

The Center for Human Environments Mission Statement

The Center for Human Environments (CHE) at the CUNY Graduate Center brings together psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, planners and designers, and public health experts whose research addresses the problems faced by people in their everyday living environments, including homes, neighborhoods, educational institutions, hospitals and prisons. Much of CHE research is oriented toward addressing problems of injustice in human-environment relationships, particularly in settings where people are struggling to fulfill their rights. For this reason, the research typically engages directly with community-based groups, advocacy movements, and educational institutions through highly participatory methods. This work is often carried out in partnership with nonprofit organizations, government agencies, or international development organizations.

Activities at CHE in 2018-2019

CHE's projects are funded from a wide variety of sources, including federal awards (NSF and US Department of Education), US foundations (Ford, Pinkerton, New York Community Trust, Booth Ferris / JP Morgan, Heckscher, Altman), and international charities (Axson Foundation [Sweden]). In FY19 our Center saw a very significant increase in contracts from NYC agencies, including the NYC Department of Education (DOE), the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and the NYC Department of Probation (DoP). The award of such NYC contracts testifies to the valuable and often unique expertise that CHE research teams offer to city agencies; at the same time, these contracts allow for research and training opportunities that put Graduate Center students in close contact with some of the most challenging current issues in the fields of health, education, and criminal justice.

Below are a few notable events from the Center for Human Environments calendar for 2018-2019:

CHE's Public Science Project (PSP), following the conclusion of its multi-year national survey of LGBTQ youth, was recruited by the NYC Mayor's Office with funding from DOHMH to design research projects about supportive environments for NYC's LGBTQ youth and particularly to investigate what is needed to foster better acceptance of LGBTQ youth by their families. Other projects underway this year by PSP also focus on improving outcomes for youth, including justice-involved youth and youth who are in foster care. Additional partners for these research projects include The Children's Defense Fund and the Broward County (Florida) Children's Services Council, as well as the Steinhardt School at New York University

In the past year the College Access: Research & Action (CARA) program at CHE finalized its new five-year contract with NYC DOE, which will allow CARA to extend its programming to all NYC public high schools. CARA's unique

peer-to-peer college counseling model drew national attention when *Personal Statement*, a documentary film featuring three CARA youth leaders, was broadcast three times on PBS, and was shown to legislators at the US Capitol in April. *Personal Statement* had its local presentation at the Graduate Center in October, where it was introduced by Interim CUNY Chancellor Vita Rabinowitz and was accompanied by a panel discussion with two of the film's youth leaders. One of the CARA youth leaders, Enoch Jemmott, also published an opinion piece in *The New York Times*, laying out the case that access to a college education in the US has become grossly unequal, privileging those with greater wealth, and appealing for new and creative efforts to improve college access and success for youth from low-income backgrounds.

After nearly a decade based at Hunter College, a multi-year project sponsored by the NYC Department of Probation (DoP), "Models of Probation Incubator," was transferred to CHE at the Graduate Center in 2018-2019. The Principal Investigator, Harriet Goodman, Executive Officer of the Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare, is leading the DoP project in new research initiatives as well as expanded dissemination activities, including an annual national forum on probation policies that has attracted hundreds of community representatives, government officials and policy makers from across the US.

Prof. Setha Low, Director of CHE's Public Space Research Group (PSRG), together with GC doctoral students Troy Simpson and Erin Lilli, traveled to Iceland in May to present at an Expert Forum on the Future of Public Space, organized by a research team at Sweden's Royal College of Technology (KTH). The KTH research group has awarded support to Prof. Low for the past two years for her work in preparing a general audience book entitled *Why Public Space Matters*. Through its relationship with the Axson Foundation of Sweden, KTH has also provided multi-year support for the two PSRG doctoral students, who have produced and piloted a public space research database designed to be of use to a wide range of urbanists, including architects, urban planners and government policy makers in all regions of the world.

