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ARC News

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ARC Welcomes New *Director of Academic Community Partnerships - Al Hearn*

As of October 2006, the University of Cincinnati has a new resource to assist faculty in developing action-research projects: the Director of Academic Community Partnerships. This position was made possible by a generous grant by Cincinnati's Mayerson Foundation. We were very fortunate to gain support from the Mayerson Foundation and even more fortunate to fill the position with Al Hearn, PhD.

Al earned his PhD in 2006 from the University of Michigan. He developed an innovative degree program with elements of curriculum development, higher education leadership, organizational change management, and experiential learning. The self-designed PhD program was truly visionary. In many ways it appeared to be designed with his current position in mind.

Al's dissertation was a case study of the partnerships between the Manhattan School of Music and a number of K-8 music programs. This research emerged from community-outreach work that Al initiated in Ann Arbor following his arrival in September 1997. He has had extensive experience with projects that involved student volunteer recruitment for outreach activities in the community. In addition, Al helped to develop an academic course entitled "The New Public Scholarship in the Arts, Humanities, and Design" that brought together nationally recognized scholars in the area of Arts, Humanities, and Design.

At the University of Michigan, Al also developed a mentoring program for high-school students and founded the Outreach in the Performing Arts Program. This was a non-profit student volunteer organization that operated for four years and due to its incredible success, was adopted by Michigan's School of Music Career Development Center.

You will notice through all of Al's outstanding accomplishments a powerful and sustained theme of engagement in and involvement with the community. You also will notice the theme of music. Prior to his studies at Michigan, Al studied right here at our own CCM and received a B.A. in Music with a focus on Euphonium Performance.

We are so very happy to have Al return to the University of Cincinnati. Most certainly, we will benefit from the experience he brings in the area of community outreach and engagement. Please join the us in welcoming Al Hearn!!

Making Connections: Harmony Garden & Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA)

As action researchers, we all make every effort to build strong connections with schools, organizations, and residents in our community to ensure that all parties involved reap the benefits of research findings. At the Harmony Garden, we, too, are striving to establish strong links with community residents and groups outside of our immediate research team. Harmony Garden is a community-based research and education center which seeks to grow healthy girls through research and education. Our mission is to build academic-community partnerships for the development of effective approaches that empower all girls to achieve their full potential.

The researchers at Harmony Garden were fortunate to have the opportunity to form a partnership with the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) in 2004 when data collection for the *Pulse* study first began. Mothers and grandmothers from CMHA participated in community forums to share experiences and offer solutions to the challenges facing girls and young women in our region. Harmony Garden's relationship with CMHA directors, staff, and residents has continued to flourish today through a variety of avenues, even though the *Pulse* study concluded in 2005.

CMHA, is large, community-based organization, that manages over 5,000 public housing households in neighborhoods throughout Hamilton County. CMHA also offers the Housing Choice Voucher Program which provides affordable housing options for 10,300 families. In addition to providing direct housing services, CMHA is dedicated to fostering the healthy well-being of families through programs that help them to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Given CMHA's efforts to improve health and wellness of families living in Cincinnati and Harmony Garden's aim to promote the health and wellness of girls living in Cincinnati, the importance of maintaining a strong partnership to carry out action research efforts to target our similar goals was clearly evident.

In the future, the collaboration between CMHA residents and the Harmony Garden team will focus on a number of efforts targeting girls with the greatest disparity in health and wellness (i.e. African-American girls in the City of Cincinnati). These efforts will first involve girls and the supportive adults in their lives in small cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting which may help to define issues and ideas more clearly so that girls and supportive adults can define more powerful questions to address in future participatory action research projects.





Spotlight - Ranjita Mohanty—Fulbright Research Fellow

I was born in a small town called Chakradharpur previously part of Bihar state in India. Upon graduating from college in Orissa, I moved to Delhi and enrolled myself in Jawaharlal Nehru University for a combined Master of Philosophy / PhD in Sociology. I worked on movements against big dams and got my PhD in the year 1996. My academic background in Delhi shaped my thoughts in many significant ways. It was a place for radical ideas and open discussion on contemporary issues. Towards the end of my PhD program, I became more interested in micro-action and studying field realities. This interest led me to Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) in 1998, where I am currently employed. I anchored and conducted research that bridges the gap between theory and practice. The issues I worked on cover a range - participation, development, civil society, democracy and governance, citizenship, social justice. My focus has remained on the marginalized sections of rural poor, women, tribal and low castes. Since PRIA is an institution that promotes both knowledge and action, I have been able to organize several seminars and conferences to bring together academics and activists to collectively reflect on social change. The collaboration between research and practice has been a substantial part of my work.

I am currently in the U.S. on a Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship, based in the Department of Anthropology in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am working on my research, "Revisiting Development: Explorations in Participation, Rights and Democracy". I am a great believer in Action Research because it gives us the opportunity of doing socially relevant research, and if we are persistent in our effort we can also see some results of our research in mobilizing communities or initiating a policy change. What most concerns me is that Action Research is used almost synonymously with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). Both PRA and RRA are useful methods to collect quick data involving the community for the purpose of developmental intervention.

Action research requires both the academic rigour of research as well as the building of

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Renowned Action Researcher Featured in Upcoming Lecture



Jean J. Schensul, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, *Institute for Community Research*, is a medical/educational anthropologist with a background in qualitative and mixed methods research and a career commitment to the development of community based research institutions in the U.S., South Asia and Latin America that use social and health science research in partnership with communities to address issues of disparity and social justice.

Founding director of the Institute for Community Research (1987 to 2004) she guided the evolution of its programs of participatory basic, intervention, action research, cultural conservation and support for urban artists and the ICR community gallery. Her research in the United States, India and other countries covers the developmental spectrum and addresses social and structural factors relating to learning, cultural development and acute and chronic health problems.

She is senior editor and co-author, *Ethnographer's Toolkit*, a book series that guides community based and action research for students at all levels.

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Graduate Student Spotlight (cont'd)

synergy for social change by involving communities in a series of self - reflective questions. As such it requires much time, patience and commitment.

To the students who are interested in action research, I would like to say that it is a myth that Action Research is meant only for activists or NGO practitioners. It is a viable research methodology for conducting social science research. The methodological and analytical rigour is not to be compromised or sacrificed in action research. The challenge is to engage with the communities and build an agenda of social transformation into our research. This is certainly more challenging than following conventional social science research methods. Hence it requires not only planning and perseverance, but also an attitude of empathy that does not see communities as objects of research but as human beings who have the capacity to change their own lives for better.

Membership Invitation

We are now seeking faculty, students, staff, and community partners interested in joining us as members of the ARC.

Membership provides opportunities to:

- Participate in Center sponsored programs and workshops related to action research.
- Receive information about available grants, conferences, and publications.
- Develop collaborative relationships with colleagues and partners across the university and with community partners.

There is no membership fee required, just an interest in learning more about action research and a willingness to contribute to the Center's mission. If you are interested in joining us, or in learning more about the Center, please contact our membership coordinator:

Helen Meyer, Membership Coordinator
helen.meyer@uc.edu

Upcoming ARC Lecture Series

Upcoming Presentations:

January 24 - Jean J. Schensul, Ph.D.
*Research Partnerships for Health
Social Action*

February 26 - Ranjita Mohanty, Ph.D.,
*Revisiting Development Explorations in
Participation, Rights and Democracy*

March 26 - Thembi Carr
*Dissertation Project - Examining Student
and Organizational Intersectionality in the
Urban University*