

Notes on TRUN Steering Committee Meeting
September 29, 2009
York University

Present: Donald Boyd (Rochester), Mark Glauser (Syracuse), Carol Irving (York, recording), Daniel Kolundzic (Canadian Consulate Buffalo), Susan Marlin (Queen's), Derek Newton (UWO), Adrian Shubert (York), John Wood (Buffalo), Lorna Wright (York, co-chair).

1. Welcome and review of TRUN progress to date

- L. Wright welcomed the committee to York and referred members to the minutes of the last general meeting held at the University at Buffalo in May 2008.
- It was reported that the Memorandum of Understanding was making its way around the universities for signature, and was currently with the University of Toronto. L. Wright agreed to ask that the memorandum be forwarded as soon as possible to the next university on the list for signature so that the process could be completed.
- It was noted that some committee members were having difficulty keeping up interest in TRUN with changes in the administration at their institutions.
- It was further noted that Rochester had decided not to sign the MOU at this time.
- The main challenge to be met was how to get the initiative off the ground. J. Wood observed that other similar networks have had a similar challenge.

2. Updates from members on recent, pending and potential TRUN activities

- Members were referred to the list of projects on the TRUN website, including, for example, the Great Lakes Energy Consortium led by the Canadian Consulate in Buffalo, Queen's University and the Syracuse Center of Excellence In Environmental and Energy Systems.
- The need to establish and promote grassroots connections was stressed.
- It was suggested that three key objectives for TRUN could be:
 - To find good, large-scale cross-border project proposals to submit for funding.
 - To attract good graduate students. Providing students with an opportunity to work with faculty in other institutions is an advantage.
 - To develop projects with economic relevance.
- Other points made concerning the purpose, objectives and criteria for TRUN were:
 - The starting point for the network had been the assumption that New York and Ontario constitute a region where collaboration between the research universities is not as intense as it could be, and TRUN would be a way of highlighting the region and its activities.
 - Collaboration would not only have an economic advantage, but would lead to innovation; for example, in health care policy, a focused and structured network would be useful in the area of public policy and presenting options to government.

- The network can foster, identify and facilitate collaboration.
- There should be a deliverable, usually a grant application or a contract.
- Being a part of an international network is an advantage in applying for funding.
- Members agreed that a clear statement of the value of TRUN should be developed – a strategic document. This should include objectives and criteria for projects. This document would be an addition or attachment to the MOU which could remain as is.
- Members also agreed that one or two flagship activities would be desirable. Possibilities discussed were:
 - A student exchange program (the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities had indicated some interest).
 - An annual summer school.
 - An annual research conference.

The topic of the summer school and conference could be changed from year to year to respond to current events and concerns.

- Several possible topics for a first event or activity were suggested:
 - History (the War of 1812),
 - Health care,
 - Free trade,
 - Regional solutions for sustainable energy,
 - Approaches to healthy buildings (green building).

It was suggested that politically it would be better to focus on a policy or practical issue, at least to begin, and to hold a conference or other event on the War of 1812 in 2012.

- The comment was also made that the most important thing would be to pick identifiable events each year to highlight and promote and that these might be different things depending on the topic; in other words, the theme and the activity should not be limited.

3. Membership

- The committee discussed recent approaches from other universities about joining TRUN and agreed that there should be a moratorium on new members until the network is more fully established.

4. Funding

- The committee briefly discussed whether the current commitment of \$5,000 per institution was sufficient but did not reach any conclusions.
- The committee also agreed that a set of criteria are needed for what is to be considered a TRUN event.

5. Plans for formal TRUN MOU signing ceremony

- The idea of a formal signing ceremony or other official launch of TRUN was discussed at several points during the meeting. Generally members expressed a preference for a 'soft' opening to take place at the first flagship event.

6. BALANCE Project

- Inge Knudsen and Anna Quici from the COIMBRA Group of universities in Europe joined the meeting, to share their expertise on working with a network of universities and to discuss possible ways of collaboration between the two networks. One of COIMBRA's projects, called BALANCE, would be holding its final seminar at York on the following two days. This meeting of the TRUN Steering Committee had been timed to coincide with the BALANCE seminar so that interested committee members could attend both events.
- Inge Knudsen made the following points:
 - Task forces have been the 'bread and butter' activity over many years with COIMBRA.
 - Summer schools are another activity, although more sporadic and ad hoc. There are challenges around funding, and which institution will take on the work of hosting the event, or applying for the funding (usually it is the universities that must apply for funding according to funder regulations). Follow-through can be difficult when elections occur or when university administrations change. Some of the member universities, however, have actually put them into their international strategies in order to make them more regular.
 - One example of a summer school has been one in skills development for doctoral students.
 - The possibility for collaborative international skills training for doctoral students, involving COIMBRA and TRUN, was raised and met with great interest.
 - The doctoral level is of most interest to European universities because it is the way to develop the most lasting research collaborations.
 - Another more long-term possibility for collaboration would be a task force on doctoral studies and research.
 - COIMBRA task forces report to the executive board of COIMBRA, and each board member has an affiliation to one or another task force. Each task force meets 2 or 3 times a year, and then the task force chairs meet twice a year with the executive board. There is no budget, but there is a person in the central office who does secretarial work for the task forces.
 - In terms of deliverables, these vary from one task force to another; some run projects, and others organize workshops, for example.

- The member universities pay an annual fee to keep COIMBRA going (9,000 euros), plus the costs of their participation in the task forces (travel, etc). They also pay if they host a workshop, for example.
- Task force membership is a mix of faculty, administration, and international administrators. The doctoral studies task force is dominated by faculty.
- COIMBRA works with the Montevideo Group of universities on a small pilot student exchange project. They are also in the process of forming a new group called COIMBRAZIL.
- A task force on regional issues might be a good 'glue' for TRUN.
- The only way to collaborate in research institutionally is by example. Networks can provide the milieu.
- A final point: young researchers need networks.
- Inge Knudsen brought greetings from the COIMBRA Doctoral Studies Task Force and reported that they are interested in collaborating with TRUN.

7. Wrap Up

- The meeting ended on a note of optimism, with agreement to continuing pursuing the summer school and research conference ideas, look into sources of funding on both sides, complete the signing of the MOU, and continue discussions about cooperation with COIMBRA.