

What is an “Anchor University”?

While it has always been common for universities to be engaged in their home communities to some degree, the current “anchor” concept emerged about 20 years ago, with the recognition that institutions such as universities and hospitals are anchored into a place by the enormous infrastructures and personnel required to fulfill their functions.⁴ Anchor institutions offer direct economic benefits to their communities through local procurement and the employment required for everyday operations. Likewise, universities also represent an unlimited range of possibilities for collaborating with stakeholders outside of their campuses in order to leverage their knowledge, training, and expertise in ways that directly and indirectly support local residents. As anchor institutions, universities like Sacramento State are acknowledging their interdependence with their community, and actively developing long-term, place-based strategies to align and coordinate their community engagement efforts. Simply put, the university that strategically embraces and supports their interdependent role in the community can be a major engine for economic and cultural growth, innovation, and revitalization.

The Anchor University concept gained further momentum in February 2018, when 33 member institutions of the CUMU joined a pilot program, the *Higher Education Anchor Mission Initiative*. These institutions agreed to work collaboratively to identify resources and develop new tools for implementing, expanding, and evaluating anchor mission practices. The pilot project led to the creation of the Anchor Learning Network, “designed to facilitate a more rapid and effective advancement of the anchor mission within member institutions, in home communities, and across the higher education sector.”⁵

Establishing Sacramento State as an Anchor University, then, is fully in line with this movement over the past couple of decades by universities to link community engagement with teaching and research, and to leverage resources to support local economies through procurement and hiring. This movement also has led to efforts at some universities to examine promotion and tenure guidelines to determine the extent to which incentives can be provided to support and expand community-engaged research. In sum, adopting an anchor-focused mission and taking strategic steps toward becoming an anchor institution allows for the operationalization of our existing commitments as “Sacramento’s University” and the “Capital University” and provides a framework in which the University can be accountable for realizing our evolving vision for becoming a strategic and supportive community partner.⁶

Anchor institutions enhance the economic, social and cultural well-being of their home cities. While many institutions can play this role (hospitals, schools, recreational centers, stadiums), university engagement promises the potentially greatest reward. With its mission of education, discovery and engagement, its networks of knowledge that reach into the community and across the globe, and its role as educator of the urban workforce, the urban university sits at the center of the city in a way that no other institution can.⁶

⁴ [Anchor Institutions | Overview](#)

⁵ [Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities Anchor Learning Network](#)

⁶ [The Anchor Dashboard: Aligning Institutional Practice to Meet Low-Income Community Needs \(2013\)](#)

⁷ [What Does it Mean to Anchor a Community?](#)