Research that Matters Conference

The Office of Community Engagement held its first annual Research that Matters conference on March 2, 2012. This conference is an occasion for USF academics and community leaders to come together in order to share their experiences with research and practice, as well as to exchange ideas about ways the University of South Florida and off-campus organizations can form partnerships to solve social problems. The conference also provides a forum for graduate students to display their community-based research projects through a poster competition. To see this year’s poster competition winners, see page 4 or visit http://engagement.rc.usf.edu/.

The conference drew a diverse group of faculty, community organizations, and students from USF, the University of Tampa, and the University of Memphis as well. More than sixty participants filled the conference space to discuss local campus–community research partnerships based on the theme “Understanding the New Poverty: Local Impacts of the Current Recession.”

The plenary lectures included Elizabeth...

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The Impact of Service-Learning: One Student’s Experience

For Jeannese Castro, the idea of returning to Sulphur Springs, the Tampa community in which she spent her childhood, never crossed her mind. She was focused on her education, working on a degree in Anthropology. Little did she know that through a service-learning course the community of Sulphur Springs would reenter her life as a young adult and influence the direction of her academic and career goals.

Jeannese enrolled in an Anthropology course, Urban Life & Culture, expecting the usual: lectures, discussions, article reviews, papers to write—all the typical components of a university class. Upon reviewing the syllabus, Jeannese realized Urban Life & Culture would not be the customary college course experience. The instructor, Lance Arney, explained to the class that this was a service-learning course. This meant that the students would be required to apply the theories and ideas discussed in the course while working off-campus with a community partner to address a community identified issue. A critical component of service-learning is that throughout the course students are expected to thoughtfully reflect on their community-based education experience.

Being the first and only service-learning course Jeannese had encountered, she had some trepidation about continuing with the course. Graduation was within her sights, and as any exhausted senior will tell you, getting through the last courses should be as uncomplicated as possible. She could easily drop the course and enroll in a traditional class where she would read, write, and be done with it. Jeannese was thinking about packing up her belongings and leaving the class, when she heard the words Sulphur Springs. Focusing back on the details of the course work, she discovered she and her class...

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USF Students Attend the 2012 Florida Campus Compact Student Scholars’ Institute

Congratulations go out to five USF students who attended this year’s Student Scholar Institute (SSI); Mitzy Gonzalez, Lauren Richardson, Maxwell Wesemann, Sabrina Wise, and Lance Arney. They were selected, along with about thirty other students, from a strong pool of candidates from colleges and universities across the state.

Florida Campus Compact (FL|CC) hosts the SSI in Tallahassee, and this year the participants were able to observe a session of the Florida Legislature, visit their Legislator’s office in the State Capitol, have lunch with local elected officials, and participate in a mock trial in the Florida State Supreme Court. Guest speakers rounded out the three-day learning experience; they presented on Florida politics, the Occupy Movement, the economic recession, the changing face of journalism, and inspirations behind public service and civic engagement.

On the second night of the SSI, students were entertained by a live performance of the play Twelve Angry Men, a drama about overcoming prejudice in the jury deliberation room in order to deliver justice. On the final day of the SSI, Florida Supreme Court Justice R. Fred Lewis presented the 2011 Excellence in Service Award to three of Florida’s most dedicated student service scholars, one of which was USF’s own Lance Arney.

The SSI offers student leaders from around the state the opportunity to learn from public officials—and from each other—about civic engagement and what it means to be an active citizen. Students had ample occasions for group sharing and reflection on the service activities they perform at their respective colleges, universities, and communities. They also made new friends and built connections based on their common experiences as engaged student scholars.

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mates would be working with nonprofit organizations that serve the children and families of Sulphur Springs. Recognizing an opportunity to reconnect to her childhood neighborhood, Jeannese chose to stay and see this experience through to completion.

