Summary report for the Visiting Scholars Award

Building Collaborative Foundations: Visiting Scholars from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Gujarat, India

Submitted by Anna Scheyett, Dean, College of Social Work

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Introduction

In 2012-2013, the University of South Carolina began an initiative titled Carolindia, with goals of educating students and the community about the growing importance of India, promoting study abroad to and research collaborations with India, and initiating dialogue that will promote a permanent focus on India at USC. The College of Social Work (COSW) has been involved with Carolindia, with one of our faculty members, Dr. Teri Browne, on the Advisory Committee. Building on the goals of Carolindia, COSW established an informal relationship with the Department of Social Work at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MSU) in Gujarat, India. This relationship began when then Vice Provost Doupnik met with officials from MSU to explore possible collaborations. Upon his recommendation the COSW contacted MSU’s Department of Social Work and began exploratory dialogue. Here we found rich collaborative potential, particularly in the areas of women’s issues and community development.

First steps in our collaboration included co-sponsorship of an international conference to be held at MSU titled International Conference on Women and Millennium Goals: A Social Work Response. We decided to formalize this relationship and begin an ongoing collaboration by bringing two scholars from the social work department at MSU to USC as Visiting Scholars in Academic Year 2014-2015. The COSW proposed to bring two scholars from MSU for a week-long visit to USC—Dr. C.K. Parmar and Dr. Bhavna Mehta. We chose these two scholars because of their leadership roles within MSU as well as their scholarship in the substantive areas of greatest area for potential collaboration. Dr. Parmar is the Dean of the social work department, with expertise in community organizing and organizational management. Dr. Mehta is an Associate Professor in the social work department at MSU, with research interests in health and mental health as they relate to women’s issues.

Social work is an established profession in India, with university-based social work education beginning in the 1936 (Nagpul, 1993). The social work curriculum in India is highly standardized with parallels to that of the United States (Noble, 2004). However, as with much international social work, social work in India has a strong grounding in local practice and community-based work, an indigenous focus, and is primarily provided through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than state or national systems (Gray & Fook, 2004). Thus, while similar enough to have points of relevance and congruence, social work, and thus social work education and research, are sufficiently different to provide an excellent opportunity for transnational learning.

Our visiting scholars were in Columbia from October 6 through October 10, 2014. During that time they met with numerous administrators, faculty, and staff across campus. Visit goals, objectives, and outcomes are summarized below.
Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

The goals of this proposal for Visiting Scholars were to:

**Goal 1:** Learn about social work research methods, activities, and findings in India regarding women’s issues, with a focus on health and safety and regarding community organizing and NGO work, particularly as they pertain to addressing issues of poverty.

**Objective A:** 50 USC students/faculty will gain knowledge of the practices, policies and impact of social work services to women in India

**Objective B:** 50 USC students and faculty will gain knowledge of the practices, policies, and impact of community organizing and NGO poverty services in India

**Outcomes met for Objectives A and B:**
- On October 7th and 10th Drs. C. Parmar and Bhavna Mehta presented colloquia on the topics of community organizing and social work services to women, respectively. The talks were open to the university and over 35 faculty and students attended from the College of Social Work, the Department on Women and Gender Studies, and the Walker Institute
- On October 7th Drs. Parmar and Mehta spoke to approximately 20 undergraduate students in SOWK 304, discussing community interventions for women in poverty in India
- On October 9th Drs. Mehta and Parmar spoke to approximately 20 undergraduates in SOWK 441 on community-based social work interventions in India
- A total of over 75 faculty and students learned about social work services to women and community organizing activities in India

**Objective C:** 5 USC faculty and doctoral students will learn novel research methods for community-based research on women’s health and safety used in India

**Objective D:** 15 USC faculty and doctoral students will learn novel research methods for community-based research on poverty and community well-being in India

**Outcomes met for Objectives C and D:**
- On October 8th Drs. Parmar and Mehta spoke with first year social work doctoral students in the ProSeminar on their research methods and activities in India
- On October 9th they spoke to the second year cohort regarding the history of social work research methods in India.
- Drs. Parmar and Mehta met with faculty from the Institute for Families in Society on October 9th to discuss research methods and activities
- In total 15 faculty and students learned novel research methods for community-based research on women’s health and safety used in India from our Visiting Scholars.
Goal 2: Bring together scholars from across USC to explore future research collaborations with Drs. Parmar and Mehta.

