Sac State center joins in supporting Japan’s disaster recovery

It has been three-plus years since the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear reactor meltdown that overwhelmed Fukushima prefecture in northern Japan. Though the reactors are being decommissioned, the question remains: How are residents coping with stresses of the long recovery process?

That was the focus of an international seminar attended by Sacramento State’s Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) in early March. The center has a longstanding relationship with Kumamoto University in southern Japan and has exchanged delegations over the past 10 years. Kumamoto sponsored the seminar to discuss community-level conflict and dispute resolution evolving from the Fukushima event, as well as the impact of another regional disaster: devastating flash floods in the Kumamoto region two years ago.

The core mission of the CCP is to help public agencies and stakeholder groups coordinate effectively on public policy issues to accomplish solutions. The center’s role in supporting disaster recovery in Fukushima is a case in point.

Associate directors Adam Sutkus and Dave Ceppos participated in the seminar, providing a California perspective on community-based public engagement, disaster recovery systems and conflict resolution techniques. Seminar participants shared best practices and case studies to find new ways to address the complexities of human recovery and to manage inevitable conflicts.

The CCP team toured the Fukushima region, speaking with prefecture-level officials, mayors and council members, as well as community groups grappling with the recovery needs of everyday citizens. “It was fascinating and motivating to see the communities come together and address so many needs in the wake of this emergency,” Ceppos says. “The residents are showing an ability to form the networks needed to solve problems and engage with government systems to address long-term challenges.”

Japanese university officials hope to develop a first-of-its-kind, academic-based conflict resolution program in Kumamoto to study, teach and apply conflict resolution and community engagement systems. These policy approaches are relatively new in Japan and are gaining attention in the wake of Fukushima and other disasters.

“It was an honor and a privilege to share our experiences in California and nationally within the field of collaborative public policy development, and specifically in the
emergency response and homeland security area,” Sutkus says. The strong partnership between Kumamoto University and Sac State, he added, “will allow both schools to share knowledge and help grow the field of collaborative policy development.”

Information on the Center for Collaborative Policy, within the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, can be found at www.csus.edu/ccp or by calling (916) 445-2079.

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Alan Miller