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Global Human Rights Direct: Connecting Human Rights Voices from around the Globe (abstract)

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Oct. 2-3, 2015, Dayton, Ohio

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Research Panel: Visualizing Rights

Presenter: William Paul Simmons, University of Arizona

Title: Global Human Rights Direct: Connecting Human Rights Voices from Around the Globe

Abstract: Scholars and activists (e.g., Simmons 2011, Baxi 2007, Ife 2009) have increasingly argued for a larger role for on-the-ground stakeholders, especially marginalized populations, in defining and implementing human rights around the globe. This paper describes the Global Human Rights Direct (GHRD) initiative at the University of Arizona that seeks to connect and empower human rights stakeholders from across the globe through videoconferencing. GHRD, to be launched April 1, 2015, is a searchable database of human rights stakeholders willing to participate in videoconferences with interested individuals and groups from around the globe. It will be used by university instructors, high school teachers, community groups, and government officials to tap into on-the-ground experience and expertise for their classrooms and meetings and learn about human rights firsthand from those who know best. GHRD will revolutionize how human rights is taught, how it is conceived, and what counts as expert knowledge in rights discourses. It will empower local activists and survivors as they engage in meaningful dialogue with students, instructors, community groups, and like-minded individuals worldwide. GHRD believes that enhancing human rights discourses can lead to mobilizing larger and more effective coalitions who will pressure governments and corporations to better protect the rights of the world's most vulnerable populations.

This paper will discuss the genesis and implementation of the project, as well a number of ethical, political, and cultural issues that we have had to address. The project has embraced a critical post-colonial lens in both the website design and in our processes. Therefore, special mention will be made of the involvement of community activists in all phases of the project's development.

Keywords: Technology and activism, empowerment, marginalized populations, post-colonialism

Biography: William Paul Simmons is Associate Professor in Gender and Women's Studies and Honors Interdisciplinary Faculty at the University of Arizona. His book, *Human Rights Law and the Marginalized Other* (Cambridge UP, 2011) examines the potential for reinvigorating human rights law from the perspectives of marginalized peoples. With Carol Mueller he has edited *Binational Human Rights: The U.S.-Mexico Experience* which was just published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. He is the lead editor of an innovative textbook called *Human Rights Voices* that is under contract with Routledge and he is finishing a manuscript entitled *Joyful Human Rights*. With Michelle Tellez, he has conducted ethnographic research on sexual violence against migrant women in Mexico and he has published articles and a book chapter exploring legal remedies for the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez. He has published in such leading journals as *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Violence against Women*, *Yale Human Rights & Development Law Journal*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *The Journal of International Human Rights*, and *Social Sciences Quarterly*. He has served as a consultant on human rights and social justice issues in The Gambia (West Africa), China, Mexico and the United States.