Welcome to this second plenary session, with the admittedly generic title of “Learning from the Past, Looking Towards the Future.” I’ll make a few opening remarks and then turn it over to our 7 panelists, selected (non-randomly) to represent different generations of Workshop students and visiting scholars. I’ve not given them much guidance, except to suggest that each identify one aspect of the Workshop that struck them as especially positive or productive, as well as one aspect which might be changed or improved in some way. I’m especially interested in hearing about the latter, because we’re likely to identify the same factors as especially positive, and because we are going to have to make some changes in the next few years. Let me give you a little background on that.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the last few days, of what I think has been by far the most interesting of our WOW sequence, at least so far. Each WOW gives Workshoppers the opportunity to re-connect and to meet new people interested in similar research topics. WOW also gives those of us at IU a glimpse into all the many research programs being undertaken by scholars with some kind of connection to the Workshop, or the Bloomington School, which is so well summarized in the new book by Paul Aligica and Peter Boettke entitled Challenging Institutional Analysis and Development. Lots of familiar faces, many new participants, a total of 16 working groups, some just getting started and others with panels reflecting back on lessons learned from years of completed research projects. I managed to attend panels from 10 of them, and I’m amazed by the very different cultures found in each one. Fascinating ideas and engaging discussions, in all a bit overwhelming, but pleasantly so.

Looking at all this, I can only imagine how proud Lin and Vincent must be to see what has become of what they innocently started over 30 years ago. They set in motion of process of scientific discovery and policy reform that continues to roll on into new areas and that shows no sign of slowing down. I encourage the coordinators of each working group to build on the discussions here, to continue their conversations and collaborations either virtually or at other meetings. Frankly, the working group coordinators did most of the work of putting together these panels and setting up the procedures they wanted to follow. We made the practical arrangements here on campus, and by “we” I mean, of course, Gayle Higgins did it. Jimmy Walker, Burney Fisher, and I served on the planning committee, with Jacqui Bauer as the de facto chair. She did a great job. I was the principal organizer for WOW3, and I really appreciate how well this one was organized and how smoothly it has been implemented.
I look forward to following future developments in these working groups, and especially to seeing what you all will have in store for us at WOW5, in 2014. Yes, I realize that there has been some buzz about an approaching apocalypse in 2012, which by some interpretations marks the end of the ancient Mayan calendar. Well, that may be, but the Workshop survived Y2k, and the Bush Administration, so my bet is we’ll still be around in 2014.

By then, however, the Workshop here at IU will have undergone some changes. There have always been changes, of course, over the first 30 years, but this is a unique time of transition. Lin and Vincent were co-directors from the start until Vincent retired from administrative responsibilities around 12 years ago. Since then, a few of us have had the privilege of serving with Lin as co-director. Jimmy Walker the last few years, myself a few years back, Amos Sawyer, who has been commuting back and forth to Liberia, and Ken Bickers, who inexplicably decided that Boulder was a better place to live than southern Indiana.

As should be obvious from the previous session, Lin may be stepping down from the co-directorship, but her research agenda is still moving forward at a dizzying speed. She’s still more active than anyone I know. She’ll continue to teach and work with grad students and visiting scholars, current, past, and future.

On the administrative side of things, Jimmy and I are slated to be co-directors for the next few years. After that we have set up a plan for a rotating leadership, with co-directors to be selected from a group of senior faculty in our Workshop Advisory Council. Currently the WAC includes three SPEAons (Burney Fisher, Matt Auer, and Roger Parks as an emeritus member), three other political scientists at IUB (Bill Bianco, Regina Smyth, and Aurelian Craiutu), Bill Blomquist formerly from political science at IUPUI but currently Dean of the School of Liberal Arts, Dan Cole and Jeff Stake from our rival law schools in Indy and Bloomington, respectively, and two non-political scientists from the IUB College, Catherine Tucker (Anthropology) and Tom Evans (Geography). We also have a few junior faculty about to cross the tenure threshold, and others may join later, but I mention our current WAC members because some pair of them is likely to be in charge for WOW 5 (assuming the Mayan calendar goes on that long).

Oh, and I hope Jacqui will be around too, as her position of Assistant Director is meant to bring a sense of continuity (and sanity?) to this collective leadership. And Gayle had better still be here, or all bets are off.

