CURA Program and Staff Updates

The Community Geographic Information Systems (CGIS) program recently hired Lucas Winzenburg, student in the Master of Geographic Information Science program at the University of Minnesota, as a graduate research assistant to work on grant-funded indicator projects from the Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the McKnight Foundation. CGIS staff completed a hands-on redistricting training with neighborhood residents and organization staff at the Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC) in February. The workshop was designed to involve residents in the City of Minneapolis redistricting process. In addition, CGIS has produced a set of maps and data showing changes in the racial and ethnic composition of newly proposed ward boundaries in comparison with the existing wards (see www.cura.umn.edu /mcno/ward-demographics-maps). Jeff Matson, CGIS program coordinator, attended the spring meeting of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) in Portland, Oregon, in February. NNIP is a consortium of 37 CURA-like centers from around the country that share similar goals of using data to inform neighborhood-level decision making. Sessions focused on technology and innovative uses of data. At the meeting, Matson presented ArcGIS online tools for creating simple and free web-based mapping applications.

This spring, CURA’s community-based research programs partnered with the Minnesota Evaluation Studies Institute (MESI) to support an evaluation research assistant to provide evaluation and proposal-writing assistance to nonprofit organizations that applied for but did not receive research help with evaluation projects through one of CURA’s community-based research programs. Nora Murphy, a Ph.D. student in organizational leadership and policy development, is working with eight organizations this semester. The partnership will not only help organizations in need of evaluation assistance, but will also improve the focus and quality of subsequent proposals for funding through CURA as well as inform MESI’s model of community evaluation consultation. Depending on demand for this type of evaluation assistance, CURA may continue the program in the future.

Upcoming CURA Housing Forums will feature George Sherman talking about tax credits for affordable housing (April) and Carissa Schively Slotterback presenting an analysis of planned unit development approaches in the Twin Cities metropolitan area (June). View upcoming CURA Housing Forums, review past forums, or sign up to receive announcements about future forums at www.cura.umn.edu/housing-forum.

This past fall, CURA launched the new Artist Neighborhood Partnership Initiative (ANPI) grant program, which supports partnerships with individual artists and community-based organizations to engage residents who are traditionally underrepresented and to develop innovative engagement approaches to address community issues. Three $10,000 grants were awarded to community organizations and their artist partners: Dayton’s Bluff Community Council and Terrell Woods; Phillips West Neighborhood Association and Peter Haakon Thompson; and District 7 Planning Council and Barry Kleider, Conie Borchardt, and Sheronda Orridge.

Edward Goetz, CURA director and Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs faculty member, received the 2011 “Best Paper” award from the Journal of Urban Affairs for his article “Where Have All the Towers Gone?” He received the award in April at the Urban Affairs Association Conference in Pittsburgh. Goetz was also named to the technical advisory committee for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s new Housing and Transportation Index initiative. The index will be piloted in several communities around the country this year, including the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Will Craig, CURA associate director, helped organize a meeting of state GIS coordinators and members of the U.S. Senate GIS Working Group in Washington, D.C., in February. The event was part of Hill Day at the 2012 Mid-Year Meeting of the National States Geographic Information Council, whose outreach committee Craig cochairs. The Senate GIS Working Group currently has two dozen members, but is likely to grow as more senators rely on maps to understand important policy issues.

Neeraj Mehta was hired in February as director of community-based research at CURA. Mehta has previous experience in community-based work as a program officer at Nexus Community Partners, a program manager with Project for Pride in Living, and the program and strategic development director with the Sanctuary Community Development Corporation. In March, he attended “Transforming-Race 2012: Visions of Change,” a conference hosted by the Kirwan Institute in Columbus, OH.

Mike Greco, CURA’s community planning assistance coordinator, attended the Sustainable Cities Year Program (SCYP) Replication Workshop at the University of Oregon in Eugene in April. SCYP matches faculty in various disciplines and their existing courses with city-identified projects in one partner city each academic year. The workshop included visits with city staff in communities that have previously taken part in the program, and provided participants with an in-depth look at how the community-engagement program works so that the model can be replicated at other institutions.

Esther Wattenberg, CURA’s policy and program coordinator in family and child welfare, is coordinating the fourth in a series of reflective seminars for child-welfare supervisors and practitioners, “The Role of Supportive Housing: Clarifying the Issues in Responding to Young, High-Risk Populations,” will be held in May or June 2012. Summaries and other materials from the first three reflective seminars, which were held in 2011, are available at www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/events /past_events/. In March, Wattenberg issued a Brief Note on “Initiatives for Assuring Successful Educational Experiences for All Minnesota Children,” available at www.bit.ly/BriefNote-March2012.