

PROJECT AND PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The impact of the university's transition to distance modalities

Our Center's programs and research projects were largely successful in shifting to remote work following the closure of our Graduate Center offices on March 16, 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. Some programs, such as the College Access: Research & Action (CARA) program and the Department of Probation-sponsored Credible Messenger programs, rapidly developed and implemented distance alternatives to their usual in-person trainings and supports. In this shift, the programs were helped by the fact that they had previously used a wide array of social media and tech to deliver their trainings and development programs, and so the move to a fully remote delivery was not such a leap.

Participatory projects involving close contact among community members and researchers are central to several CHE research teams, and it remains to be seen in what way and according to what timeline these can be resumed. The Public Science Project was fortunate in being able to conclude its year-long community health project in the Bronx ("What Creates Health @ Southern Boulevard," sponsored by the NYS Fund for Public Health) just before the closure in March. However, PSP was forced by the shutdown to cancel its annual Critical Participatory Action Research Institute, which had been scheduled for the first week of June. Online webinars as a substitute for the in-person CPAR experience are now under consideration. Meanwhile, CHE's national forum on innovation in probation policy, set for June at the Graduate Center, was transformed into an online version and generally met with success despite some technical difficulties.

Accomplishments, Projects, Highlights

In 2019-2020, CHE managed a portfolio of approximately 25 grants and contracts at the Research Foundation of CUNY, many of them multi-year awards. In addition, CHE research groups maintained half a dozen funds at the CUNY Graduate Center and the Graduate Center Foundation. During the past year, CHE projects and funds supported 26 Graduate Center students with fellowships and/or research assistant salary. CHE Principal Investigators and Co-Investigators in the past year included 8 GC faculty members and 2 faculty from other CUNY divisions.

By the close of FY20, CHE researchers had also submitted more than a dozen new proposals, and many of these had been awarded funding by end of June 2020.

CHE's projects are supported by 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, Borealis Philanthropy,

New York Women's Foundation), and international charities (Ax:son Foundation [Sweden]). In FY20, our Center saw a continuation of 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). These contracts allow for research and training opportunities that put Graduate Center students in direct contact with some of the most challenging current issues in the fields of education, health, and criminal justice.

The accomplishments of the Center are best summarized under the headings of its distinct set of research groups:

The Public Science Project (PSP)

Co-Directors: Prof. Maria Torre, Prof. Michelle Fine

The Public Science Project engages in four kinds of projects, all of which have funding of some type:

1. Rapid response

PSP is working with lawyers/activists/policymakers on issues of urgent concern (getting folks out of prison under the provisions of the new Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act; documenting the experience of families separated by ICE; documenting racialized police brutality). We have received funding from the New York Women's Foundation and from Vital Projects to work with lawyers tracking domestic violence survivors' eligibility for reduced sentencing, in accordance with the new NYS law. Since January, we have also been working on immigration crises, in particular the crisis of family separations due to current US Immigration policy (funding provided by Borealis Philanthropy). We also have funding from the Children's Defense Fund and the nonprofit Youth Represent to document the impact of policies that raise the age for criminal court treatment of youthful defendants. And a new project sponsored by Trinity Wall Street involves a participatory project with NYC communities seeking to find alternatives to current policing through community safety and community welfare programs.

These PSP projects are ambitious pieces of public scholarship that have dramatically gained in relevance, even urgency, during the COVID pandemic and the nationwide Black Lives Matter demonstrations. PSP has also been encouraged in its recent work as it finds more and more partners in government agencies at the local and state level who recognize the worth and power of participatory practices, inquiry, and policy setting.

Following an energetic community response to our NYS Fund for Public Health project in the Bronx earlier in the year, PSP is now seeking funding to expand the "micro food hub" model developed with our Bronx community partners. With the COVID pandemic, the farmers we collaborated with have supercharged their efforts and are now growing food for neighborhood food relief; in our future work we would like to highlight this

evolution of the project, and explore other examples of community agency in managing and controlling food supplies.

2. Trans-National Consulting/Collaborations: "Disaster Capitalism" in Higher Education

PSP colleagues regularly reach out to collaborate, theorize transnationally, and document the issue of "disaster capitalism" in higher education, as well as rising levels of gendered, racialized and state violence in the midst of "crisis." We are continuing to work with collaborators on these issues in South Africa, Egypt, Germany, and the US. Many of our current consultations stem from PSP's annual Critical Participatory Action Research Institutes, which over the past eight years have brought together 40-80 participants per year from a variety of backgrounds including nonprofits, advocacy and social justice movements, academic research centers, and government agencies.

