University of Minnesota Robert J. Jones
Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center
Research Agenda

Overview

The University of Minnesota Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC) is an off-campus academic research and outreach-engagement center located in North Minneapolis. Our mission is to link the University in vital public partnership with urban communities across the Twin Cities to advance learning, improve quality of life, and discover breakthrough solutions to critical problems. To achieve our mission we also seek to transform how communities and universities work together. The work of UROC is rooted in relationships forged through shared vision, love of community, well-intentioned mistakes, unexpected triumphs, long-term commitment, and hard-earned trust.

Truly reciprocal partnerships require time and space for the co-creation of trusting partnerships and meaningful research questions. Since opening in 2009, UROC has fostered hundreds of research partnerships between urban communities and the University through affiliated projects with University researchers and staff-led "signature" projects. We have unique expertise in creating research processes rooted in respect, transparency, inclusion, and shared action. The new UROC Research Agenda will capitalize on this expertise to help spur and support consequential community-University partnerships to work with community to promote a thriving urban core, including but not limited to the North Minneapolis community.

UROC is much more than research. We convene conversations, host gatherings and community celebrations, curate a community art gallery, participate in neighborhood celebrations and activities (i.e., National Night Out, Urban League Family Day), support University-sponsored community programs (i.e., Technology Empowerment Center, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development projects, SNAP-Ed, 4-H, and Minnesota Landscape Arboretum projects), and advise, lend insight and support initiatives and organizations with a similar vision of a thriving, asset-rich community (e.g., Public Engagement Network, Towerside, Parents in Community Action, Northpoint Health and Wellness, Liberty Community Church). UROC staff also promote strategies for reciprocal engagement on campus and in the community as part of the University's Office for Public Engagement.

Background

In the spring and summer of 2019, UROC engaged more than 50 of its stakeholders—including Northside residents, non-profit leaders, government officials, and young people as well as University of Minnesota faculty, staff and students—to help identify research topics and questions for a new UROC Research Agenda that will help guide UROC's collaborative research focus for the next three to five years. The agenda's summary document was compiled, updated, then vetted to community groups and University leadership in the spring and summer of 2020. The purpose of this new Research Agenda is to inspire and attract new projects, improve outcomes with our community through robust partnerships, and create a framework for measuring impacts and outcomes related to collaborative research at UROC.

The new UROC Research Agenda focuses on a set of timely opportunities and questions that are vital to a thriving North Minneapolis and other urban communities to guide collaborative research in UROC signature projects over the next three to five years. We will continue the regular UROC affiliation process and all other engagement and programmatic activities at UROC and support the development of new community-University partnerships and projects that will advance the Research Agenda.

Values and Guiding Principles

All research at UROC is conducted by University of Minnesota faculty, staff, and students in partnership with a community-based resident, group of residents, or organization. UROC's community-University partnerships are built on mutual respect and long-term trust – values that have established the culture and foundation upon which we have conducted research at UROC.

Through the extensive discussions with our stakeholders this past spring, new guiding principles have surfaced and been identified. In moving this new Research Agenda forward, we place a strong emphasis on research that is placed-based, collaborative, intergenerational- and intragenerational-focused, valuing multiple forms of knowledge, and centered on reciprocal engagement, wholeness and intersectionality.

- **Place-based**
  UROC has the unique ability to leverage our place-based location in North Minneapolis and our role as one of the anchor institutions on the historic corner of Plymouth and Penn Avenues North. In addition to the physical facility and location, UROC also has the potential to leverage our human capital of established relationships. Place-based learning and research emphasizes the need to develop "context-specific knowledge networks that support the management and planning decisions" by individuals and communities within a specific locality (Davidson-Hunt & O'Flaherty, 2007). Future research addressing priorities outlined in this Research Agenda should be place-based, aiming to leverage UROC's unique place and human capital.

- **Collaborative**
  The mainstay of research conducted at UROC is in partnership and collaboration with communities. Collaboration, however, requires ongoing growth, iteration, and attention to how individuals, communities, institutions, and entities work together (Seifer, 2006). That is why at UROC we continually call for community partnerships and affiliations in all of our projects. Future research addressing priorities outlined in this Research Agenda should work to intentionally incorporate and elevate community voices and knowledge while in the process of developing and maintaining thriving community-University partnerships and projects.

- **Intergenerational and Intragenerational**
  In addition to its unique location in North Minneapolis, UROC also has a deep and rich human capital of established relationships with young and elderly people. In the past two years, significant work has been completed to intentionally center and integrate more youth voices into the research initiatives coming out of UROC (e.g., YoUthROC Research Team). Simultaneously, the aging residents of North Minneapolis also provide a rich knowledge to community-University processes. UROC will continue to work to combine these voices and honor the variety of perspectives and opportunities within the youth and senior populations. Future research addressing priorities outlined in this agenda should incorporate an intergenerational and intragenerational lens with particular attention paid to the inclusion of more youth and elderly voices in the research processes.