The service-learning project chosen by Jeannese was one that focused on working with Moses House staff to create and promote the Moses Girls Program. Jeannese and several of her classmates developed and distributed a needs assessment to neighborhood parents in order to identify which issues parents would like to see covered in a girls’ program. The students then developed a curriculum on girls’ health that covered topics such as body image, healthy relationships, nutrition, stress, and peer pressure. They next developed lesson plans for each topic. Jeannese and her team participated in monthly events called “Girls’ Night,” where neighborhood girls would come to Moses House for a night of games, arts and crafts, and movies. Five girls showed up regularly and became active at Moses House. Jeannese calls the first group of girls she was able to work with the “Fab Five,” and she continues to be a mentor and friend to the girls today.

Through participation in a service-learning course, Jeannese realized she was able to make a real and lasting impact on the lives of children. Even though the course ended, Jeannese stayed connected with the community and continued the work she had started in the spring. Jeannese and Moses House partnered with the YMCA Community Learning Center and conducted the Moses Girls Program during the Y’s Summer Camp at Sulphur Springs Elementary School. Jeannese’s service-learning encounter was transformative for her and enhanced her academic experience. Jeannese now is of the opinion that service-learning should be required for all students: “Service-learning forces students to go out into our neighborhoods and see that there are kids who need our help to support and develop their talents.”

Jeannese is cognizant of what she was able to give, and also what she received from completing a service-learning course. Jeannese learned that service-learning was more than just volunteering. She includes the work she accomplished through the course on her curriculum vitae; it has led to awards, a fellowship, and a job. The research that she conducted through the course inspired her to focus on public health. She incorporated her service-learning project in her application for admission as a graduate student into USF’s College of Public Health. Jeannese was accepted into the graduate program and is planning to concentrate on maternal and childhood health. Jeannese believes that taking a service-learning course leads college students towards opportunities that would otherwise be denied due to a lack of real-world practice. Her experience demonstrates the transformative impact that service-learning can have on a student, as well as some benefits it can bring to the community.

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The Community Quarterly would like to feature more stories about the impacts of service-learning on student success. If service-learning has enhanced your academic experience or influenced your career goals, and you would like to share your experience with others, please contact us about the possibility of having your story featured in our newsletter.
Research that Matters Conference, cont’d from page 1

Strom’s overview of post-recession university–community research partnerships; Kathleen Moore and Colleen Clark from FMHI and Jenine LaCoe from Mental Health Care, Inc. presenting research results regarding housing chronically homeless people; and Dave Rogoff from the College of Public Health and Rayme Knuckles from the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County looking at how public policy impacts the ability of people to be self-sufficient. All speakers’ presentations can be found on the Office of Community Engagement’s website by clicking on “Past Events” located under the Calendar tab.

Conference attendees broke into discussion groups, facilitated by experts in the field, where participants were able to share insights into a myriad of topics such as improving the quality of public education, and bringing together research and community activism to address environmental concerns. Another session demonstrated how to utilize the Hillsborough Community Atlas for successful community-based research (click on the link to be taken to the Atlas). To find out more about the Research that Matters Conference please visit the Office of Community Engagement website.

Go Public!: Disseminating Your Research Beyond Academia

Academic scholars often conduct research in areas that are vital to community well-being, but typically the academic outlets we rely on don’t have much influence on contemporary cultural or policy debates. Are there ways we can promote our ideas to a broader audience? The Office of Community Engagement invited two veteran journalists with reporting and editorial experience to discuss this question with USF faculty and advanced graduate students in a presentation/workshop on disseminating research beyond academia held on February 3rd.

Led by Vickie Chachere, News Manager, USF Communications (and formerly with the Associated Press and Tampa Tribune) and Rosemary Goudreau, Editor and Co-Founder, Florida Voices (and formerly with the Tampa Tribune and the Cincinnati Enquirer), workshop attendees learned how to frame academic research ideas for a broader public and build partnerships with newspapers and other media outlets.

Chachere noted that USF researchers study real-world issues and that even though the news media do request USF faculty expertise on these issues, there needs to be more awareness among faculty of the importance of news media.

Chachere explained how faculty can be more proactive with the news media by interacting and building relationships with reporters, as well as framing and defining issues under public discussion.

Goudreau discussed the importance of faculty contributions to the op-ed pages of newspapers. Goudreau clarified that an op-ed, short for “opposite the editorial page,” is not a mere opinion piece, but an informed commentary that uses an author’s learned expertise to add insight to an issue. Op-eds, Goudreau reminded the audience, are places where faculty can enter the public discussion and help people understand what scholars already know about the issues of the day.

