

Making a difference in the community

by Jacqueline Mitchell



Elmer Freeman, Executive Director of the Center for Community Health, Education, Research and Service.

“Share everything . . . play fair. . . clean up your own mess. Watch out for traffic when you go out into the world, hold hands and stick together.” These words of wisdom from the popular book *All You Really Need to Know You Learned in Kindergarten* are good advice for Tufts researchers considering community-based research projects, says Elmer Freeman of Boston’s Center for Community Health Education Research and Service.

Freeman was one of more than a dozen panelists who spoke at the Tufts Community Research Symposium held on the Somerville/Medford campus on March 31.

Scientists from across the university and community leaders from Somerville and Boston

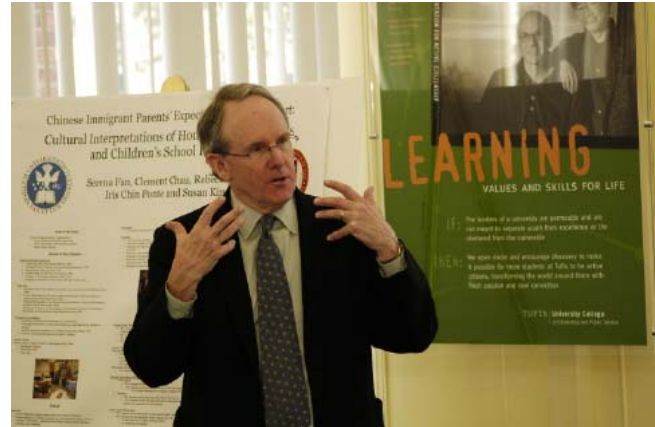


Jamshed Bharucha, Provost, Tufts University

attended the session sponsored by the Tufts Community Research Center and the University College of Citizenship and Public Service. The symposium was the first of what organizer Douglas Brugge, associate professor of public health and family medicine, hopes will become an annual

event.

“This work represents some of the very best of what Tufts is all about,” Jamshed Bharucha, university provost and senior vice president, said in his opening remarks. “One priority is to bring together people from all across the university to talk to each other about their goals and research, and the other is to promote civic engagement.”



Robert Hollister, Dean, University College of Citizenship and Public Service

“This is an opportunity to celebrate excellence as well as an opportunity to exchange information and take the next steps to yield higher quality results and improve lives,” said Robert Hollister, dean of the University College of Citizenship and Public Service. “Community research is a promising dimension of research at Tufts, in part because it is not a new theme here.”



Christina Economos, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Jessica Collins, Somerville Health Agenda

Researchers on the panel discussed their work in Somerville and Boston’s Roxbury and Chinatown neighborhoods. Christina D. Economos, assistant professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and Jessica Collins of the Somerville Health Agenda talked about the “Shape Up Somerville: Eat Smart, Play Hard” program. This community-based partnership between Tufts scientists and Somerville’s school department, PTA, local restaurants and a community

walking committee is an environmental approach to prevent obesity in Somerville elementary school students.

“We worked together to create a shared agenda from which everyone can benefit,” said Economos, who added that projects like Shape Up “need to be driven by the community so they can have a life beyond the research dollars.”

Leda Munoz Orians, project coordinator at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts, and Josianne Martinez of Boston's La Alianza Hispana discussed their work documenting stress, nutrition and chronic disease in Boston's Puerto Rican community. "We tell them it's a one-time opportunity to be part of studies Hispanics were not included in before," said Munoz Orians.



Leda Munoz Orians, Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging and Josianne Martinez, Boston's La Alianza Hispana

"Our community was very open to the research, but we need to keep communicating to them the importance of it," said Martinez. "Once we have results, we can advocate for a different model of health care."

Describing his own community-based research, Brugge emphasized the importance of collaborating with the community before determining the research protocol. "Not only is that a more respectful way to do things, but it also just yields better results," said Brugge, who studies public housing conditions and health.



Mae Bradley, Committee for Boston Public Housing and Doug Brugge, Tufts University School of Medicine

He has found that overheated apartments bother many residents more than even mold or cockroach infestations. "It was residents' number-one complaint, which never would have occurred to me sitting at my desk at the medical school," Brugge said. He reminded the audience that

research projects also can focus on employment and job-training opportunities for members of the community, something echoed by Mae Bradley from the Committee for Boston Public Housing.

“These people already knew that being poor is unhealthy,” she said. “They don’t need data. The community needs to know what the benefits [of research in their neighborhood] are.”

“We need research that informs what we’re already doing, that helps us develop campaigns, that has an impact on real life,” agreed Lydia Lowe of the Chinese Progressive Association. “Chinatown is rich with research opportunities.”



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Lydia Lowe, the Chinese Progressive Association and Alex Pirie Immigrant Service Providers Group