As part of this transition process, we’ve been asked to have an external review of the Workshop this fall. We are confident we can make a strong case that IU would be nuts not to continue supporting Lin’s ongoing and ever-expanding research agenda. We also hope to convince the external review board to recommend to IU administrators that they help us transition to a more regularized form of institutional support, with the College and SPEA sharing joint responsibilities as our primary anchors in the IU system.
(along with OVPR, the office which oversees all IU research centers). We are also in the process of exploring the potential of closer working partnerships with CIPEC and some new initiatives on campus, CRES and CREE, which have brought together environmental scientists in the College and SPEA. There are some potential synergies in our use of facilities and the human capital available to us (through our outstanding staff and student support). There are likely to be other initiatives to be added to the mix, especially the Political Economy of Democratic Sustainability (PEDS) that Bill Bianco and Regina Smyth are in the process of establishing.

Out of all this we plan on a re-structured Workshop focused on two broad overarching themes: sustainable management of resources (especially community-based systems) and sustainable institutions of democratic governance (with a definite tilt towards Tocquevillian foundations). In both areas we envision the continued operation of multi-disciplinary research teams of faculty, students, and visiting scholars, using multiple methods, models, field research, and frequent use of the Interdisciplinary Experimental Lab here on campus.

Why these themes? Well, we’ve had a long series of discussions on this, and these fit well with the interests of the cohort of current faculty, while still encompassing much of the Workshop agenda. There is no way we can give equal coverage of all 16 of the WOW4 working groups, but we don’t need to do that. You are all engaged in active research programs, exploring many different roads to better knowledge and improved policy. The Bloomington School is much bigger than what happens physically in Bloomington. Here we’ve got to concentrate our resources on moving in a few key directions.

Another component of our strategic plan will be to encourage the College and SPEA to coordinate on the hiring of at least two senior faculty whose research programs fit into this broad agenda. There’s no way we can think of hiring someone to “replace” Lin, just as the political science department never seriously considered searching for a “replacement” for Vincent when he retired. Instead, we’re thinking in terms of identifying individuals who can contribute towards a continued development of some of the research themes pioneered by Lin and/or Vincent. Once we get them here in Bloomington, we’ll start to integrate them into our WACky governance structure, so one of them might be up here 5 years from now. But, given the current economic situation, we don’t envision making any such hires for a few years.

So, in the meantime, let me get, at long last, to the point of this panel.

We know there are changes ahead, and we’d like to get some advice from you Workshoppers about which aspects of the Workshop, as each of you have experienced it, you consider to be absolutely critical to maintain, and which aspects might be changed or improved in some way. There are some key aspects of the Workshop, core values and norms, that we have no intention of changing, but we would like to have some guidance from all of you on what kinds of changes might be helpful. That’s basically all
the guidance I gave our panelists, and I will, soon, give each of them a chance to make a few comments. If they keep their comments short, much shorter than mine (!), we might have time to take a few more comments from the audience. I suspect there will be some informal conversations later on.

To get us started, let me begin with an example, something that might seem rather trivial, but which I think can have some real positive consequences. Most of you have experienced the mini-conference with which we conclude each Workshop seminar. I really like the way we ask someone other than the author to present each paper, sympathetically, and then make constructive comments for revisions. That’s what first piqued my interest in the Workshop many years ago, when, for whatever reason, I was asked to participate and enjoyed a series of panels with incredibly fascinating discussions on a remarkably wide-ranging array of topics. I was hooked, and still am. But one of the least attractive aspects of the mini-conference was that we always had a long day of sessions on Saturday. (I still remember the student, Pat Haney, who taught me to bring a seat cushion to make it easier to survive the marathon sessions.) When I later came to be responsible for scheduling mini-conference sessions for my own seminars, I realized how difficult it was to arrange for the participation of faculty members with less direct ties to the Workshop, since most had commitments to family events or other activities. Many of our students now come to us with families and other pressing time commitments. This last semester Armando Razo, who taught an excellent seminar on Networks and Institutional Analysis, scheduled all the mini-conference sessions during the Monday of finals week. As a consequence, we had a wider range of faculty participants than I remember for quite some time. In this way Armando helped strengthen the social network that will help sustain the Bloomington part of the Ostroms’ Workshop through this time of transition.

Well, that’s more than enough from me. Who wants to go next? … and please introduce yourself when you start.

