



## Promoting Engaged Scholarship

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This case study reports on Duke University's Research Consultation Project (RCP). The RCP, which is one element of a broader School Research Partnership (SRP), promotes engaged scholarship by connecting students with faculty and community partners (e.g., schools, nonprofits, other agencies) to address specific problems in society. The project arose from student needs for real-world application of knowledge and research skills, community members' needs for access to relevant and mutually beneficial research, and the institution's desire to bridge the gap between academic research and practice. RCP meets student needs for applied learning and research while simultaneously benefiting the community.

The goal of engaged scholarship is to ensure that teaching, research, and service contribute to the greater good. The process involves collaboration between students, advisors, and community partners whose combined efforts result in a product that is useful and practical. The RCP is interdisciplinary and is not connected directly to a course. Instead, students pair with a faculty advisor in independent study and participate in peer support groups.

To initiate the program each semester, SRP directors contact local school districts and community agencies to identify a list of issues needing attention. Directors then narrow down the list based on feasibility and with the goal of having a diverse group of partners and advisors. The directors also seek to address a variety of possible student interests. The next step is to recruit students by publicizing the RCP in all academic departments. Interested students complete an online application that includes their personal ranking of possible research topics. RCP advisors, who come from diverse disciplines, also rank their preferences, which enables matching to students. Following this, the student/partner/advisor teams meet and coordinate plans and strategies for communicating. Then, within two weeks, each student submits a proposed plan for

completing the project within the semester. The respective partners review the plans and either accept them or suggest modifications.

For deliverables, students are required to write a research paper and an action-oriented brief for the partner. Some elect to create a poster for a session hosted by SRP, which partners, students, advisors, faculty, and community members attend. The student may also be invited to present to the partner organization.

The impact of the SRP is evidenced indirectly in student self-reported progress on learning objectives, partner feedback regarding the final products, and advisor input about the value of student meetings. Nonetheless, those who wish to implement such a program, may face many challenges. Topics may not necessarily be of high interest to advisors. The level of the community partner's engagement may not always be strong. Moreover, the staff member the partner assigns to the project may not necessarily be that engaged. In addition, some students may assume that an independent study course requires less work than other courses. The key is to encourage effective communication among all constituents.