Issues ranging from undergraduate experience to the potential effect of free trade agreements on Sub-Saharan Africa were discussed during Salisbury University’s inaugural Research Day and Innovation Showcase in September 2013.

‘Real-World Stuff’

Lembo, technical director of the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative, presented “Getting Down to Earth: Engaging Undergraduates in Theoretical and Applied GIScience.” He recounted a discussion with the vice president of a major research university who lamented, “we’re never going to be Swarthmore.”

“They are the gold standard of undergraduate education and they’re doing everything right,” he said. “I contrast that with when I came (to SU) to interview. I met Tom Jones, who at one time was the provost here, and he said, ‘Look, if you’re an 18-year-old kid and you come to Salisbury University, you’re going to be in a lab with a professor with a Ph.D.’ I thought, ‘wow – this guy gets it.’ He totally gets the idea that we can give our undergraduates a really special undergraduate experience.”

Last year, Lembo’s students did extensive research into the interests of job seekers, analyzed the health of the Chesapeake Bay, developed smartphone apps and helped with Super Storm Sandy damage assessment.

“This is real-world stuff,” he said. “Our undergraduates are put in a professional environment where they have to perform. We expect our students to perform at a level that rivals a professional organization. We expect our students to engage in meaningful, real-world work so they can have a better future for themselves.

“Don’t let anybody tell you that you can’t be Swarthmore. I can give my undergraduate students the absolute best experience out of any college in America, and our students are up the challenge.”

Community-Based Research

Schlehofer and Egan collaborated on “Applied Community-Based Research: Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Our Community.” Egan said research “helps us establish what those needs are in our community and to prioritize those needs.

“We are so fortunate [at SU] to have access to things that not everybody has access to. We can access empirical databases, we have statistical packages, and we have software and other things at our disposal. We also are fortunate enough to have a research and grants office that can help us find and secure funding for these projects. We have over 8,000 wonderful students who can collaborate on these projects with us as they get hands-on experience that they can apply after graduation, and we have a social responsibility as academics and researchers that are actually living in a community to take our work and ground it in our very own neighborhood.”

Navigating Global Trade

Munemo presented “Engaging the Soaring Dragon: Can Sub-Saharan Africa Benefit from Free Trade Agreements [FTA] with China?” “What’s remarkable about China is, since it embarked on economic reforms in 1978, it has truly become a soaring dragon,” said Munemo. “It is now the second-largest economy in the world, accounting for 9 percent of global trade. This is truly remarkable, but this also has brought several challenges for China. These challenges include interacting with other emerging markets. The Southern African Customs Union (SACU) is one of five nations currently negotiating an FTA with China. Munemo argued that the introduction of lower-cost Chinese goods to SACU countries would harm labor-intensive industries that are essential for rapid employment and poverty reduction.

“The key conclusion that comes out is that duty free access in the SACU market, as well as for SACU into the Chinese market through FTA, is not enough by itself to generate development in the SACU countries,” said Munemo.

Theory and Practice

Forte presented “Where’s the Theory? A Research Review of a Love-Hate Relationship and a Preview of Repair
Strategies. “From my point of view, social workers would marry theorists,” Forte said. “They would see the value of a reciprocal and caring partnership between theory and practice; theory would inform practice and practice would inform theory.”

Problems theory runs into, he suggested, include translation difficulties and an overabundance of jargon and rhetorical conventions that make it difficult for many people to pick up.

“I believe in the possibility of reconciliation,” Forte said. “Social workers can change their emotions of ambivalence, indifference and hate into those of love. We can move from polarities to unity.”

Peace Building Through Sports

Ravizza showcased “We Got Game: Building a Sport and Social Intervention for Children of War,” about his time in Uganda working on a UNICEF project called Sports for Development of Peace. “I was asked to come to the GUSCO Child Reception Center for former child soldiers,” Ravizza said. “At this time, we could see that the region was in conflict for over 20 years, and roughly 90 percent of the population lived in what was called ‘internally displaced person camps.’ Approximately 66,000 children and youth were abducted by the rebel groups (who) used child soldiers as their weapon of war.”

Ravizza focused on the issue of how sport can play a role in a child’s reintroduction into their community. “What (the children) told us was that they could utilize sport as a form of social inclusion – a way to develop leadership skills,” he said. “It was also a pull factor for school and, most importantly, a means for building peace within the communities.”

Politics of Garbage

Surak explored “Talking Trash: The Politics of Garbage.” A former EPA waste researcher, Surak has consulted for municipalities across the country on waste management practices. “Our waste is never anonymous,” she said. “It’s never private. It is a public process as soon as it leaves our private properties.”

Scientific excavation of landfills has shown that, because of the lack of oxygen and moisture, organic matter doesn’t always break down. You can still find “cuts of meat and banana peels from the 1920s.” Surak laid the bulk of the blame on government regulations – or lack there of – as well as harmful industrial practices.

“Industry decides how long your products last and whether you’re going to be able to recycle that product,” she said. “While we tend to think of wasting as this very individual process and we put a lot of blame on ourselves, what we tend to do when we individualize it is we forget all of the other important aspects, including our people that actually manage it.”

Enhancing Student Success

Arvi exhibited “Connecting the Dots – Mobile App Used to Enhance Student Success with Future Employment.” “Student loan debt now totals more than $1 trillion in the United States, averaging more than $50,000 per student. Meanwhile, Arvi asserted that many employers have begun to undervalue college-educated students. Looking to make a difference in their future, he created a mobile app showcasing his students’ work in his Practicum in Portfolio Management class, where students managed nearly a half million dollars of the SU Foundation, Inc.’s money.

“With one shot I can send all 19 of my students to potential employers, instead of emailing individual resumes,” he said. Arvi considered the experiment a success. “Most of the students are employed, and if they aren’t employed they’re in grad school,” he said. The app is a free download, available at m.guidebook.com/guide/8581/.

Students as Collaborators

Taylor presented “Basic Science and Frog Research with Applied Perspective on Human Hearing.” “Frogs can tell us a lot about the evolution of life on this planet, and may even play a role in helping us understand something about human hearing,” he said.

During his study, Taylor built a “robofrog” to research how female frogs are assessing acoustic and visual signals from males. He found that females often perform a virtual “lip reading” of vocal sacks in order to differentiate between choruses of calls.

“It’s clear that a lot of vertebrates are actually very strongly integrating both auditory and visual components in terms of their sensory perception,” he said. “(Students) have really become collaborators,” Taylor shared. “They’re developing projects, and I expect by next year we’re going to have some fantastic publications coming out. These guys have done an amazing job and can certainly hold their own with the best doctoral students at any institution anywhere.”

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