



Advancing Higher Education's Democratic Purpose

A Minnesota statement reflecting themes that emerged from a conversation of college and university presidents and chancellors on Campus Compact's 30th Anniversary Action Statement

We may represent a diverse array of higher education institutions, but we agree: there is more we must do to live out our democratic purpose. Our institutional missions commit—in distinctive ways—to teaching, research, and institutional partnerships that promote a strong democracy, vital economy, and healthy, just, sustainable communities. Our results do not yet match our rhetoric.

Debates about workforce development vs. liberal education present a false choice. Employees and entrepreneurs, citizens and new immigrants, leaders and neighbors require many of the same skills. We must all be able to communicate effectively, think critically, organize and collaborate across differences (religious, racial, economic, and more), continue learning, and take responsibility for solving problems. An education that advances these skills will prepare people for professional, community, and civic life.

To develop and practice these skills, we are committed to integrating community engagement throughout our institutions' identity and operations. Just as we know our students can contribute to the public good through work in any role and sector, we believe everyone working in higher education can contribute to deeper engagement and impact. We will invest in faculty members' capacity to teach classes and conduct research with collaborative methods and public value. We will also support our staff, students, and community members in co-creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue and action. As anchor institutions in local communities, with extended spheres of influence through online learning and global partnerships, we will ensure our decisions about purchasing, facilities, and other resources generate social, economic, and environmental benefits as well.

Minnesotans from all backgrounds consider higher education a crucial path to opportunity; there is no educational aspiration gap. So why does our state have some of the nation's highest disparities by race and income? Financial accessibility certainly matters. We must address our own cost structures while also developing partnerships to prevent food insecurity, unreliable transportation, and other basic challenges from derailing an education. Money is not the whole story, though. We must address cultural barriers, listening to our students so we can adapt to them, not the other way around. We need to build more trusting and equitable relationships, grounded in a sense that all of us are members of communities, with more to learn, knowledge or wisdom to share, and power to create positive change. As positional leaders, we also need to be braver in calling out systemic inequities and implicit biases within our institutions. Only then will we support the full participation and success of our students.

In today's world, it can be easy to get overwhelmed by polarization, inequality, violence, and to lose a sense of agency and responsibility for creating positive change. Sometimes silos and hierarchies also inhibit a sense of common purpose, both within and among colleges and universities. We hereby commit to modeling our civic commitments in part by fostering critical dialogue, responding constructively when challenged, and actively supporting possibilities for improvement and innovation.

Approved by the Minnesota Campus Compact Board of Directors on March 17, 2016, after soliciting input on the draft statement from all member presidents and chancellors