Faculty and staff help shape ISR Diversity, Equity & Inclusion plan

By Dory Knight-Ingram

As members of the University of Michigan community hold engagement activities in support of U-M President Mark Schlissel’s Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Strategic Planning Initiative, ISR is helping move DEI strategic planning efforts forward.

On January 26, more than 160 ISR faculty and staff met to talk about ISR’s DEI plan. Participants shared views on their current work environments, and ideas for the future.

Each person was asked to address three questions:

1. What is ISR’s biggest challenge in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

2. What do you envision a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive ISR will look like?

3. What is one action that we could take that would move us toward that vision?

Participants shared concerns and ideas during a report-out of table discussions. Among them: reflecting the communities we research and teach; creating opportunities to collaborate across ISR; recruiting in communities as opposed to more elite institutions; increasing gender diversity in ISR leadership at ISR; considering diversity in all decision-making bodies; making summer opportunities available to high school students; being more inclusive to part-time/hourly workers, post-docs and temps; and supporting diversity of religion.

U-M Vice Provost Robert M. Sellers said ISR and units across the university, in taking part in this process, are publicly demonstrating a re-commitment to DEI issues.

ISR Director David Lam said that there will be more chances to participate in the development of ISR’s DEI plan. “When the draft is prepared, it will be shared and available for comment and suggestions by all members of the ISR community,” he said, adding that ISR intends to have a plan in place before the end of the academic year.
Problems with Flint’s water supply began about a year and a half before Michigan Governor Rick Snyder responded to complaints. “People’s concerns were discounted or dismissed,” U-M researcher Paul Mohai told the Christian Science Monitor. “As far as I can see, they did not appear to have been taken very seriously, and it really seemed to take quite a while for the government to pay attention and respond.” In the article, published on Jan. 28, Mohai notes that Flint’s “demographics suggest a community that doesn’t have a lot of resources, that doesn’t have a lot of political clout. Those are the characteristics of other environmental justice cases.”


Young children with step- or half-siblings behave aggressively more often, on average, than do other children, ISR researcher Paula Fomby found. Her research, published in the journal Demography, received media coverage in January and February around the world and in the U.S. on Fox News, Yahoo Parenting, and The New York Times via Futurity News. Living in these “complex sibships” is more common than many people believe, Fomby also found. About one in six U.S. children live with half- or step-siblings just before starting kindergarten. Read more about Fomby’s research here.


India has made significant progress bringing electricity to its people, but more improvements need to be made, according to U-M political scientist Brian Min, whose research was highlighted on NDTV, India’s 24-hour Hindi news channel. Min processed thousands of images taken by satellites every night from the last 20 years to show the electrification history of the country. “The project shows dramatic changes in the brightness of villages across India,” Min told NDTV. But while many rural areas have become much brighter, other states have seen only small improvements in electrification over the two decades studies. Read more about Min’s study here.


ISR Emeritus Group meets and mentors

Sarah Stoddard, a PSC research affiliate and assistant professor at the U-M School of Nursing, talks with ISR’s Rosemary Sarri and Al Hermalin at a recent meeting of the ISR Emeritus Group. The group, which now includes about 20 ISR emeritus faculty, aims to provide support and advice for junior faculty.

Photo by Jennifer Puckett

Albert and Charlotte Anderson Conference Room named

William Axinn, left, and Dirga Ghimire, right, celebrate the naming with Al Anderson, holding plaque, and Paul Anderson, at a ceremony in ISR-Thompson 2443. ISR Director David Lam and PSC Director Jeffrey Morenoff spoke at the Feb. 15 event. The new facility will enhance training at the Institute for Social and Environmental Research-Nepal and throughout Southeast Asia.
ISR hosts interdisciplinary discussion on study of racism

By Dory Knight-Ingram

ISR hosted a Rackham Interdisciplinary Workgroup on Racism panel discussion workshop “On the Study of Racism” February 11. The workshop was sponsored by the ISR Survey Research Center, and was part of the U-M MLK Jr. Symposium.