3. Excavating Buried Stories of Resistance, Mutual Aid, and Survival

PSP is applying for grants to create an archive of testimonies delivered by women in prison, in 1985, to state legislators on the impact of domestic violence on their lives/crimes. We also expect additional funding from School in the Square Foundation to continue our youth oral histories of "navigating immigrant adolescence in NYC," now altered significantly to document, through the eyes of young people, the racialized and class-based impact of the COVID pandemic. For this project, the youth participants are 9th graders transitioning to high school in the Inwood neighborhood of Manhattan.

4. Critical PAR/Community Based Research Trainings and "Zoom Trainings"

These training and technical assistance sessions on Participatory Action Research (PAR) are not always funded initiatives but are central to the mission of PSP. This past year they were carried out with colleagues in Vermont, Australia, and South Africa. In addition, PSP received a contract to provide PAR trainings and technical assistance to the Broward County (Florida) Children's Services Agency as it sought to improve its foster care policies and practices.

College Access: Research & Action (CARA) program

Co-Directors: Janice Bloom and Lori Chajet; Prof. Michelle Fine, GC Faculty Sponsor

CARA works with both NYC high schools and within CUNY on issues of college access and success for first-generation, low-income students of color. Accomplishments this year include:

The design of a Peer Leader evaluation and assessment system:

With a grant from the Altman Foundation, CARA has designed a first-of-its-kind Peer Leader evaluation and assessment system that can be used as a citywide and national model for programs utilizing young people as peer leaders for college access and success. We expect the tools that we have designed will be used by access, matriculation and persistence programs around New York City, and will serve as a model for national programs interested in peer leadership in these arenas in the years ahead. Indeed, this

fall, Northampton Community College in Pennsylvania will be using a Perkins grant to work with CARA to adopt a peer leader persistence model for its campus.

Three new College Success initiatives at CUNY:

- 1) The training of peer leaders through CUNY's "Career Success on Campus" program to support their fellow students in planning for and pursuing careers as part of their college experience.
- 2) The creation of a peer leader transfer program between two- and four- year campuses, funded by the Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation. The Peer leaders - themselves students who have transferred between campuses - will support the many students taking this path to a four-year college degree, and address the enormous guidance gap in this area.
- 3) With funding from The Gates Foundation, CARA is working with CUNY Central to develop a peer-to-peer college transition and persistence program that lays the groundwork for a systemwide model.

Media attention to issues of college access and success:

After more than a decade of experience, College Access: Research & Action (CARA)'s program is widely recognized as a leader in improving college access and retention for low-income and first-generation-to-college students. Its well-elaborated peer leadership model and the documented impact of its programming draw frequent media attention, as evidenced by this sample of CARA-focused features from the past year:

- NPR Marketplace, [Many high school seniors in the "class of COVID" are rethinking their college plans](#)
- The Hechinger Report, [Getting College Guidance Numbers Right: What if Young People Were a Solution, Not Just a Problem?](#)
- CUNY TV, [This edition: CARA-College Access: Research & Action](#)
- Fox 5, [Featured Story: Supporting every student](#)
- NY1/Noticias, [Guían a jóvenes en su proceso de ingreso universitario](#)
- WPIX, [College counseling program helps bridge the gap](#)
- The Hechinger Report, [College dreams often melt away in summer months. 'Near-peer' counseling is helping keep them alive.](#)

Housing Environments Research Group (HERG)

Director: Prof. Susan Saegert

HERG is now in the final year of its National Science Foundation project, "Interrupting Place-Based Inequality: Building Sustainable Communities through Shared-Equity Homeownership," and has had an active research and publication program around Community Land Trusts and other affordable housing programs. At the close of FY20, HERG received word that it had been selected to compete in the final round of a competition sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, focused on housing policies to combat inequality in the US.

Below are publications deriving from HERG research that appeared in the past year. Authors are HERG Director Susan Saegert, and HERG Research Assistants Claire Cahen, Jakob Schneider, and Erin Lilli.

Cahen, C., Schneider, J. & Saegert, S. 2019 Victories through Insurgency. *Antipode* published online 2019 ISSN 0066-4812. Pp. 1-20 anti-125558.

