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**Abstract**

Universities in the United States for at least the last century have made positive contributions to the economic weal, whether through their intrinsic mission of teaching and research or through special arrangements for service activities. In recent years there has been heightened awareness of the special role of academic research among policymakers at the state and federal levels and within universities themselves. Especially since 2000, explicit measures have been taken to enhance contributions of university research to economic development for the sake of national, local, or institutional gains. The aim of this paper is to identify and analyze this current trend and particularly how it has affected research universities. The term 'economic relevance' is used deliberately here to capture the multiple elements involved ? university expertise, human capital formation, and direct participation in commercial markets ? as well as their often indirect links to economic activity. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)