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University of California Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California (CCREC) Wins Major Grant to Investigate Ethical Issues in University-Community Research Partnerships

SANTA CRUZ, California (March 1, 2012) – The Board of Directors of the Spencer Foundation, Chicago, IL, one of the leading national foundations that supports educational research, has awarded CCREC a grant in the amount of $277,550 to carry out a philosophic research project entitled “Ethical Issues in Equity-Oriented Collaborative Community-Based Research.” The Spencer Foundation “is intended, by [founder Lyle M.] Spencer's direction, to investigate ways in which education, broadly conceived, can be improved around the world.”

Founded in August 2010, CCREC is a growing University of California multi-campus research program initiative that links university researchers, community-based organizations, and policy-makers in collaborative projects to achieve creative solutions to the problems in our communities. With more than 30 Faculty Fellows from across the UC system, as well as with affiliations with multiple other research centers both within and outside the UC system, CCREC supports engaged scholarship to address the state’s interconnected crises in the economy, education, employment, environment, health, housing, and nutrition.

The Spencer Foundation funded project will be led by CCREC Director Ronald David Glass, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy of Education at UCSC, and the research team will include Samara Foster, Ph.D. (CCREC Coordinator) and a CCREC doctoral student research assistant. In addition, Anne Newman, Ph.D., will join the project full-time later this year, and CCREC Faculty Fellows from throughout the UC will provide additional input and support. The team’s research will untangle and provide guidance on complex issues at the core of research ethics that are complicated by equity-oriented collaborative research. “When communities study themselves, assisted by university researchers, in order to solve the actual social problems they face, then traditional notions of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity need to be re-thought and re-grounded,” said Glass.

Glass believes that as more faculty, graduate students, and communities engage in research partnerships and collaborations, the need has become critical for clear guidance on what constitutes the “highest standards of academic integrity, respect of persons, and civic responsibility.” Yet Glass points out that “no accepted inter/national standards currently exist for this work, so CCREC’s contribution will shape this research practice for future generations of scholars.” Additionally, Glass noted that “This award from a major research foundation indicates the importance of the ethical dimension of equity-oriented collaborative community-based research, and the pressing need to establish philosophically grounded and empirically informed standards.”
Foster explained that another important outcome of this project will be the preparation of a Casebook that will connect realistic cases from the field with sets of guiding ethical questions that can be used in research training for both scholars and community members: “The casebook will become an important curricular and professional development tool for graduate students, junior faculty, institutional review boards for the protection of human subjects, and other partners in community-based, collaborative research.”

Foster also pointed out that the CCREC research team was being significantly augmented by the grant. The 15-month project will support a part-time graduate student and a full-time nationally established scholar, Anne Newman. Foster said, “This team will enable us to work closely with our Fellows and with a wider national and international network of scholars.”

Newman’s research and numerous publications focus at the intersection of contemporary political philosophy and education policy. Before joining CCREC, Newman received her Ph.D. from Stanford University’s School of Education, served on the faculty of Washington University (St. Louis), and was awarded a National Academy of Education/ Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship.

"Community-based research is a promising way to address urgent social issues, and we need to think carefully about how researchers and communities can produce ethically responsible, academically sound, and useful results,” Newman said. “I'm really excited about this project because it tackles the intellectually rich and policy-important questions that this mode of research raises about ethics, epistemology, and research norms." Glass commented, "We are very fortunate to have Anne Newman joining the CCREC team on this ethics project. She is a nationally recognized scholar, and will be a key leader in our work over the next couple of years."

The overall goal of the project is to insure that current and future generations of researchers, review boards for the protection of human subjects, governmental agencies, and community organizations, can have a common set of standards and paradigmatic cases by which to judge the ethical dimensions of this emerging and important area of research.

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