Saegert, S. (2019) Crisis makes heroes: Affordable housing in New York City during and after a “Decade of fire”. *Metropolitiques*. Published online July 2, 2019

<https://www.metropolitiques.eu/Crisis-Makes-Heroes-Affordable-Housing-in-New-York-City-During-and-After-a.html>

Cahen, C., Saegert, S. & Lilli, E. (2020) Ethical Action in the Age of Austerity: Cases of Care in Two Community Land Trusts. *Housing Studies*, in press.

Public Space Research Group (PSR)

Director: Prof. Setha Low

In 2019-2020, PSRG members engaged in a variety of activities supporting research generation and dissemination in the realm of public space, including multi-partner funded collaborative research, public programming, training, and publications.

Examples of these activities include:

- Presentations, moderated discussions, and training at the UN Habitat World Urban Forum 2020 in Abu Dhabi. Presentation topics included (a) Stakeholder roundtable on older persons, (b) Promoting a culture of healthy public spaces: Case studies and key drivers for action, (c) Public space in the New Urban Agenda, and (d) a training event for practitioners illustrating the use of PSRG’s *Toolkit for the Ethnographic Study of Space (TESS)*.
- Continuation of collaborative research efforts with the Centre for the Future of Places at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. Continuation of a multi-year grant project funded by the Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation for Public Benefit, focused primarily on the development of an interdisciplinary database of academic literature on public space.
- Public Space Network events. A key current activity of PSRG is facilitating research-informed conversations among public space practitioners. In FY20, PSRG coordinated a series of public programs, including speakers from practitioner organizations (e.g., Design Trust for Public Space, New Yorkers for Parks, and the Barcelona Lab for Urban and Environmental Justice and Sustainability).
- Open call for public space reflections in the context of COVID-19. Using the PSRG website and email distribution list to facilitate a call for participation, PSRG has collected and posted reflections on transformations to public space dynamics in the context of COVID-19 from affiliated members. Example topics include: (a) Public life during social distancing in Gowanus, Brooklyn, (b) Hanoi in the first days of nationwide social distancing, (c) Confined life and a silent city in Paris, among many others.

Community Justice Collaborative (CJC)

Director: Prof. Harriet Goodman

The CJC moved its contracted work with the NYC Department of Probation from Hunter College to the Graduate Center in early 2019; the fiscal year ending 6/30/2020 thus marked the first full year of CJC projects based at the Center for Human Environments. A major reason for the transfer of these projects to the Graduate Center and CHE in particular was the DoP's desire to enhance the research components of its work. Some of the main types of work undertaken are:

- Focus group research to improve the quality of the community-based "Credible Messenger" program
- The evaluation of arts-based rehabilitation programs
- The ethnography of the Animation Project, a community-centered creative storytelling project sponsored by DoP over the past several years

The onset of the COVID pandemic prevented CJC from hosting its planned national forum on innovations in probation programming, which had been scheduled for June at the Graduate Center. However, an online version of the forum presented many of the intended features and found a substantial audience. In spite of budget challenges for FY21, the larger part of CJC's programming is expected to continue, albeit with some modifications to accommodate the need for social distancing.

Narrating Change Research Group

(Formerly Development Studies Research Group)

Professor Colette Daiute, Convener

The *Narrating Change Research Group* focuses on theory and research with collectives using narrative and other genres for societal and individual human development. Our orientation is to integrate critical and creative uses of verbal and nonverbal communication – language and visual media – for positive social change. By positive change, we mean change defined by people's goals in local contexts, from local perspectives, yet also aware of broader social structural challenges and opportunities. Typically, our projects address issues of adversity and injustice.

Human development and *positive change* are concepts we consider as interacting human and environmental perspectives – that is focusing on personal and structural dynamics. These perspectives are symbolic and physical. Our priorities include highlighting human thriving over capitalist accumulation, supporting participation and authority by young people, ethnic, racial, document, and economic groups whose perspectives are marginalized in powerful mainstream spheres of life, who are subject to governmental policies/laws, and whose perspectives should be required for ethical advancement of such entities.

Our research occurs in ongoing practices with rigorous, knowledge-building narrative research designs and analyses. Collaborating collectives include educators, community organizations, policy makers, legal clinics, and grass roots employers who are organizing to be permeable to diverse voices and consciously dependent on those diverse voices.

