

# **COPAA VISITING FELLOW FINAL REPORT**

University of Memphis, Department of Anthropology

Visiting Fellow: Jean Schensul

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The Department of Anthropology hosted Dr. Jean Schensul of the Institute for Community Research (ICR), a national expert in community-based collaborative and participatory action research (PAR) methodology, from April 18-22, 2012. During this time, Dr. Schensul participated in a series of workshops and informal dialogues around methods of community based collaborative and participatory research during the University of Memphis' centennial celebration. These events culminated in the delivery of a keynote speech at the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion celebration of our MA program in Applied Anthropology on April 21, 2012.

## **Description of Program Activities**

For many years, U of M faculty have been involved in applied research with local communities, and our departmental faculty and students are guided by an engaged scholarship framework. This focus is endorsed and enhanced by the Carnegie Foundation's recognition of our university for its high level of community engagement. We are committed to working collaboratively with community partners to address the concerns and opportunities of the urban, regional, state, national, and global communities to which we belong. As an anthropology program focused on the "scholarship of application," we continually seek to enhance our training in collaborative and action research approaches. The Institute for Community Research (ICR) has long been a pioneer in building collaborative community-based research partnerships with organizations, informal groups and community residents to improve conditions and reduce health and other disparities. As the founding director of ICR, Dr. Schensul's participation in seminars and trainings during her visit to Memphis greatly enriched our training activities in community-based research. For example, over the course of Dr. Schensul's 3-day visit, our faculty and students participated in a range of opportunities, including:

- (1) Participation in a "showcase" of select academic-community partnerships and dialogue around best practices for collaborative research in the Mid-South. Featured as a panel discussion were collaborations between anthropology, non-profit management, and public health faculty with Shelby Farms Park Conservancy, Lemonye-Owen College Community Development Corporation, and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital's Connect to Protect Memphis. Presenters described the nature of their collaboration, challenges they have encountered in building partnership (e.g., deciding on methodologies, resources to support engaged work, how they found collaborators, etc.), and tips and troubleshooting for doing engaged scholarship. This panel discussion was followed by a lively dialogue and commentary by Dr. Schensul, in which she provided the national framework for university-community collaborations. In her feedback, Dr. Schensul emphasized the importance of transdisciplinary approaches to social justice research. The event concluded with a viewing of project posters that highlighted the

University's Strengthening Community Grant Initiative, a program that supports university-community collaboration developed under a participatory and collaborative framework of engagement. This event was held on Thursday afternoon, April 19, 2012.

- (2) A well-attended "hands-on" workshop on participatory action research (PAR) methods for Anthropology faculty, graduate students, alumni, and their community partners. Participating community partners included: Memphis Healthy Common Table, Shelby Farms Park Conservancy, BRIDGES, Greater Memphis Greenline, Overton Park Conservancy, Methodist Healthcare, LeBonheur Hospital, C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa, and the City of Memphis' Department of Housing and Community Development. Several representatives of these community organizations are also department alumni, reflecting the strong relationships our department maintains with former students. When students leave our program they often move on to become community research partners and graduate student practicum supervisors. This event was held on Friday morning, April 20, 2012. During the workshop, participants group-modeled PAR projects, presented them and obtained feedback from attendant faculty.
- (3) "Ask a Practitioner" Brown Bag lunch with applied anthropology graduate students on April 20, 2012. Consultation on applied collaborative/participatory project design and anthropology core curriculum.
- (4) Participation in the "Praxis Makes Perfect" conference in honor of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UofM's Department of Anthropology, held on Saturday, April 21, 2012, and attended by Dr. Shirley Raines, the President of the University of Memphis. The culminating event was a keynote address on Community-University Engagement by Dr. Schensul during our evening Gala reunion celebration at the Peabody Hotel.