- **Multiple Forms of Knowledge**
  There are many different kinds of knowledge (e.g., practical, generalized, artistic, etc) that contribute to scholarship and information production (Heron & Reason, 2007). Honoring multiple ways of knowing calls in the importance to harness various values, beliefs, and lived experiences. That is why at UROC we find it paramount to give credit and acknowledgment to

those before us and to build on what we have already learned and honor those whose knowledge made that learning possible. Future research addressing priorities outlined in this Research Agenda should incorporate and validate multiple ways of producing knowledge.

- **Reciprocal Engagement**
  Truly mutually beneficial, long-term partnerships require a commitment of time, self-examination, openness to institutional change and transformation, hard work punctuated by moments of celebration, and a commitment to stay in relationships based on shared principles in order to develop and sustain trust (Seifer, 2006). Future research addressing priorities outlined in this Research Agenda should foster engagement and learning that is reciprocal for all involved parties.

- **Wholeness and Intersectionality**
  Wholeness can be understood as "attending to the 'the whole system in the room' [that is, lifting and listening to] everyone responsible for or affected by a change, and/or at least representatives of each group of stakeholders" (Whitney & Bloom, 2010). It is calling to attention the need to incorporate "whole truths" from multiple perspectives and depart from the harmful lens of a single story (a concept termed by writer Chimamanda Adichie in her 2009 Ted Talk, where she explained how a single story fuels stereotypes and buttresses an incomplete story). Complementarily, "intersectionality" is a more nuanced understanding of wholeness with regard to discrimination and privilege. Coined by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989, "intersectionality" emphasizes how multiple dimensions of a person's social and political identities (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, etc.) might intersect to create distinctive means of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). It calls in the importance of recognizing the specific and intersectional lived experiences of different social groups when attending to "whole system" solutions. Future research addressing the priorities outlined in this Research Agenda, therefore, should center wholeness and intersectionality and work to minimize the dangers of a single story and/or sociopolitical lens.

Research Areas and Priorities

From April to July of 2019, UROC convened various stakeholders to discuss and generate a new urban Research Agenda for UROC for the next three to five years. Through a series of four workgroups, UROC stakeholders identified three critical research areas for the new Research Agenda: (1) Community Healing and Wholeness; (2) Systems and Systemic Racism; and (3) Individual, Family, and Community Financial Wellbeing.

1. **Community Healing and Wholeness**
   Urban residents today are faced with many challenges and difficulties (e.g., historical trauma, marginalization) that have a tremendous effect on the community. The existing research on community healing and wholeness has primarily focused on the development of community healing models and frameworks, and to a lesser extent, the assessment and effectiveness of those models. Over the years, a wide range of community healing and wholeness models have been proposed. To name a few, in 1995, Maton and Wells proposed that religion can be used as a community resource for wellbeing. By leveraging the congregations and relations within faith-based organizations, prevention, healing, and empowerment can naturally infuse into urban communities.

More recently, several scholars from the field of Native American and Indigenous studies have called to attention that urban community healing must involve addressing multigenerational trauma – that is, collective healing must transcend and incorporate children and their families for communities to truly and wholly heal (Mitchell, Psych & Maracle, 2005; Porter, Martin & Anda, 2016).

Related questions that should guide UROC research in the next three to five years should include:

- o *What constitutes community healing and wholeness? How do these conceptualizations change or stay the same when using an educational, health, and/or economic lens? How do these conceptualizations change when defined by different types of stakeholders (e.g., scholars, community members, etc.)? Relatedly, how do these concepts change or stay the same across various community contexts (urban vs. rural)?*
- o *What community healing and wholeness models work for various types of communities in the Northside? How do these models guide the identification and application of community assets to address community healing and wholeness?*
- o *Does the specific tailoring of an existing model work to meet the needs of a particular community? Or is an entirely new model needed for that community?*
- o *What is the impact of certain community healing and wholeness models in addressing health outcomes and how does it impact such outcomes (i.e., understanding how mechanisms and pathways for healing operate)?*
- o *Similarly, what is the impact of community healing and wholeness models in addressing educational disparities and how do these models impact such outcomes (e.g., what mechanisms support a robust educational pipeline for marginalized communities)?*
- o *If shown to have some impact, how will these models be shared, scaled, and sustained?*

2. **Systems and Systemic Racism**
Urban communities are complex entities that historically have been shaped by planners and policy makers. At the root of many of these planning and policy practices is racism, and therefore, modern urban communities have had to bear that legacy of discrimination. One of the most salient issues that was voiced by UROC stakeholders was a lack of critical research from UROC that focuses on addressing systems (that perpetuate racism) and systemic racism.

