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Transforming Cross-National Theory and Research through International Research  
Collaboratives

PIs: Valerie Hans, David Engel, Sally Merry, Masayuki Murayama, and Barbara Yngvesson

Project Outcome Report

Over the last two decades, social science scholarship on law and legal systems has focused more intensively on understanding the effects of globalization on law and social life. Sociolegal scholarship has explored transnational religious movements, economic crises, immigration issues, global environmental transformations, changing gender roles, human rights, transitional justice, and the interface of international legal regimes with local law and practice. As issues such as these become more central to sociolegal scholarship and more important for US scholars seeking to understand the global role of the US, scientific collaboration across national borders and regional divisions takes on greater significance. Collaboration is critical for developing scientifically sound transnational and international sociolegal research.

In order to further such scientific collaboration and enhance American scholars' knowledge of sociolegal scholarship in other parts of the world, the Law and Society Association (LSA) created a mechanism, the International Research Collaborative (IRC), to bring scholars from low and middle income countries (as defined by the World Bank) to the Association's annual meetings. The LSA is a US-based scholarly association with a significant international membership. It encouraged sociolegal scholars to develop international collaborative groups that focused on specific research topics and included scholars from less affluent countries. LSA sought funding from NSF which, in addition to funding from its own resources, enabled these

scholars to attend the annual meeting of the LSA in Honolulu in 2012. Thus, these funds made possible an international intellectual exchange of the kind that is essential to developing a broad approach to sociolegal theory and empirical research.

Each of the 64 scholars who received financial support to come to the meeting was a member of one of the 30 international research collaboratives and participated in the panels that the IRCs organized. Many IRCs have produced collective publications of their collaborative work or are in the process of finalizing them. Both men and women were well-represented among the funded applicants (31 women scholars and 33 men scholars). Many funded scholars came from South, Southeast, and Northeast Asia (29 scholars). Others came from countries in Latin America (22 scholars); Africa (9); and Eastern Europe (4 scholars). IRC topics were quite diverse, such as Gender and Judicial Education, Citizenship and Migration, Lay Participation in Legal Decision-making, and Indicators as a Technology of Global Governance. Some of the IRCs compared similar sociolegal phenomena in different countries and contexts while others explored the workings of transnational legal institutions and international law.

The project enhanced intellectual and scientific exchange among a wide variety of countries on issues of importance to sociolegal studies. A major benefit was the increasing ability of US scholars to interact with scholars from other parts of the world who often cannot afford to attend meetings in the US. Many participants described the advantages to them of making contacts from other scholars around the world working on the similar problems. By bringing scholars from countries that usually cannot afford to send scholars to international meetings, the NSF funding enabled US scholars as well as others attending these meetings to see the global implications of their scholarship and to rethink their own approaches. Since the

funded scholars were included in ongoing research collaboratives, the benefits to the US scholars who belong to the collaboratives are even greater, since they have developed a basis for sustained work together in the future. Whether the topic is transitional justice, judicial decision-making, or the shape of global governance and international law, such encounters profoundly enrich the work of US scholars as well as international scholars.

In sum, through this project and a previous, NSF-supported IRC initiative, US law and society scholars have gained a broader, more comparative and international perspective. The effects are visible in the content of conference presentations and articles in sociolegal journals. This initiative, and the NSF funding that supported it, has made a substantial contribution to developing a more international emphasis in law and society scholarship for Americans working in this field. Given the enormous concern with rule of law and the nature of legal institutions globally, such an intellectual development is extremely valuable for the US's position in the world. The National Science Foundation has contributed significantly to the internationalization of the field of sociolegal research. As sociolegal scholars develop their capacity to understand law in a global context, this project has facilitated the ability of US academics and policy makers to develop thoughtful and wise approaches to global legal developments.