The Sherrerd Center supported my attendance at the American Economic Association’s Conference for Teaching and Research in Economics Education (CTREE) 28-30 May 2014. I participated both as an attendee and as a workshop presenter.

I learned a great deal from attending the conference. Right from the get-go, the first plenary introduced a topic which is important to our role as economics educators at Smith: Cecilia Rouse (Princeton) interrogated how we can increase diversity in economics, focusing particularly on the presence of women and minorities in Economics graduate programs and among economics faculty. She emphasized how faculty can do their part as role models, mentors, and connectors for female and minority students.

Independent of the plenaries, I learned from a variety of sessions, panels and workshops. One of the first sessions I attended focused broadly on topics relevant to teaching development economics, which I will be teaching in Spring 2015. Julia Paxton (Ohio University) explained clearly the benefits of incorporating service learning into a course on development economics, because it exposes students to the issues of inequality and poverty in practical terms and because it shows how these ideas are relevant to domestic US social and development policy. I am now considering how to work with the Smith Center for Community Collaboration to complement the development economics course I shall teach in the spring. A session on the Art of Teaching provided good practical ideas for teaching which I hope to adopt in my classes. Charity-Joy Acchiardo (U. Arizona) proposed a variety of exercises to promote selecting students into group-work as well as some easy-to-implement classroom practices to promote group cohesion. James Tierney (Penn State) made a good argument for both faculty and students to consider, among other things, working with drama faculty or attending a drama improv workshop to improve presentation skills.

The workshop session in which I was a presenter was called ‘PechaKu-What? Visually Rich and Verbally Concise Presentations - Econ Style!’ A PechaKucha is a presentation style in which a presenter uses 20 slides with evocative images. During the presentation, the slides automatically progress every 20 seconds. This means that the presentation lasts 6:40. Charity-Joy Acchiardo had developed the session and my presentation was an example of using PechaKucha presentations to introduce or conclude an economics class. I used ideas from my seminar on the Political Economy of African Development to conceive my PechaKucha and the presentation was well received (see link to presentation slides on Sherrerd Center conferences webpage).

The conference also helped me to cement contacts and future networks. For example, Mario Villareal-Diaz, an economics program coordinator at George Mason University asked me to ensure that I remain in contact as I could perhaps be included as a future lecturer in the summer school economics program typically for interested undergraduate and graduate students considering careers in academia, teaching or research.

I greatly appreciate the support from the Sherrerd Center and I hope to be able to attend the CTREE conference again next year. I am already considering a plethora of ideas for my classes and I hope to report back in future Sherrerd events on those ideas that have worked for me and those that need further refining.