

## **First Race, Ethnicity, and Poverty Summit Held at the University of Pittsburgh Center on Race and Social Problems**

Over 30 researchers and directors from across the country gathered at the University of Pittsburgh's Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP) for the first-of-its-kind summit of Race, Ethnicity and Poverty (REAP) centers. CRSP Director, and Dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, Dr. Larry E. Davis was spurred to organize the June 6-7 event because he knew of no other organization that brought together race-focused scholars and center directors.

The summit aimed to identify and locate existing REAP centers, determine what these centers do and how they function as research entities, and create opportunities for future collaboration among centers.

The event began with a reception at the home of Dr. Davis where many of those in attendance found they were familiar with one another's research but had never met face-to-face.

The event brought together researchers and practitioners from Arizona, California, Michigan, Texas, North Carolina, Washington D.C., and Massachusetts--to name a few.

Friday's summit began with remarks from University of Pittsburgh Provost Patricia Beeson, whose office sponsored the event, and who encouraged the group to work together to explore new research opportunities.

Dr. Davis then welcomed the group and shared some data on the 70 identified REAP centers throughout the United States, 90% of which are University-affiliated.

While many Centers work in several different areas, some were identified by a main area of focus:

- 26 centers were identified as focusing primarily on African Americans.
- 7 centers were identified as focusing primarily on Hispanics.
- 3 centers were identified as focusing primarily on Asian Americans.
- 5 centers were identified as focusing primarily on Native Americans.

Each attendee then took three minutes to describe their center and their work. There was wide variation in the center structures, methods, and strategies.

During this exercise, the enthusiasm was evident, and many participants expressed feeling "energized" and looking forward to future partnerships.

Attendees then heard from Dr. Scott Beach, Center Associate Director and Director of Survey Research at the University Center for Social and Urban Research (UCSUR) at the University of

Pittsburgh. Dr. Beach spoke about the “*Contrasting poverty in Pittsburgh and the nation*” and topics included: how poverty is measured, the race, ethnicity and poverty patterns in the nation and Pittsburgh, and trends for the future.

The final two presenters of the day addressed the issue of funding.

Dr. Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, of the Center for Research on Ethnicity, Culture and Health School of Public Health at the University of Michigan, spoke about the sources of funding, noting that 47% of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD)’s budget is dedicated to Research Centers.

Dr. Caldwell also looked toward the future direction of research and the role of race, ethnicity, and poverty, including: neuroscience, epigenetics, life course, systems change, and Biological and Social. She also suggested exploring alternative funding sources like the Department of Justice, Department of Defense, and Department of Education, among others.

Dr. Thomas LaVeist, Director of the Hopkins Center for Health Disparities Solutions at Johns Hopkins University, also touched on the harsh toll the recession and spending cuts have taken on funders and proposed some solutions for centers including: diversifying, expanding partnerships, developing internal revenue sources, and exploring commercialization opportunities.

After lunch the group moved onto a discussion of center issues based partly on a survey completed prior to their attendance. The issues most frequently mentioned were:

- obtaining and sustaining funding,
- creating partnerships that funders will respond to, and
- sharing credit and funding within a university.

Some topics were broached by several attendees, including the complications that ensue when funding goes to a PI and not specifically to the center with which they are affiliated--especially in today’s climate when many are being pushed by the University to increase their research dollars.

Some participants suggested that centers may want to separate from their University and become a non-profit; while others felt that a center would not be sustainable if it is not tied into the core mission of the University.

A center’s relationship with their University was a topic often broached. Some felt that a center should stay on task and conduct research, while others believed centers have a responsibility to transform the institution in some way—helping to increase underrepresented faculty for example. Many felt their centers gave them an opportunity to sit on University committees that can be used to make a difference.

Several commented on the link between effective communication and effective fundraising, and the importance in connecting the two. The message: today's centers must be creative and entrepreneurial.

Foundations were mentioned as being possible resources for administrative overhead in some instances, but other sustainability ideas included: pursuit of a full or partial endowment, cultivation of relationships with the Development Office, and working to locate soft money.

The last discussion of the day asked the question "Where does REAP go from here?"

Dr. Davis suggested that at the very least the group should create a Listserv to keep the lines of communication open. He also proposed hosting one more meeting here in Pittsburgh and then have the meeting hosted by other centers in the future. In the meantime, perhaps a panel or a task force could be formed to assist in developing future plans.

Attendees enjoyed the research presentations and suggested that at future meetings, one or two scholars could be invited to speak to the group, and that foundation representatives might also be invited to discuss funding opportunities.

REAP attendee expressed great interest in the research being done by other centers, and Davis recommended surveying future participants about what topics they would like to discuss.

"What is the glue that would make all of us want to talk to each other?" he asked. "What can we all work on and feel good about? How do we collaborate?"

Dr. King Davis noted that the comments from other centers have been very helpful, and he would like to have some of today's attendees consult at the University of Texas at Austin.

While the creation of an independent website was supported, for now the list of web addresses of REAP attendees will be housed on the Center on Race and Social Problems website ([www.crsp.pitt.edu](http://www.crsp.pitt.edu)). Dr. Ralph Bangs, Associate Director of CRSP, asked that everyone review the description of their center and send information on any additional centers they feel should be included. Dr. Bangs noted the Call for Papers and recommended that the summit attendees should consider submitting manuscripts to the *Race and Social Problems* journal.

The summit ended with many expressing enthusiasm for future partnerships, collaborations, and shared research.