Eugene Borgida, professor of psychology and law and director of the Center for the Study of Political Psychology, has been named to the Fesler-Lampert Chair in Urban and Regional Affairs for 2002–2003. Borgida’s appointment, which was announced this past summer, was made by former Dean of the Graduate School and Vice President for Research (now Executive Vice President and Provost) Christine Maziar based on recommendations from CURA.

When asked for his reaction to the announcement, Borgida replied that he was “genuinely thrilled. I regard the chair as a tremendous honor and a great investment in my program of research.”

The Fesler-Lampert Chair in Urban and Regional Affairs is one of four endowed chairs and two named professorships made possible through a generous contribution to the University of Minnesota by David R. and Elizabeth P. Fesler. The Fesler-Lampert Endowment in Interdisciplinary and Graduate Studies was initially established in 1985 through a $1 million grant from the David R. Fesler Fund of the Saint Paul Foundation, Inc. The gift was matched by a $1 million allocation from the Permanent University Fund, and the combined endowment and matching funds have now grown in value to over $9.5 million. The endowment is intended to stimulate interdisciplinary research and teaching through the appointment of distinguished, broadly learned scholars to endowed faculty positions at the University of Minnesota.

Borgida has taught at the University of Minnesota for more than 25 years, and has served as co-director of the University’s Center for Research in Law and Psychology, associate dean for research and planning in the College of Liberal Arts, and chair of the Department of Psychology. He was named a Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Psychology in 1996. He has written, edited, or co-authored more than 200 articles, books, and papers on topics as diverse as the psychology of racial and gender stereotyping, the effect of candidate and issue assessment on voting behavior, the impacts of community electronic networks, the effects of cameras in the courtroom on juror deliberation, and the use of prior sexual histories as evidence in sexual assault trials.

Borgida intends to use the resources provided by his appointment to extend his work with Regents Professor of Political Science John Sullivan on the impact of computer networks on the conduct of civic life in rural Minnesota communities, a project initially funded by CURA in 1996. The project focuses on the role a community’s civic and political cultural norms play in addressing disparities in access to information technology, and draws heavily on theory and research on social psychology, political psychology, and the social implications of the Internet. To date, Borgida and Sullivan have conducted survey research, focus groups, and archival research in two rural communities. Based on this analysis, Borgida explains, “we maintain that whether information technology is viewed as a public good, with an accompanying collective obligation to provide access, or as a private good, best provided by the free market, is in part determined by the extant civic culture of a community,” and that these different means of providing access to information technology also have “different consequences for equality of access.” Borgida will use this year to extend his analysis to several other communities, particularly those taking part in Minnesota’s Rural Internet Initiative, a program designed to improve the state’s telecommunications infrastructure. He also expects to develop and pilot a new graduate seminar on the Internet and Civic Culture.

The Fesler-Lampert Endowment is intended as a tribute to David Fesler’s grandparents, Bert Fesler and Jacob Lampert. The Fesler-Lampert Chair in Urban and Regional Affairs is appointed for a one-year period, and receives approximately $50,000 for research, salary, and logistical support. The funds are jointly administered by the University of Minnesota Foundation and the University of Minnesota.

Correction
The Spring 2002 issue of the CURA Reporter was incorrectly numbered Volume 33, Number 2. The correct numbering for the issue is Volume 32, Number 2. Our apologies for any confusion this error might have caused.