A common thread in the panelists’ presentations was “everyday racism,” also the topic of a book by Antioch University’s Philomena Essed, one of the panelists.

“I look at what happens around me from a social justice perspective and try to capture a concept of ‘what is happening here?’” said Essed, a pioneer in the conceptualization of racism in Europe and the US. “I think revisiting stories and seeing what you can get out of them can be good... the Black Lives Matter movement benefits from the power of video and personal stories where you can imagine yourself in that situation.”

“The fact is that race does matter in our society in terms of defining people’s lives and trajectories and what happens,” said former ISR Director James S. Jackson, a pioneer in the study of racial health inequalities. “Discrimination in housing, schools, occupation and related areas of life is real. It’s not part of people’s imaginations.”

Other panelists included Chandra Ford of UCLA, Tené Lewis of Emory University, and Ellis Monk of the University of Chicago.

Jennifer Puckett and Margaret Hicken contributed to this report.

Run for Bob and have a Twinkie (or two!)

Once again, the ISR Runs for Bob team is headed to Gallup Park for the challenging Twinkie Run. Join the team and show your support for our friend and colleague Bob Schoeni.

Can you eat a Twinkie, run half a 5K, eat another Twinkie and then finish the race? Each Twinkie shaves a minute off your run time. It’s win-win as you get some fresh air and nutritious food at the same time as you raise awareness for ALS. Register at:


2015 ISR Runs for Bob team. Photo by Michael McIntyre

Contributed by Pete Westhead
Lost in the system: 
Stacking the deck against Detroit foreclosures

By Susan Rosegrant

Eric Seymour, the 2015 winner of the Robert Kahn Fellowship for the Scientific Study of Social Issues, is examining how private lenders and federal entities handled the recent rash of foreclosed properties in Detroit, and what this suggests for the future.

Large numbers of Detroit homeowners lost their properties to foreclosure in the recent economic recession, and many of those houses ended up empty and deteriorating, leading to increased crime and lower property values in the city.

But why exactly do foreclosures have that impact? When banks and federal institutions repossess large numbers of houses in a region, what are the policies and practices that produce the long vacancy periods, poor maintenance, and heavily discounted sale prices that so negatively impact neighborhoods?

Eric Seymour, a doctoral student in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan, hopes to answer those questions. He also wants to know how approaches and outcomes in Detroit differed between private lenders, who were understandably focused on the bottom line, and governmental lenders, who have a mandate to work with neighborhoods and homeowners.

For the last year, Seymour has been poring over Detroit-area real estate data, interviewing real estate brokers, investigating housing sites, and studying federal rules and regulations.

A big problem, Seymour says, was the indiscriminate selloff of Detroit properties, regardless of a house’s condition or the relative stability of its neighborhood. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac—hybrid public-private entities that have been criticized for favoring profit over their public mission—routinely sold foreclosed properties en masse to real estate intermediaries with no stake in the area. These shell companies then sold blocks of houses to investors as far away as Singapore, China, and the UK, promising buyers a burgeoning rental and real estate market that didn’t exist, and understating the sales price on the Detroit end to avoid paying local property transfer taxes.

“I expected to see a lot of sad stories about what happened with the foreclosed properties, regardless of which entity was responsible for them,” Seymour says. “But the nature and the scale of some of these investor activities has been the most surprising thing to me.”

Seymour will complete his research, with the support of the 2015 Robert Kahn Fellowship for the Scientific Study of Social Issues, over the next few months. He hopes his findings will lead to change. For starters, he says, HUD needs to find a way to expedite its acquisition of properties. And Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac need to look beyond the bottom line. “With the volume of properties that they touch,” he says, “they need to have a neighborhood-oriented foreclosure disposition policy.

Read more about Seymour’s research: http://bit.ly/1mibIFc

Save the Date

ISR Spring Bazaar
Tuesday, April 12, 2016
10 am to 3 pm
ISR-Thompson Atrium

Support the ISR Staples Staff Development Fund by contributing items for sale or auction.


Questions to Jennifer Puckett: isrstaplesfund@umich.edu

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