Chachere and Goudreau provided a wealth of writing tips useful for translating academic discourse into plain language and composing short, newsworthy narratives that correct misinformation and misunderstandings in the public discussion and tell readers what the real story is. For more information on USF News and how it can work with faculty, please contact Vickie Chachere at vchachere@usf.edu.

Graduate Student Workshop on Qualitative Methods for Community Engaged Research

When the Graduate Student Applied Research Network met during the fall 2011 semester, one of the requests that students had was for the Office of Community Engagement to hold occasional workshops on community engaged research methods. In response, the OCE invited Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez (Chair of Africana Studies and Director of the Institute on Black Life) to discuss qualitative methods for community engaged research.

Rodriguez has decades of experience conducting community engaged qualitative research, and has taught a qualitative research methods course entitled African American Community Research for 16 years at USF. On January 25, she spoke to graduate students about “Engaging ‘Community’ through Qualitative Research,” providing examples from her own work with communities in urban Tampa.

Rodriguez focused her presentation on the research process itself, emphasizing the importance of trust, reciprocity, and partnership in building the kinds of relationships that community engaged research usually entails. She stressed that there is a difference between doing research in a community versus being engaged with a community throughout the research process.

Engagement, Rodriguez affirms, involves a commitment to learning about everyday life and the ability to connect theory and practice. After her presentation, Rodriguez facilitated a seminar-style dialogue with graduate students, who shared and discussed difficulties they have encountered while conducting their own qualitative research.
Building partnerships to improve our communities.

The mission of the Office of Community Engagement is to expand local and global initiatives that strengthen and sustain healthy communities, promote social justice, and help improve the quality of life for all. The Office carries out its mission by building mutually beneficial and reciprocal university–community partnerships founded on community engaged scholarship and service-learning pedagogy. Community engagement is scholarly and pedagogical activities that are carried out in collaboration with, and with potential benefit for, groups and organizations in the municipality or region that contains the university. As a Research I university located in a major urban area, USF has significant relationships with its surrounding communities. The neighborhoods, institutions, and people of the local region offer opportunities for citizens and scholars to work together on issues of relevance to the community and the world.

Attention USF Faculty:

Will you be applying for external grants? Don't forget to designate your research as “community-based” on your internal form if it involves community partners. This helps us track research dollars awarded to engaged researchers.

Will you be teaching a service-learning course? Don't forget to have your departmental schedule inform the registrar that yours is a service-learning course. This helps us track service-learning courses and also allows students to search for such courses.

Graduate Student Poster Contest Winners

Masters Winner: Nathan Manser (pictured)
“Improving Access to Affordable Drinking Water for Rural Communities in Mexico”

Masters Second Place Winner: Paromita Chatterjee
“Mapping and Analysis of Pinellas County Foreclosures, 2007-2009”

Doctoral Winner: Maryann Cairns (pictured)
“Community Engagement in Water Committees: Lessons in Sustainability and Inclusion from Rural Bolivia”

Doctoral Second Place Winner: Vanessa Vernaza-Hernández
“Integration of Middle and High School Students in an Authentic Climate Change Research Experience at the Camuy Cave In Puerto Rico”

Congratulations, Graduate Student Challenge Grant Winners!

The OCE congratulates this years’ winners, in particular the teams whose proposals outline a community-engaged research project. Visit our website to view these projects. We hope to feature stories about their progress in future issues of our newsletter and on our website.

Graduate Student Applied Research Network (G-SARN)

G-SARN is comprised of graduate students who conduct community-based research in Tampa Bay and surrounding areas. Too often, graduate researchers are unaware that students with similar interests, who use similar methods, and who focus on the same communities are working right across campus. Our goal is to overcome some of those divides, and help graduate students find peers with whom they can discuss common concerns. To join G-SARN, contact us at CommunityEngagement@usf.edu.

Call for contributions

Our newsletter exists in part to showcase community engagement research being done by USF faculty and students. If you have an exciting story to tell about USF service-learning or community engaged research, please inquire with our Office about how to submit your story.

We look forward to hearing from you!