Supporting graduate students, both financially and in terms of their development as researchers, remains a primary purpose of CHE. In the past year, as reported on our Data Form, CHE projects provided fellowships and/or research employment for 17 GC students. CHE funds in 2018-2019 also furnished support for several students traveling to present at conferences or to attend professional development sessions. In addition, CHE assists students who are developing their capacity as researchers and who come to our Center for help in applying for external funding. As FY19 closed, we were pleased to receive word that two CHE graduate student affiliates were awarded dissertation fellowships for the coming year, one from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and another from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). These fellowships will be administered through CHE.

The Center for Human Environments operates as a federal structure, bringing together a family of subgroups that address specific research areas, including children's environments, health and society, participatory action research, developmental psychology, housing, public space, criminal justice policies, and the human-architectural design interface. Here are highlights from the past year's work conducted by CHE research groups:

- Throughout its growth over the past 10 years, the College Access: Research & Action (CARA) group at CHE has emphasized research and evaluation along with program development, and this has yielded multi-year support from the New York Community Trust and the Booth Ferris Foundation for research, evaluation, and documentation of CARA's innovative youth-centered programming. Among findings to date: in NYC high schools that adopted CARA's whole school and peer leader programming, post-secondary enrollment climbed significantly over a three-year period; and the college persistence rate for those with CARA training similarly increased. Moreover, these positive outcomes were achieved at very moderate cost and were the result of a design that promotes durable, long-term improvements in college access and persistence for the predominantly low-income and first-generation-to-college population that CARA serves.

As mentioned above, the documentary film *Personal Statement*, which follows three Brooklyn youth leaders in the CARA program, has been shown very widely in the past year, at venues including Teachers College/Columbia University, the South by Southwest Education (SXSW.EDU) conference in Austin, Texas, as well as at film festivals in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Milwaukee. At the same time, CARA's innovative programming is also being showcased for a national audience in the final report for Prof. Michelle Fine's project "Moving the Dial on Inequality Challenges," a US DOE-sponsored project based at six publicly funded colleges and universities across the US. And, in another testimony to the growing recognition of its work, CARA was called upon recently to consult on design and implementation of college access programming for public schools in Connecticut.

- A steadily wider audience has also been the story in the past year for the Public Science Project and its participatory action research model. In addition to the projects with NYC DOHMH and other youth-oriented agencies that we mentioned above, PSP conducted an eighth year of its Critical Participatory Action Research workshops in May and June. These two week-long professional development sessions, led by PSP Director Dr. Maria Torre with assistance from Prof. Michelle Fine (GC) and Prof. Madeline Fox (Brooklyn College) attracted a total of 75 participants from community-based organizations, advocacy groups, government agencies, and college and university departments. We note as well that the audience for the CPAR workshops now extends internationally, with participants from New Zealand, the UK, Canada, and Brazil.

PSP also sponsors many public events at the Graduate Center, from book launches to conferences. In 2018-2019, the PSP events calendar included an international conference entitled “Pathologies of Capitalism,” which was co-produced with Canadian colleagues; a book launch for the anthology *New York After 9/11*, which was co-edited by Prof. Susan Opatow (GC and John Jay), a frequent collaborator and inspiration for the PSP research team; and a presentation by trans rights advocate Brynn Tannahill, *Everything You Wanted to Know About Trans And Were Afraid to Ask*.

A few other activities from PSP’s year, briefly listed. Prof. Brett Stoudt (GC and John Jay) has engaged with The Children’s Defense Fund and the nonprofit Youth Represent, which are supporting research on the issue of raising the age for the treatment of people as adults in the NYS criminal justice system. Prof. Michelle Fine and colleagues at three other academic institutions are exploring the situation of undocumented students in higher education, with participation from the American Association of Colleges and Universities’ “Bringing Theory to Practice” program. Prof. Fine is also exploring a participatory research study of a community school, The School in the Square, which opened three years ago in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood of upper Manhattan. Last, in 2019, Prof. Fine has been PI of a subaward from Columbia University (parent grant from the Gates Foundation) for a project entitled “Women Peacebuilders Fellowship,” which supports community-based women’s peace movements in East Africa.