Objective A: Beginning at least 2 collaborative research projects between MSU and USC, one in women’s health and safety, and one in organizational impact on poverty and community well-being

Outcomes for Objective A:
- During their visit Drs. Parmar and Mehta met to discuss potential research collaborations with Vice President Nagarkatti, COSW Assistant Dean for Research Dana DeHart, Dr. Ed Madden and members of the faculty from Women and Gender Studies, Dr. Bob Cox and other members of the Walker Institute, and Drs. Steve Lize and Pippin Whitaker from the COSW
- Plans for future collaborations include applying for an ASPIRE grant for Drs. Lize and Whitaker to work with Dr. Mehta to work together on a human trafficking research project
- Dr. Mehta is exploring potential funding from the Gates Foundation for work with women in villages in India, and will be inviting the COSW as a collaborator in these efforts

Goal 3: Bring together faculty from COSW with Drs. Parmar and Mehta to engage in mutual learning about social work education goals and strategies.

Objective A: 15 social work faculty will exchange knowledge with the Visiting Scholars on how to focus social work educational goals to meet the unique needs of local contexts and on pedagogical strategies to build student competencies in community-based and women-specific social work

Outcomes for Objective A:
- Throughout their visit, Drs. Parmar and Mehta met on numerous occasions with faculty, the BSW Program Coordinator, and the MSW Program Coordinator from the COSW to share ideas on social work educational goals and pedagogical strategies (see schedule in Appendix). In total they met with 15 social work faculty.
- The visiting scholars participated in a meeting of the IHI Open School, an interdisciplinary group of faculty and students in the health services schools, to learn about interdisciplinary health education and social work.
- The scholars had the opportunity to meet with two service agencies who are internship sites for the COSW—SisterCare and United Way of the Midlands—to learn about social work field education in the US.
Goal 4: Explore possible study abroad or internships in India for USC social work students and study at USC for students of MSU.

Objective A: Development of plans for at least 2 student exchange opportunities between COSW and MSU.

Outcomes for Objective A:
- Drs. Mehta and Parmar expressed great interest in hosting social work students at MSU of Baroda. They met with USC Study Abroad office to learn more about options for student visits. Professor Sudie Nallo from COSW has continued to communicate with our visiting scholars regarding scheduling a study abroad visit for next summer.
- Drs. Mehta and Parmar met with Vice Provost Allen Miller to discuss potential student exchange with MSU.
- Drs. Mehta and Parmar met with Director of Field Education Dr. Melissa Reitmeier to discuss the possibility of developing international internships for COSW students. They are continuing this discussion and we anticipate student interest for 2016.

Summary

As a result of our Visiting Scholar award we were able to bring Dr. C. K. Parmar and Dr. Bhavna Mehta of MS University of Baroda in Gujarat India to spend a week with faculty and students of the University of South Carolina. During their visit we were able to learn about social work research methods and interventions India regarding women’s issues and regarding community organizing and issues of poverty. We created a firm foundation for future work, including plans for several grants, for future visits from faculty at the College of Social Work to MSU of Baroda, and future student exchange through summer study abroad and international field placements. The College of Social Work sees this as the first steps in an ongoing productive collaborative relationship with the faculty of the Department of Social Work at MSU of Baroda. We are grateful for the support of the Provost’s Office in establishing this collaborative relationship.

Summary of Spending:

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<td>Travel</td>
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