Research on systems and systemic racism has been long-standing and its genesis is rooted in many disciplines (e.g., organizational leadership, business, sociology, psychology) and sectors (e.g., for-profit, academic, government). Most studies from these fields, however, have generally focused on identifying and characterizing racism at the individual level (e.g., implicit association test, perceived racism scale). However, the manifestation of racism and its impacts exists at multiple levels of social ecologies (e.g., individual, community, organizational, policy) (Feagin, 2013; Paradies, 2006). Hence, a clarion call to do more rigorous, interdisciplinary and multilevel research around the measures and impacts of racism and systemic racism is warranted.

Related questions that should guide UROC research in the next three to five years include:

o *Are there existing frameworks that addresses and explains how racism at various levels (individual, organizational, systems) interact and influence one another? How can these frameworks be applied to create more multilevel, comprehensive approaches to tackling racism?*

o *Are there community-based asset tools available to reverse the impact of institutional discriminatory practices, such as redlining, predatory lending and targeted divestment? How are these tools being used in urban communities and what are their impacts (e.g., economic, health, educational) on such communities?*

o *How have various sectors (academic/education, non-profit, government, industry) assessed systems and systemic racism?*

o *Is there a current cross-sectoral approach to addressing systems and systemic racism? How can that approach or practice be adopted and scaled out?*

o *What community building practices, targeted at systems and systemic racism, have worked for Native Americans and African Americans historically and more recently? Are these practices sustainable and can they be translated into other communities?*

o *What is anti-blackness? How does anti-blackness impact all cultures? Conversely, what is white supremacy and how does that impact cultures and structures/systems in the United States? How do these impacts look for urban communities versus rural communities?*

o *How are we measuring the impact of anti-racist initiatives and policies? Are there established equality indicators or metrics that can be applied to urban communities?*

o *In what ways are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, particularly in the Northside, being systematically disenfranchised (right now and historically)? How have these strategies worked to undermine their political voice and power?*

o *What community-organizing strategies are effective in strengthening BIPOC community participation and voice in democracy and policy/structural changes?*

3. **Individual, Family, and Community Financial Wellbeing**
   Over the years, conversations about whether our nation is on a sustainable economic path have multiplied and emerged across various disciplines and sectors. Central to this debate is the growing concerns around wealth inequality and the increasing racial wealth gap, particularly in urban communities (i.e., gentrification).

   Similar to racism, research on individual, family, and community financial wellbeing cuts across many sectors and disciplines (e.g., housing, higher education, employment). Much of the research in this field, however, has been descriptive studies assessing individuals' subjective and self-reported experiences of economic wellbeing (Federal Reserve, 2019). Ongoing research on individual and family wellbeing, therefore, should move beyond these subjective measures and incorporate more active solutions to address and sustain economic wellbeing within individuals, families, and communities.

   Related questions that should guide UROC research in the next three to five years include:

   o *What economic opportunities and barriers are shared between urban and rural contexts? Is there a potential synergy between the two that could be leveraged for mutual benefit?*

- *What linkages exist between educational and economic opportunities and barriers? Specifically, how does educational attainment and access support or facilitate financial wellbeing for individuals, families, and/or communities?*
- *How are family dynamics affected when youth are employed while the adults in a family unit are unemployed?*
- *What are the impacts of housing instability on families that otherwise would be financially secure?*
- *What constitutes financial wellbeing, for either a family, an individual, or community?*
- *Is there a tipping point when too many families are financially unwell where a community then begins to become financially insecure?*
- *Are there policies or programs (e.g., educational) that could insulate a community from becoming financially unwell?*
- *Are there any intergenerational models that currently exist for the transference of wealth and equity among minority communities? What assets can be leveraged in a family unit to introduce and sustain intergenerational equity?*
- *Conversely, what initiatives or strategies are being employed to address intergenerational inequity? Are these strategies successful and can they be mainstreamed in urban communities?*

Research Agenda Charge

Through stakeholder engagement processes with University of Minnesota faculty, staff, students, and community members, we are confident that the research priorities and questions we have put forth in this new agenda reflect both a great breadth and depth of expertise and needs across the University and its urban communities.

We believe that the charge of this new Research Agenda will further advance the excellence and impact of University and community scholarship. Most importantly, we are enthused about the potential new community-University research projects that will address the critical societal challenges and questions posed in this agenda.

For individuals and entities actualizing and proposing research concepts and initiatives to address these priorities, we ask that you consider and reflect on how this work should be done with community and how that work centers UROC's principles. Before initiating any new research project with a community from the Northside, consider how the community will be involved in shaping the research and its related actions/products; ensure that community leadership and direction is incorporated throughout all phases of a project (from end to beginning). As evidenced throughout this Research Agenda, the hallmark of research at UROC is in partnership and collaboration with communities. Future community-University partnerships and projects that aim to advance UROC's Research Agenda should commit to strengthening community voices throughout the community-engaged research continuum (Coughlin & Wonsuk, 2017).

In moving forward with this Research Agenda, invoking the values and principles identified above, and addressing the critical research areas and questions, we will ensure that our mission to link the University in vital public partnership with urban communities to advance learning, improve quality of life, and discover breakthrough solutions to critical problems is met.

Acknowledgements

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