



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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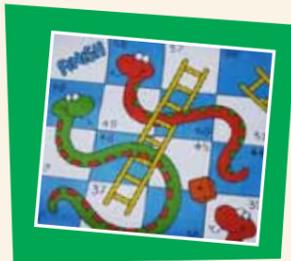


Introduction

While Trinity College Dublin has a long and proud history of engagement with the community and activities in this are many and varied, the College appointed its first Civic Engagement Officer in 2009. The initial two-year contract was intended to support voluntary activity among staff and students and to develop links with Civil Society Organisations.

To this end and to further new strategic actions (measure and reward outreach activities; incentivise and champion initiatives in civic engagement and volunteering; maximise learning opportunities outside the classroom), a mapping exercise was undertaken to ascertain the institutional baseline, strengths and weaknesses and to determine the most appropriate next steps for the University through consultation.

The resulting report was endorsed by University Council in April 2011 offering a work plan and mandate for continued and coordinated Civic Engagement activity. The College has also retained the position of Civic Engagement Officer.



Methods

The report was limited to the civic engagement activities of community outreach & partnerships, volunteering, service-learning and engaged research.

The report consolidated information and opinions provided through the following mechanisms:

- Responses of all Academic Units to a framework document for the Strategic Plan 2009-14 (Summer 2009).
- Results of a Staff Civic Engagement Survey with a response rate of 13% (Summer 2010).
- Results of the Student Voluntary Activity Survey with a 6% response rate (N=953) (Spring 2010).
- Stakeholder focus groups and submissions for the University's input into National Survey of Civic Engagement Activities in Higher Education in Ireland (March 2010).
- Information provided by individual Heads of Academic Units and information available on University websites at the time of data collection.

Findings

- Almost half of academic staff respondents to the survey indicated recent involvement in **community partnerships**.

"This work informs my teaching, offers practical real-life examples for students and is research grounded in local community"

- Thirty-one academic staff respondents indicated using elements of service-learning in their teaching although implement it to the extent that students gain credit for participating in organised, discipline-specific service activity meeting identified community needs, and including structured reflection activity on academic, personal and civic learning.

Engineering students showcase universal design prototypes to community members for assessment



"The interaction with the community organisation is absolutely vital for the students to fully understand and apply theoretical complexities into real and practical environments, that they may face in the future."

71% of academic respondents agreed that service-learning would be a useful pedagogy in the education of students in their disciplines. Of those who believed service-learning would be useful, 30% were unaware of how it might be incorporated into the courses they teach.

- 40% of academic respondents reported experience of **engaged research** and more than 20% indicated related publications.

"The research would not have been possible without the collaboration, and the particular breakthroughs that are being achieved would not have been possible without the sustained input and support of the charity."

- Without additional support, further development of community engagement activities will be difficult due to **capacity and resource constraints**.

"This takes a lot of energy and work. Collaboration means that there has to be an exploratory stage where these needs are discussed and teased out before any programmes are up and running which all takes time."

- Members of the College community involved in civic engagement activity felt this work was **not sufficiently valued** or recognised by the College.

- Half of the students surveyed engage in **volunteering** for an average of 20 hours per month and a further 40% had volunteered in the past. 31% of staff respondents volunteer for more than 8 hours per month on average although a total of 70% indicated an interest.

Students participating in National Day of Volunteering



32% of student respondents who had volunteered previously, indicated that they had not volunteered since coming to University. Among staff volunteers, most have been engaging in voluntary work for many years while relatively few are new to the activity.

"It is probable that staff actually encourage [volunteerism] less than in the past, not least because of the pressures of conventional research and the fact that many new staff initially have only tenuous relationships with the city and the society"

Barriers to Volunteering

Among Students	Among Staff
1 Work commitments	1 Other commitments
2 Other commitments	2 No time
3 Lack of awareness	3 Not enough information
4 Family commitments	4 Don't know anyone else doing it
5 Poor organisation	5 Not aware of anything of interest

Recommendations

- Develop mechanisms to recognise and incentivise engaged research, teaching and service activity which is of mutual benefit to the College and the Community.
- Raise awareness of the value and opportunities for service-learning and provide professional development opportunities for those interested in the pedagogy.
- Continue to offer community organisations a contact point within the University and develop a mechanism to enable community organisations with research questions to link in with the College in a more structured way.

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Trinity College Provost and Dean of Students pictured with student volunteers at now annual ceremony honouring learning and contribution in the community



- Facilitate and promote low commitment and once off volunteering opportunities to enable increased participation.
- Promote, raise awareness and provide information about the range of volunteering opportunities available.
- Support new students and staff who wish to engage in volunteering.
- Provide opportunities for those actively engaged in service-learning, engaged research, voluntary programmes and community outreach to knowledge share.
- Identify and more widely disseminate the success stories of effective collaboration with the community and civic engagement occurring throughout the University.



Posters from the Annual Volunteer Fair which showcases 30+ volunteer involving organisations on campus

Strengths

- Raised awareness of civic engagement commitment and activities throughout university.
- Justified this commitment by reference to existing activities and local values.
- Recommendations arose from specific institutional culture of engagement thus enhancing buy-in.
- Mandated actions going forward.
- Established baseline and acknowledged good practice.



Challenges

- Those who engaged with mapping exercise were largely self-selecting.
- Creates expectation that resources will follow.
- Structures required for follow through not necessarily in place.
- Information was presented as it was provided according to localised understandings of civic engagement activities which weren't necessarily in line with the broad definitions of terms articulated.



For further information

Please contact roisin.mcrogan@tcd.ie More information on this and related projects can be obtained at www.tcd.ie/Community.