CURA Program and Staff Updates

In May, the Hennepin–University Partnership (HUP) hosted a networking mixer to provide a forum for Hennepin County staff and University of Minnesota faculty to get to know one another and create new collaborations. More than 75 faculty and staff participated in the event, which was held at the Coffman Memorial Union on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. As a follow-up to this event, HUP invited proposals for a $20,000 Hennepin-University Collaborative Grant, intended to encourage University faculty and Hennepin County staff to partner on projects that involve an issue or topic of significance to both entities. HUP recently awarded the grant to “The Risk of Family Homelessness over the Recessions: The Role of Earnings History,” a joint proposal from Lisa Thornquist (Hennepin County Office to End Homelessness) and Maria Hanratty (Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs). The project will assess the impact of the recent economic recession on homeless-shelter entry among families in Hennepin County, and will develop predictors of shelter entry to better target homelessness prevention services for low-income families. HUP recently hired graduate research assistant Vanee Dusoruth, a master of public policy student at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs. The project will assess the impact of the recent economic recession on homeless-shelter entry among families in Hennepin County, and will develop predictors of shelter entry to better target homelessness prevention services for low-income families. HUP recently hired graduate research assistant Vanee Dusoruth, a master of public policy student at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs. 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The Kris Nelson Community-Based Research Program Review Committee recently approved 10 projects for the fall 2012 semester. Organizational partners include the Asian Economic Development Association, Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, Casa de Esperanza, Center for Earth Energy and Democracy, Cleveland Neighborhood Association, Crow Wing County, Hennepin Teen Parent Connection, Hope Community, Minneapolis American Indian Center, Neighborhood Development Alliance, and Selby Avenue Action Coalition. Visit www.cura.umn.edu/Nelson-Program to learn more about these projects. In May, community-based research program assistant Jeff Corn collaborated with Carol Swenson, executive director of the District Councils Collaborative of St. Paul and Minneapolis, to present a session titled “Routes to Rails: Pedestrian Realm Planning in the Central Corridor,” at the University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies’ 23rd Annual Transportation Research Conference. The presentation summarized a research project supported by the Nelson Program.

The Charles R. Krusell Fellowship in Community Development is designed to prepare students of color at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs to be Minnesota’s future leaders and change makers in community development. This year’s Krusell Fellows are Kylie Patterson, a second-year graduate student who will work with EMERGE in North Minneapolis on program evaluation and strategic planning; and Suado Abdi, a first-year graduate student who will work with the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD) on a small-business loan program and support MCCD’s legislative agenda.

At a meeting in August co-convened by Equity Now TC (of which CURA is a partner), PolicyLink, and the Center for American Progress, some of the region’s and nation’s greatest equity thinkers outlined the steps it will take to tap into the huge potential within Minnesota’s communities of color and ensure that all Minnesotans prosper into the future. An initial summary of the meeting is available at www.equitynowtc.org. A more complete report about the gathering will be released later this fall.

In July, the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing (MCNO) bid a fond farewell to Margaret Kaplan, MCNO’s outgoing operations director. During her three years at CURA, she was instrumental in building MCNO’s organizational capacity, with a keen eye toward public policy and community engagement in the areas of housing, transit, and media justice. She will be sorely missed. Kaplan left MCNO to join the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency as community development director. MCNO staff member Ned Moore (nedmoore@umn.edu, 612-625-5805) has taken over Kaplan’s responsibilities.

Neeraj Mehta, director of community-based research at CURA, was selected as a member of this year’s Next American Vanguard class. Each year, Next American City selects 40 people who have demonstrated their ability to impact their city or the national dialogue on urban issues, and brings them together for a series of presentations, workshops, and other activities. Mehta will attend the Next American Vanguard conference this October in St. Louis, as well as the Applied Research Center’s biannual Facing Race conference in November.

CURA associate director Will Craig will attend the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) annual GIS Pro Conference in September, which will mark the organization’s 50th anniversary. Craig also recently co-chaired the National States Geographic Information Council’s (NSGIC) Outreach Committee, which updated the organization’s advocacy agenda to more clearly reflect the basic issues that states encounter when working with the federal government on data collected to address national needs. This summer, Craig and co-researcher Bruce Schwartau presented their work on trade centers in Greater Minnesota (published in the Fall/Winter 2011 CURA Reporter, as well as in this issue) at the University of Minnesota Center.
for Transportation Studies’ annual Transportation Research Conference in St. Paul, the Annual Mid-Continent Regional Science Association conference in Bloomington, and the University of Minnesota Center for Small Towns Symposium in Morris.