- In May 2019, Children’s Environments Research Group (CERG) Director Roger Hart attended an expert meeting convened by UNICEF USA in Jacksonville, Florida to discuss implementation of the “Child Friendly Cities Initiative” in the United States. CERG researchers have long experience with designing and conducting this type of participatory community assessment and planning project, and in the past have completed “Child Friendly Communities” projects in Brazil and India, so there is the potential for CERG researchers to be involved in the upcoming UNICEF USA work as well.
- In 2018-19, the Housing Environments Research Group (HERG), led by Prof. Susan Saegert, focused on data analysis and preliminary findings for its National Science Foundation project, “Interrupting Place-based Inequality: Building Sustainable Communities through Shared Equity Homeownership.” The project offered initial results in the form of a session organized at the annual Urban Affairs Association conference in Los Angeles; presenters included Prof. Saegert, Co-PI Prof. Mary Clare Lennon (Sociology), and graduate student Research Assistants Jakob Schneider and Claire Cahen. A third HERG graduate student RA, Hilary Wilson, who is a Ph.D. student in Earth and Environmental Sciences, addressed a public hearing in June at the NYC City Planning Commission, sharing HERG research that indicates that collectively owned and managed limited equity co-ops and community land trusts can be an important source of permanently affordable housing for those historically excluded from and discriminated against in the housing market.

- In addition to the work conducted with funding from Sweden’s Royal College of Technology (KTH) mentioned above, the Public Space Research Group (PSRG) organized and hosted a series of lectures and events in 2018-2019, including a panel discussion of *The Routledge Handbook of Anthropology and the City*, co-edited by Prof. Setha Low. Another PSRG publication from the past year was the *Toolkit for the Ethnographic Study of Space*, a compact field guide created by Prof. Low, GC doctoral student Troy Simpson and long-time PSRG collaborator Prof. Suzanne Scheld (California State University – Northridge). This handbook is intended to provide a readily usable guide to analyzing the human-public space interface, and can thus furnish an accessible tool for planners, architects and policy makers. Also of note: Prof. Low offered insights from both her work with KTH and her other PSRG studies at UN Habitat meetings in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in Fall 2018, and in Nairobi, Kenya in Spring 2019.
- In the past year, Developmental Studies Research Group Director Prof. Colette Daiute conducted an evaluation of a European Union program to encourage locally developed “global education” projects. (“Global education,” in the EU agency definition, includes topics such as *Human Rights Education, Education for Peace and Conflict Prevention, and Intercultural Education.*) Two GC doctoral students assisted in this evaluation, which focused its analysis on 12 projects that were awarded EU funding, and 20 additional projects that were published as models for discussion. Prof. Daiute presented findings from the evaluation at an EU-sponsored conference in Belgium in Fall 2018, and she and the GC doctoral students were co-editors and provided a key analytical chapter for the book *Innovation, Values and Policies in Global Education*, published in 2018 by the Global Education Network Europe, an EU multi-country entity.
- Harriet Goodman’s newly organized Community Justice Collaborative (CJC) research group at CHE, as mentioned above, moved its contracted work with the NYC Department of Probation from Hunter College to the Graduate Center during the past year. Specifically, a multi-year MOU between CUNY/GC and DoP was signed in November, 2018, and provides for \$2.5 million in funding for projects at our Center through FY 2020. A major reason for the transfer of this project to the Graduate Center was the DoP’s desire to enhance the research components of its work, and specifically to make use of CHE’s recognized expertise in participatory and community-based projects. On the CJC research agenda for the coming year are such initiatives as focus group research to improve the quality of the community-based “Credible Messenger” program; the evaluation of arts-based rehabilitation programs; and an ethnography of the Animation Project, a community-centered creative storytelling project sponsored by DoP over the past several years.