**Portfolio review write-up: DRAFT FOR COMMENT**

**Joanne Csete, GDPP, April 14, 2014**

The review of the Global Drug Policy Program’s portfolio on university-based research and teaching was conducted on March 25 at OSF-NY, and the GDPP Advisory Board also discussed the portfolio at its meeting on April 3-4, 2014. This paper reports on both those consultations.

In attendance at the March 25 meeting were Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch, Karolina Walecik, Scott Bernstein and Joanne Csete from the GDPP staff, Ruth Dreifuss from the GDPP Advisory Board, Andy Ko from US Programs, Steve Rickard from OSF-Washington, Philip Watkins from Scholarships Program, Claudia Hernandez from the President’s Office, Dan Sershen and Daphne Panayotatos from the Strategy and Monitoring group, Kristof Varga of the Central European University liaison office in Budapest, and Chris Stone.

Joanne presented a brief summary of the background portfolio review document distributed earlier to all participants.

Chris noted that the portfolio reviews are meant to be a time to look backward and reflect not only on what seemed to work or not work but also to understand how we all think about the problems we’re dealing with and the decision-making going into our grant-making decisions. He said that everyone is unlikely to have the same assessment of the success or lack of success of each activity funded, but the review should give us insights about how and why decisions were made and what we can learn that can be applied to future decisions.

Chris asked us to rank as 1, 2 and 3 what we thought were the best successes on our list of recent grants in this portfolio and also to mark the ones that we thought did not come out as well as we had hoped. This led to a useful discussion of the range of qualities that we value in the work of the partners in this area. Central European University’s evolution to the point of devoting its own resources to the hiring of an outstanding drug policy scholar and to the establishment of its own regularly offered courses was noted as a particular success. Chris pointed out that since there is Soros funding behind CEU, it may not be the best example to learn from. Nonetheless, we concluded that the steps that were followed in working day to day and year to year with CEU and especially the new School of Public Policy to persuade them of the importance of drugs as a policy issue carried some lessons that would be useful in other places.

Kasia noted that the teaching of the short courses has provided opportunities beyond just teaching. The chance to identify and interact with new players in drug policy reform (the students and sometimes professors) is very important, particularly in places where there are no NGOs focused on drug policy reform. Where local faculty are involved in the courses, the courses are an important capacity-building opportunity and can lead to interest in drug policy research on the part of participating faculty.

Chris noted that because of those factors, online courses would not appear to meet our need since they don’t provide those opportunities for forming relationships with new advocates and researchers. There was some discussion, however, in view of the urgent need for building drug policy capacity, about whether online courses could be an important step forward for people who could not be part of the few university courses available. Chris indicated that in his experience, online courses are very expensive to prepare, they do not engage students in a way that enables them to retain information, and many courses have poor pass rates. He said, nonetheless, that if we thought there was an institution serving a remote population that had success with online learning in other areas, he would be interested in seeing how that would work.

A question was raised with respect to university courses about the one-third rule – that is, that OSF would prefer in general not to provide more than one third of the funding of a given organization. Chris explained that the rule applies to organizations, not projects, and the courses would generally be understood to need more than one-third support.

The discussion of a few years ago about the idea of a US university hosting a drug policy “center of excellence” was raised. It was noted that while there may not be the same need in the US as in other places for research that would put drug policy on the public agenda, in fact there is a need for good research on reform issues in the US. Kasia noted that in the US there are very few professors who are able to focus on drug policy full-time; drug policy is usually a side issue to a larger research program. Having a dedicated center for drug policy research and teaching might enable professors with an interest in the issue to produce much more policy-relevant research and teaching than even the leading names in the field are able to do now.

Philip Watkins cited the example of the Disability Rights Scholarship Program as a case that might have lessons for university-based teaching of drug policy. The Human Rights Initiative saw that there was a gap in possibilities for training on disability law, with only one degree-granting program in the world in this area. The Disability Rights Scholarship Program was created to allow promising legal scholars with an interest in disability law to go to faculties of law where they would be able to get the skills needed to return to their countries and be part of drafting or advocating for legislation that would reflect the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Philip wondered whether it would be possible to develop something equally specific for promising leaders in the drug law or drug policy field.

It was suggested that there might be more research to be done on the psychology of people’s resistance to accepting the overwhelming evidence on the ineffectiveness of repressive approaches to drug control.

In general, the discussion was constructive and helpful, particularly in enabling us to realize that our university grants fall into a number of categories with distinct stated or unstated goals that go beyond the obvious outputs of a course or a piece of research and involve such objectives as:

* Identifying and cultivating relationships with experienced or promising scholars and advocates;
* Bringing to bear in drug policy discussions the weight of the “brand name” of elite universities;
* Sharpening the advocacy impact of new drug policy research;
* Reaching existing or potential drug policy reform advocates in places where civil society is not active in drug policy reform.

The April discussion with the GDPP Advisory Board was also very helpful. The Board recognized the importance of engaging universities in developing drug policy evidence to be used for advocacy purposes and endorsed GDPP’s focus on this work. Other comments from Board members included the following:

* The Board noted that it is important that courses supported by GDPP should exemplify the multi-disciplinary nature of the field to the greatest degree possible. Courses supported by the program should ideally show how public health, law and criminal justice, sociology, gender studies, etc. come together in the study of drug policy and give some idea of the contribution of each discipline to research and practice.
* The Board thought that the value of short courses would be greatly enhanced by sustaining networks of alumni of these courses, though it is recognized that this can be a labor-intensive activity. One Board member shared his experience with a global health short course at the Graduate Institute of Geneva in which alumni were themselves invited to help design a follow-up course, and there was a high degree of uptake with a relatively small investment of resources.
* The Board suggested that GDPP might explore convening drug policy events at smaller universities outside capital cities in the Global South, where large audiences might be hungry for exposure to new ideas.
* The Board suggested that GDPP explore a connection with the Humphrey Fellows program. The Humphrey Fellowship is sponsored by the US State Department, and it gives fellows from all over the world a chance to spend a year in a US university honing leadership skills. Isidore Obot studied drug use and drug policy during his time as a Humphrey Fellow at Johns Hopkins University. The US National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) co-sponsors several fellows each year who wish to study a drug-related issue. It was agreed that a sub-group of the Board and staff would follow up on this idea.