College of Human Science
Community Engagement Roundtable Series

Meeting Summary
November 9, 2017

Topic:
Engaging with Global Communities

Speakers:
Dr. Ron Cox (Associate Research Professor; Human Development and Family Science)
Mr. Rodney Eksteen (Assistant Director, Disaster Management; Western Cape Province, South Africa)
Mr. Dave Lassen (Global & Community Engagement Coordinator; College of Human Sciences)

Summary:
Mr. Dave Lassen began the discussion by reviewing the concept of equity and its application to global community-university partnerships. He defined equity as “a state in which all stakeholders have the full opportunity to achieve their goals in their personal context.” Lassen noted that there are a variety of paths to achieving equitable relationships with global communities that can include providing more resources or reducing barriers for individuals. He also argued that equity should be a central, motivating goal in all community-engaged partnerships. Achieving equity must therefore be a continuous effort in all aspects of off-campus university work, including program design and individual behavior. Lassen noted that equity can be surprisingly elusive in some contexts, including undergraduate work in international health care facilities and orphanages. In almost every case, these difficulties arise when university actors place their own goals and benefits above those of their community partners. Lassen then introduced two models for creating and sustaining equitable partnerships: Fair Trade Learning and Students Prepared to Partner. The first focuses on working closely with communities to create programs that clearly and sustainably benefit local residents. Several attendees agreed that building local capacity should be a major focus of OSU’s global partnerships. The second model focuses on preparing students and other university actors to effectively adapt to and work in the organizational, community, and social cultures of a given community. Lassen also noted that OSU has a variety of resources that can help individuals prepare, including access to the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The IDI places individuals on an Intercultural Development Continuum and helps them identify how they can become more effective at working in global communities.

Mr. Rodney Eksteen next shared some thoughts from his perspective as an international community partner of OSU. Eksteen argued that fostering relationships must be a central goal of community-university partnerships. If key relationships are not created, he asserted, even well-designed partnerships will fail after university actors leave the country. This means balancing the interests of a variety of individuals and groups, including on-the-ground facilitators, funders, and legislators/administrators. Eksteen suggested that improved training for university actors—including by looking to the example of other universities—is important in this effort. For example, Eksteen says that he is wary of partnering with universities that do not have a full-time community-engagement coordinator. Institutions who are willing to invest in such a position, he said, are more likely to understand the importance of effectively applying the results of research off-campus.
Dr. Ron Cox then concluded the conversation with a discussion of his experience working with Hispanic communities in Tulsa. He agreed with Eksteen that implementation and adaptability are key elements of research that many researchers are only beginning to recognize. Cox noted that time spent in a community is an important indicator of their views and behavior, including the meaning they attach to their experiences. He said that he has found success focusing partnerships on universal antecedents of behavior—fundamental views and beliefs that most members of a community share. Doing so with real care and interest will allow community members to develop their own capacity and more effectively apply university insights and resources at the local level. Cox concluded by encouraging university actors to work with local groups to develop the kind of community partners they want.