Comments from Panelists:

Rick Wilson highlighted the tolerance and flexibility associated with this intellectual school, always open to new ideas or techniques. However, not everything goes, since Workshop research has always been characterized by a sharp focus on answering some particular research question. He noted that the Workshop community has a family feel, and hoped that this nurturing would continue. After commenting on how hard everyone works, he suggested setting up more opportunities for fun, such as the informal hootenanny held the previous evening.
T.K. Ahn shared some poignant personal moments and suggested some improvements in physical facilities. He identified the leadership of senior scholars in flexible research programs in which graduate students were fully involved as being what he considered to be the most important ingredient in the Workshop’s success.

Filippo Sabetti encouraged Workshoppers to re-discover the ideas and writings of Vincent Ostrom, and to make sure that they remain central to future developments. He specifically pointed to recent books, including revisions of two of Vincent’s books (with the help of Barbara Allen) and the two edited volumes that emerged from the recent festschrift for Vincent.

Edella Schlager remarked how her interactions with other graduate students, faculty, and visiting scholars around the Workshop really brought the world to her. She expressed the hope that the Workshop’s connections to sister research centers would continue to remain important, and encouraged even more international connections. She lauded Workshop faculty and staff for sustaining a culture of practical problem-solving. Finally, she suggested that the Workshop might reserve a few post-doc positions for students of former Workshop students (or visiting faculty).

Theo Toonen focused on the international dimension of the Workshop. He recommended that Workshoppers get more involved in current debates on global governance, building upon the long-standing Workshop tradition of examining the complex networks of multi-organizational coordination that exist at the local level. He encouraged us to not overlook the study of large-scale superstructures and how they affect opportunities for sustainable self-governance at local and national levels.

Esther Mwangi said that the future of the Workshop is already here, that the participants in WOW4 demonstrate the long-term viability of this research tradition. She noted how well the Workshop’s emphasis on mobility, flexibility, and relationships mesh with the real-life characteristics of the property rights systems established by the pastoralist peoples that she studies in her own research. She called for strengthening of the study of comparative indigenous institutions, including religious ones, and their relevance to conflict resolution. She also expressed appreciation for the Workshop newsletter, which helped her maintain contact with the activities of her many Workshop colleagues.

Pam Jagger described the Workshop as a mecca for graduate students interested in the study of environmental policy, especially at the international level. As the most recent graduate on the panel, she has been struck by the incredible facilities (office, computers, secure funding, including conference
travel) that were available to her. She presented a brief analysis showing how central Elinor Ostrom has been to the training of graduate students at Indiana University. Based on data gathered from ProQuest, Pam reported that Lin has chaired 34 completed Ph.D. dissertations in environmental policy, just during the years 1999-2009. (It is worth noting that Lin turned 65 in 1999.) In contrast, the 8 other SPEA faculty reporting environmental policy as one of their areas of expertise had chaired only 9 completed dissertations on this topic in that same time period. Pam also noted that 14 of Lin’s students received NSF dissertation improvement awards during that same time period. The chair of the panel thanked Pam for this analysis and promised to use it as ammunition in the upcoming external review process.

**Comments from the Audience**

Only a few minutes were left for comments from the audience. Margaret Polski lauded Workshoppers for being public intellectuals directly concerned with concrete policy issues, rather than being technocratic or jargonistic in orientation. She also noted that the language of “polycentricity” now informs policy debates in Washington to a remarkable extent. James Thomson encouraged us to not overlook the important role that Workshoppers have played as consultants. These relationships also provide potential contacts to future generations of students and visitors. Dele Olowu lauded the inclusiveness of the Workshop, especially the opportunities for making connections between research and policy on the topic of governance reform in Africa. Burney Fischer stressed the “virtuality” of Workshop research programs, especially as shown in the success of such widely-dispersed working groups, and expressed the hope that we can use new technologies to further build upon this success.

Jimmy Walker concluded this session by reiterating Esther Mwangi’s comment that the future is now. He commented that the papers presented at WOW4 seemed much more substantial than some of those presented five years previously, and interpreted this as evidence that the Workshop working groups have achieved the status of more mature research programs, both broader and more focused than in earlier meetings. He told the audience that the future of the Workshop is in their hands, and that it is just as much their responsibility as that of any of us in Bloomington.