Esther Wattenberg. CURA’s policy and program coordinator in family and child welfare, is coordinating the fifth in a series of reflective seminars for child-welfare supervisors and practitioners, planned for late this fall. A previous seminar on “The Role of Supportive Housing in Improving Responses to High-Risk, Young Parents and Adolescents in Cross-Sector Involvement,” was held in June. Summaries and other materials from the first four reflective seminars are available at www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/events/past_events/. Wattenberg is also currently working on a piece titled “Code of Silence,” which addresses how minority communities deal with the police.

Mike Greco will serve as program manager for a new initiative at CURA this fall called the Resilient Communities Project (RCP). This pilot program will match graduate-level courses at the University of Minnesota with one partner city each academic year to work on city-identified sustainability projects. This year, RCP will partner with the City of Minnetonka to work on 17 sustainability-related projects. For more information about the program, see the announcement about RCP on page 16, or visit www.rcp.umn.edu. Greco is also program co-chair for this year’s annual conference of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association, the national professional organization for land-use planners. The conference will be held at the Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, Minnesota in September.

2012–2013 Faculty Research Awards

CURA is pleased to announce the recipients of faculty research awards for 2012–2013 provided through the Faculty Interactive Research Program (FIRP) and University Metropolitan Consortium. FIRP was created to encourage University faculty to carry out research projects that involve significant issues of public policy for the state and that include interaction with community groups, agencies, or organizations in Minnesota. Grants are available to regular faculty members at the University of Minnesota and are awarded annually on a competitive basis. The University Metropolitan Consortium was established in 2006 to link the centers, programs, and faculty and staff at the University engaged in teaching, research, and outreach concerned with understanding metropolitan change and development. The mission of the consortium is to strengthen the University’s overall contribution to understanding metropolitan-urban-suburban issues by enhancing and extending the work of its existing programs and strengthening the University’s connections to those in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors who also work with these issues.

Evaluation of Nutritional Quality of Food Donations to the Emergency Foodshelf Network. The Emergency Foodshelf Network (EFN) is a coalition of 12 foodshelves in Hennepin County that aims to provide quality, nutritious food and support services to hunger-relief partners. Because poor diet quality and its associated morbidities disproportionately affect the populations it serves, EFN has identified a need to evaluate the nutritional quality of food donations. Lisa Harnack (Epidemiology and Community Health) and Marilyn Nanney (Family Medicine and Community Health) will partner with EFN to evaluate the nutritional quality of foods donated to this organization using a sampling of donated food items. The investigators will inventory and enter selected items into a nutrient-analysis software application that quantifies nutrient and food-group content. They will then analyze data from the software to identify nutritional shortfalls of donated foods. Findings will have implications for EFN and other public and private programs that serve as part of the nutrition safety net.

Program: Faculty Interactive Research Program

Native American Youth-Gang Assessment Project. Native American youth gangs have been on the rise across the country, and Native American youth are more likely than any other ethnic group to belong to a youth gang. The formation and rise of Native American youth gangs requires context-specific information and a culturally appropriate response. Ross Velure Roholt and Katie Johnston-Goodstar (Social Work) will complete a comprehensive assessment of youth-gang activity with a Midwestern tribe. Using a community-based, participatory, mixed-method research approach, the investigators will gather data on community demographics, youth-gang characteristics in the community, youth-gang problems and issues in school, community perceptions of youth-gang activity, and community resources to provide a rich understanding of the youth-gang issue in this community. Their assessment will inform tribal government policy, services, and youth programs to address and reduce Native American youth involvement in gangs.

Program: Faculty Interactive Research Program

School-County-University Collaboration to Evaluate High-School Achievement: Longitudinal Analysis of Participants in the Lead Peace Middle-School Service-Learning Program. Every year, one student drops out for every four students who graduate from high school in Hennepin County. Educational disparities are particularly marked for children of color. In partnership with Minneapolis Public Schools and Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department, Lead Peace was initiated in 2003 to reduce violence and improve school connectedness among middle-school students in North Minneapolis. Barbara J. McMorris (Nursing) and her team will evaluate high-school outcomes for middle-school participants recruited in 2007, and assess their risk and protective factors for