

White Spaces Research Network expands

The energy and commitment of five postgraduate researchers helped make this year's White Spaces research network conference a huge success, attracting more than 30 delegates for the three-day event.

White Spaces was founded by Dr Shona Hunter (School of Sociology and Social Policy) to explore ideas of 'whiteness', its relationship to gender and gendering, and white identity and ethnicity. Funded by the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), the network has gone from strength to strength. It has members from countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, and stretches across the disciplines of communication and cultural studies, sociology, critical race theory, feminism, social geography, history and literary studies.

"The academic arm of the White Spaces research network has been developing since 2006, and it's grown steadily with the help of International Office staff, particularly the WUN office," explains Dr Hunter. "In 2007 we ran an inaugural network conference at Leeds, which was a tremendous success. This year we wanted to launch the postgraduate research (PGR) arm of the network, and the idea for the conference was initiated by the PGRs themselves with supervision and mentoring from me as academic lead."

Five PGRs formed the conference's organising committee and worked over a period of nine months to organise the conference. Tasks included making funding applications, putting out calls for papers, budgeting, organising venues, accommodation and refreshments, and advising on travel arrangements. Although the conference was part-funded by a WUN Leeds Fund for International Research Collaborations (FIRC) award gained by Dr Hunter, the students also obtained a range of support from other internal and external bodies.

Say Burgin (School of History), the PGR student who chaired the committee, says:

"It was professionally challenging and really useful - I can see why PGRs are advised to get involved in conference management, as it was very interesting and I learnt many new skills and increased my confidence. It was also a great opportunity for all the delegates to showcase their work and expand their networks."

Dr Hunter is now working on consolidating the practitioner arm of White Spaces which will help strengthen international enterprise and knowledge transfer (EKT) activities. "We've won a number of small external research bids to support our activities, and have also received WUN mobility grants from some partner institutions.

We've already hosted colleagues from the University of Sydney, and I plan to visit Australia and South Africa and Say is going to the University of Madison-Wisconsin.

Our Australian members have also won the equivalent of the FIRC in Australia to fund more return visits and activities. Between us we are funding a series of workshops in the UK, Australia and South Africa over 2010-2011. We will be running PGR 'master' classes at each of these.

Text taken from University of Leeds *Reporter* (November 2010)

http://www.leeds.ac.uk/forstaff/news/article/1214/white_spaces_research_network_expands

"We have plenty of other plans afoot in terms of bids, publications and the further development of EKT and PGR activity via virtual seminars. With help from Leeds Social Sciences Institute and the WUN we've made connections with European funders and hope to soon be in position to successfully apply for a European Council grant, which will enable the White Spaces network to continue to grow and flourish."

About the FIRC awards

Fifteen FIRC awards were made earlier this year, funding promising new international research projects from across all faculties.

"Several awards were made to Early Career Researchers running international projects for the first time," says Kirsty Mattinson, International Partnerships Officer. "Despite the difficult economic background, the University is continuing to support new ideas and research through the FIRC awards and is keen to encourage applications from a range of other emerging international projects to get them to the point where they can sustain themselves. Fostering and supporting research collaborations with a wide range of international partners, especially our WUN colleagues, is an important part of the internationalisation strategy."

For more details of how and when to apply for an FIRC award, visit

www.leeds.ac.uk/wun