In addition to working on collaborative research, Ph.D. students in the group present their individual research for peer feedback. A steady group of collaborative publications are being produced by the team.

Children's Environments Research Group (CERG)

Director: Prof. Roger Hart

The Children's Environments Research Group (CERG) called a hiatus on research fundraising in 2019 due to current writing demands on senior members of the group. CERG continues to meet bi-weekly via the internet with its network of current and past research team members, made up of both current and graduated CUNY Ph.D. students, and past Visiting Research Scholars from overseas, to discuss their own projects and to plan future collaborations. CERG members in the USA and overseas continue to collaborate on the design of urban research projects related to the environmental rights of children, including the participatory assessment of neighborhood conditions and the planning and design of spaces for children. For example, Pamela Wridt, an Environmental Psychology alumna and former Project Director at CERG, has been leading the technical support for UNICEF USA to implement the "Child Friendly Cities Initiative" in the United States. The Community Based Assessment system developed by CERG with UNICEF for use overseas is now being used by six pilot cities in the USA, and we anticipate continued work on this initiative.

Also: a recent graduate of Environmental Psychology, Sruthi Atmakur, has been elected as the Country Representative of IPA (International Play Association) and is planning to develop new projects there as the CERG coordinator of the Child Friendly Places Project in India.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Most CHE projects are multi-year endeavors and are often based on multi-year awards or renewable grants, so our work typically carries on over periods longer than one year. As mentioned above, by the close of FY20, our Center researchers had submitted more than a dozen new funding requests, several of which had already been approved by the end of June. Among this new or renewed funding are awards from the Pinkerton Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and Trinity Wall Street.

Again, the plans for the center for the coming year are best summarized under the heading of each research group:

Public Science Project

The Rapid Response category of research, described above, is currently leading to new funding initiatives by PSP:

- A grant evaluating Raise the Age that we have now turned into rapid response surveys to service providers and public defenders working with young people impacted by the criminal justice system during COVID
- A grant to research and define community safety in communities of color with a focus on safety beyond police and prisons
- In discussion with NYC Public Advocate Jumaane William's office to conduct a participatory youth survey on needs within the context of COVID
- Working with Levy Rater and Center for Constitutional Rights on the Remedial Order and Disparate Treatment Settlement Agreement regarding FDNY's discriminatory employment practices
- Seeking funding for a COVID CopWatching reporting and mapping across the city during the epidemic
- Using Twitter hashtags (#Copwatch, #FilmThePolice, #COVIDCopwatch) and a new application called Street Shield.

Also, PSP looks forward to continuing work with Broward County Florida Children's Services - strengthening community participation and oversight of their integrated data system for children's services, as well as their overall research, program development, and evaluation, and a possible partnership with MDRC on a federal grant to support the inclusion of lived experience in research, programs and policy of the US Department of Health and Human Services.

College Access: Research & Action (CARA)

Research on its whole-school model of transforming the college access infrastructure of public high schools.

For the past three years, with funding from the New York Community Trust and the Heckscher Foundation for Children, CARA has conducted research on its whole-school model of transforming the college access infrastructure of public high schools.

In summer 2020, CARA will be publishing a policy brief entitled "Organizing for Access: Building High School Capacity to Support Students' Postsecondary Pathways – A New York City Study." A paper based on this research, "Operationalizing Public High Schools as Institutional Agents for College Access in New York City," was accepted for a panel at the 2020 AERA conference in San Francisco (cancelled because of COVID).

Professional development workshops series

A workshop series for community-based organizations around NYC that work with first-generation-to-college, low-income students in a range of capacities, helping them to add college access work to their mission. Also funded by the Heckscher Foundation, CARA will be providing its College Inquiry curriculum to all of the CBOs, and then

working with them both in groups and individually to bolster counseling support and classroom experiences that enhance students' knowledge of the college search, application and matriculation processes.

Public Space Research Group

Naturally, the context of COVID-19 leaves many activities difficult to project, but the importance of the PSRG as a research entity has only intensified given the many emerging and extreme pressures applied to public spaces due to the pandemic. PSRG's anticipated activities for the coming year include:

- Development of new methodological tools for participatory research including Constituency Analysis Toolkit and Public Space Guidelines for Vulnerable Populations in Response to COVID-19
- