Reflection and Self-Study

It is interesting to read through the comments made by representatives of colleges and universities that were recognized with the Carnegie Foundation's elective Community Engagement Classification (see http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/voices.php). The quotes speak to the value of self-study of institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, and how those conversations and assessments have been instrumental in catalyzing change.

At the University of Connecticut, a great deal was learned by those who were part of the various planning endeavors. Members were exposed to work being done by their colleagues. The need for greater coordination, planning, and support was recognized. This greatly assisted in constructing the university's 2010 application (available at http://engagement.uconn.edu/) to the Carnegie Foundation for the elective community engagement classification designation.

Validation and Recognition

The University of Connecticut was invited to join TRUCEN in late 2010. In January 2011, the university's recognition by the Carnegie Foundation with a community engagement classification designation was announced. The Corporation for National and Community Service President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll (with distinction) was awarded to the university's main campus in Storrs, based in large part on the strong track record of student service coordinated by the campus office of community outreach.

These distinctions brought new recognitions of legitimacy. A number of individuals reported learning about definitions and standards (e.g., for engaged scholarship and service-learning) as they explored these organizations' websites. A number of administrators and faculty members who had not been as invested in public engagement in the past became more involved after the Carnegie Foundation and TRUCEN recognitions, in particular.

Public statements by the university's administration have led to more offers of involvement by faculty members and community partners, a growing annual awards program, and new ideas for our annual symposium. Documentation and recognition of good public engagement work has brought about validation of public engagement efforts *(Byrne, 2009; Jetson & Jeremiah, 2009)*.

A Seat at the Table

In February 2012, the provost officially invited Robert McCarthy to serve as the University of Connecticut's first vice provost for engagement (while maintaining his role as dean of the School of Pharmacy). With an expanded budget and responsibility, the Office of Public Engagement is poised to implement the Public Engagement Strategic Plan (2011–2014). The core work of the office will continue to run through the committee structure of the Forum, but the additional recognition and authority that comes with this new vice provost position have many members of the Forum feeling as though their efforts are being validated by the university.

With the spate of recent accomplishments in public engagement, members of the Forum have been asked to speak at the university's new faculty orientation, review diversity and equity policies, and meet with key business and nonprofit partners. In July 2011, the university's new president shared a revised code of conduct (http://www.audit.uconn.edu/doc/codeofconduct.pdf) as one of her first pieces of correspondence with the university community. In her e-mail, she highlighted the focus on civility and collegiality (an area of her scholarly expertise; *Herbst, 2010)* and new standards for public engagement and outreach, which she described as integral to the university's mission. Indeed, the revised code of conduct includes a public engagement section with language and practices (as recommended by the Forum) reflecting the importance of intentional, reciprocal interaction and synergistic outcomes for the university and community.

In summary, progress has been made with respect to supporting the public engagement mission at the University of Connecticut. There are, however, a number of areas in which we—like other universities—need to apply the tools at our disposal to study partnerships and impact.

Public Engagement: Future Directions

In his book of essays, *Me Talk Pretty One Day*, humorist David Sedaris writes, "My hatred is entrenched, and I nourish it daily. I'm comfortable with it, and no community outreach program will change my mind" *(Sedaris, 2000, p. 145)*. Contrary to his sentiment, we at the University of Connecticut think experiences in such programs—especially those characterized by true engagement—can help communities, promote quality scholarship, and change and lead to the personal growth of college students who engage in such programs. We must, however, do a better job of supporting, studying, and assessing changes in these three domains: community partnerships and engagement; institutionalizing engaged scholarship; and impact on students.

Community Partnerships and Engagement

Saltmarsh et al. *(2009)* note that the 2006 cohort of institutions classified as community engaged by the Carnegie Foundation did not excel at understanding community partnerships marked by reciprocity. These concerns continued through the 2008 and 2010 cohorts, according to information at the Carnegie community engagement website (http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php). Thus, a major area of research and support must be the development of publicly centered, two-way engagement models, in contrast to institutionally centered, one-way expert models *(Weerts, 2011)*.

Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, and Morrison *(2010)* discuss partnerships as relationships that are characterized by closeness, equity, and integrity, and they distinguish transactional relationships from transformational relationships, with the latter marked by growth and change "because of deeper and more sustainable commitments" *(p. 7)*. The Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale that they present provides an example of a constructive tool for measuring universities' partnerships (e.g., description of partnership, analysis of types of relationships, ratings for indicators of closeness).

Institutions and networks like TRUCEN will need to study how resources and structural models at universities *(Jetson & Jeremiah, 2009)*, and consultation and evaluation skills (from fields like consulting and community psychology) for building and assessing community partnerships *(O'Neil & Britner, 2009)*, may affect impact on community outcomes *(Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Carnes Stevens, 2010)*.

Institutionalizing Engaged Scholarship

Challenges to institutionalizing engaged scholarship are recognized by faculty members and administrators at research universities *(Hutchinson, 2011; Smith, 2011; Stanton, 2008)*. Saltmarsh et al. *(2009)* write about research universities' resistance to change in promotion and tenure guidelines as well as debates about language and definitions for engaged scholarship.

Progress, however, is being made on promotion and tenure policies (see policy examples on the TRUCEN website), and new measures are becoming available to study change in institutional attitudes. For example, the University of Vermont's Faculty Community Engagement Tool *(Westdijk, Koliba, & Hamshaw, 2010)* is a web-based data collection tool to inform decision making and action. The Faculty Community Engagement Tool asks about community-based teaching activities, research, and outreach; informational and support needs; and faculty attitudes toward engagement.

Impact on Students

In *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Schmidt *(2009)* summarized findings from a civic engagement survey of students, faculty members, and administrators conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The survey found a gap between students' strong desire for community engagement experiences and their institutions' limited capacity to coordinate placements and prepare students for such experiences. As colleges and universities expand their community-based placements for students, researchers must study outcomes for the individuals and communities served. At the same time, the potential effects of volunteerism on college student volunteers should be considered. Adolescents and young adults may benefit from community-based volunteerism that allows them to experience service recipients as individuals worthy of respect, to understand the role of context and institutions on individuals, to connect to or engage with their community, and to have the opportunity to reflect on their own perspectives *(Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003)*. For example, in detailed interviews with college students performing 10 to 20 hours per week of community service, Seidler *(2007)* found that participants spoke about their identity development and shifts in worldviews as a result of their experiences. Primavera *(1999)* coded qualitative data on college students' service-learning experiences (i.e., volunteer experiences coupled with academic "processing" of the

experiences) and identified themes of satisfaction, reflection, self-knowledge, academic connections and rewards, understanding of cultural diversity and social issues, and a commitment to service. The effects of such volunteerism in college may be enduring.

The research priorities section of a recent Campus Compact publication on college access and success through civic engagement *(Cress et al., 2010)* discusses the need to study "individual civic transformation and the development of a sense of civic and personal efficacy" *(p. 19)*. Current research is being performed in conjunction with community outreach and academic colleagues at the University of Connecticut. A special issue of Pi Lambda Delta's *Educational Horizons* discusses the impact of voluntary mentoring on mentors *(Slaughter-Defoe, 2010)*. Although it is exciting to see such studies getting started, many unanswered questions remain concerning the impact of volunteerism, community service, and service-learning on students.

Conclusion

The Academic Plan and Public Engagement Strategic Plan goals at the University of Connecticut are consistent with the three goals in TRUCEN's mission statement: to encourage engaged scholarship (Goal 1), research on different forms of civic engagement (Goal 2), and commitment to curricular and co-curricular activities that promote students' civic understandings and engagement (Goal 3).

Through self-study, coordination, and planning, and by learning and sharing lessons with colleagues at peer TRUCEN institutions, we at the University of Connecticut have made progress on the road to engagement. Continuing with the Grateful Dead's "Truckin'" metaphor, "Lately it occurs to me, What a long, strange trip it's been." We have had many flat tires and detours, but the trip has been great, so far. It has been a trek shared by many invested, talented, and committed colleagues. I just hope we make it to the promised destination. We must, for the good of both our university and our partner communities. The good news is that we have the knowledge and capacity to get there, as long as we have the will to do so.

Endnote

1. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent any positions of the University of Connecticut.

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About the Author

Preston A. Britner is co-chair of the University of Connecticut's Public Engagement Forum. He is also a professor of human development and family studies, with joint appointments in educational psychology and the Ph.D. program in public health. His research interests include single-system design evaluation, attachment relationships, youth mentoring, child maltreatment prevention, and family-focused, community-based prevention/diversion programs for children, youth, and families. Britner earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Miami, and his master's degree and Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the University of Virginia.