### **Changes from the Original Proposal**

We made adjustments and improvements to the schedule after a productive planning meeting at the SfAA meetings in April 2012. Based on that discussion we decided to:

- (1) Open the Thursday "showcase event" to the entire university and public. Rationale: Bringing a national leader in PAR (Participatory Action Research) would help to extend our University's mission to support engaged scholarship by offering faculty-community partnerships tools for collaborative research. Given this expansion, we partnered with the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy (SUAPP) and Engaged Scholarship Faculty Committee to coordinate and participate in the event.
- (2) Restructure Friday's workshop on PAR to become more interactive. Following a lecture format on "how-to" conduct PAR, Dr. Schensul facilitated breakout sessions whereby groups could apply the lecture content by beginning to develop a conceptual framework and methodology for a project and obtain feedback from attending faculty.
- (3) We refined our "meet the practitioner" opportunity to be a more structured event, where students were invited to consult with Dr. Schensul one-on-one to discuss a project proposal or research ideas, and gain insight from an experienced practitioner in community.
- (4) We did not hold a focused session for curriculum consultation, although these discussions were ongoing informally between faculty and Dr. Schensul over meals and other events.

## **Outcomes / Benefits to the students, faculty, and Visiting Fellow**

The COPAA Visiting Fellow program brought several benefits, including (1) enhanced alumni/faculty partnerships and new as well as stronger academic-community research partnerships; (2) new appreciation of and strategies for incorporating PAR methodological training in graduate curriculum and specific faculty and student projects; (3) intellectual exchange surrounding the theory and practice of participatory action work in distinct geographic settings (Memphis, TN and Hartford, CT); and (4) strengthening the visibility of PAR among colleagues and administrators in the university.

Dr. Schensul's visit set up the challenge to expand the national visibility of the various forms of participatory and engaged research work that characterizes Memphis' anthropology program in particular, and our university in general. To this end, faculty and students are collaborating in the Fall 2012 to document, evaluate, and publicize the range of PAR-inspired research projects from the last five years. The eventual goal is to publish these 'stories' on the university's website and through other media forms that celebrate engaged scholarship and PAR. Additionally, the Fellow experience encouraged Dr. Schensul to suggest collaboration in telling the stories of the various U. Memphis – related PAR projects with our largest professional associations that are experimenting with wiki formats or other interactive internet based approaches that reach a broad public audience. Dr. Schensul's visit also inspired the nomination of Dr. Stanley Hyland for the American Anthropological Association's Solon T. Kimball Award for Public and Applied Anthropology by Drs. Bennett and Finerman, with a supporting letter submitted by Dr. Schensul. Dr. Hyland won the 2012 award and will be honored at the AAA annual meetings in San Francisco, November 14-18.

In sum, for the University of Memphis' Department of Anthropology, the COPAA Visiting Fellow program served to advance our strategic planning for the next decade, including fresh directions for graduate training (e.g., greater integration of PAR into curriculum, service learning, and practica); strengthening faculty research (e.g., by incorporating these methodological innovations); and building community partnerships (e.g., by expanding our skills in outreach and engagement).

## **Suggestions for Future Applicants and for Strengthening the COPAA Program**

The COPAA Visiting Fellows Program provided a unique opportunity for applied anthropologists and practitioners from our department and the broader community to participate in intensive dialogue and training with an experienced participatory action researcher. We will draw on the this experience as we consider enhancements to our department's curriculum this fall, folding in new ideas for embedding collaborative methodologies into our coursework and research projects. To take full advantage of the COPAA Fellow Program, applicant teams should attempt to meet at the professional meetings held prior to their fellowship experience to refine the details of their program, expectations and outcomes. Additionally, informal consultations between past recipients and new applicants might be beneficial to those designing applications. Finally, the COPAA Fellow Program might also be publicized more broadly, across both the SfAA and AAA through online media sources, listserves, annual meetings and in newsletters. In particular, bringing past recipients together at annual meetings to share their

experiences and the outcomes of their programs would be a fruitful exchange, as would streaming talks or, if technology exists, holding events across COPAA campuses with common approaches.

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