Topic:
Identifying, Starting, and Expanding Community Partnerships

Speakers:
Dr. Emily Roberts (Assistant Professor; Design, Housing, and Merchandising)
Ms. Lyn Broyles (Assistant Director for Community Engagement; OSU Writing Center)

Summary:
Ms. Broyles began the discussion by introducing several of the Writing Center’s current partnerships. The Center maintains programming partnerships with, among other organizations, the Wondertorium, Stillwater Public Library, Wings of Hope, Stillwater Public Schools, and the OSU Museum of Art. These partnerships generally focus on increasing literacy, but also include content for English language learners. Ms. Broyles also detailed her leading role in creating a recent partnership with the Museum of Art. She noted that while she reached out to the museum and relayed to them the Writing Center’s interest in partnering, she asked the museum to suggest the specifics of the potential collaboration. She said that partnerships are most successful when community partners “take the lead,” especially in early, formative stages. This is important in part because, according to Broyles, a “community is always changing,” a fact that should lead members of OSU to ask “how can we address [those changes] in our own work?” Broyles therefore encouraged those in attendance to suggest specific project ideas and activities only after a community partner has established a framework that is beneficial to them.

Dr. Emily Roberts then discussed the process of creating a large project to explore the creation of a self-enclosed facility to provide dementia care for elderly individuals in Oklahoma. The facility—named the “Dementia Friendly City Center”—is patterned after a recent effort in the Netherlands to preserve the lifestyle of individuals with dementia while offering safe, accessible health care. The facility follows a small house model by offering independent residences as well as shopping, restaurants, recreation, and health care offices in a walkable, enclosed area. Dr. Roberts’ team is currently using the Health in All Policies framework to evaluate the potential to retrofit one or more distressed shopping malls to create a Dementia Friendly City Center. Roberts noted that pursuit of this project has required many public and private partners. Bringing these individuals and groups together has been challenging, but Roberts has found that listening to each partner and allowing partners to interact with each other has been particularly useful. She therefore encouraged those in attendance to create spaces where community partners can come together with a shared vision and then simply listen. Doing so has not only helped her learn and refine her own plans, Roberts said, but has created more trust among all partners.