Program and Staff Updates

The Community GIS (CGIS) program bids farewell to under-graduate research assistant Nick Shauer, who secured a full-time job at Xcel Energy. CGIS also welcomes new undergraduate research assistant Dylan Jones, a senior geography/GIS major who will be working directly with community groups to support their mapping and data needs.

Last fall, CGIS program manager Jeff Matson presented work conducted in collaboration with the Fair Housing Equity Assessment at the Community Indicators Consortium’s annual conference in Chicago, Illinois. In November, Matson was invited by the McKnight Foundation to speak on the use of GIS in program evaluation and assessment at the Technology Affinity Group’s (TAG) annual meeting in Austin, Texas. TAG is a membership organization of foundations that promotes the understanding of how information and communications technology can help its members further their philanthropic goals.

CGIS graduate research assistant Tony Damiano copresented the Northside Asset Project’s interactive maps (nsassets.umn.edu/asset-maps.html) last November at the Policy Analysis Conference in St. Paul and at the Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center’s Community Day. Damiano recently won Best Interactive Map by a Graduate Student for the project from the U-Spatial Mapping Prize competition, for which he was awarded a $500 prize.

Last fall, the Hennepin–University Partnership (HUP) hosted an informational presentation for Hennepin County staff on a qualitative technique for evaluating elements of a program or project called ripple-effect mapping. Scott Chazdon, evaluation and research specialist from the University of Minnesota Extension, provided an overview of what ripple-effect mapping is and how it works. Forty-seven Hennepin County staff members attended, participated in a demonstration of the technique, and discussed possible applications.

Last year, HUP invited proposals for the first Hennepin–University Collaborative Grant for projects that involve an issue or topic of significance to both entities. The 2013 grant, in the amount of $20,000, was awarded to Lisa Thornquist from the Office to End Homelessness and Professor Maria Hanratty from the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs. The pair hired a graduate assistant to study the risk of family homelessness during the recession by analyzing the relationship between earnings history and homelessness. In October, the grantees reported key findings, including that family earnings and income are critical protection against entry and re-entry to shelters. Improving job prospects of these vulnerable individuals in the county may provide a way to help these families secure stable housing. A comprehensive summary of these research findings is available by contacting Kathie Doty at kdoty@umn.edu.

First-year Master of Public Policy student Rachel Anderson recently joined HUP as a graduate assistant. She plans to focus her studies on public management, with an emphasis on local government and human services. Her professional experience includes managing a mental-health adult foster-care program, community mental-health work, and a variety of policy research.

The recently launched HUP interactive website provides a platform for University of Minnesota researchers, staff, and students to post information related to local government, particularly Hennepin County, and vice versa. Members can share project updates, pose questions, offer suggestions, refer people to materials and contacts, and generally exchange ideas. To register as a member, visit hup.hoop.la/join.

The Resilient Communities Project (RCP) continues its year-long partnership with North St. Paul this spring semester. RCP Director Carissa Schively Slotterback was invited to present “Research and Interdisciplinarity: The Resilient Communities Project,” to the University of Minnesota Board of Regents Academic and Student Affairs Committee in February. She emphasized the value of the program in addressing critical community priorities that require multidisciplinary expertise, as well as in creating applied research and experiential learning opportunities for students on emerging sustainability issues. In April, Schively Slotterback will represent RCP at the annual Sustainable City Year Conference in Portland, Oregon, where she will share insights from the program’s second year of operation with faculty and staff from other colleges and universities that are considering launching their own programs. RCP Program Manager Mike Greco presented the work of RCP to members of the Sensible Land Use Coalition during its Annual Roundtables of Knowledge last fall, as well as to engineers at the City Engineers Association of Minnesota Annual Conference in January.

CURA Associate Director Will Craig received a Lifetime Service Award from the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC). The award is the organization’s highest honor, and is presented to an individual who has enjoyed an extended professional career of service in the geospatial community, provided dedicated and distinguished service to NSGIC, and engaged in notable activities that have advanced NSGIC’s goal of efficient and effective government through prudent adoption of geospatial technologies. The award was presented during a special session of the NSGIC Midyear Conference in Annapolis, Maryland, in February. Craig was also invited by Carolyn Parnell, Minnesota’s Chief Information Officer, to serve another term on the Minnesota Statewide Geospatial Advisory Council. Craig has been active on that Council in the past, most recently leading the effort to review nominations for a governor’s commendation for exemplary activities serving the state.

Esther Wattenberg, CURA’s policy and program coordinator in family and child welfare, has launched a new monthly blog called Notes from a Cluttered Desk (cascw.umn.edu/category/notes-from-a-cluttered-desk), which premiered last November. The most recent entry is titled “How Social Justice was Inserted into the Framework of Child Welfare” Wattenberg participates in numerous local and state meetings, task forces, forums and conferences, always applying a critical eye to the practice and policy issues facing the field of child welfare. The blog provides her reflections and insights on current and reoccurring practice and policy challenges in child welfare.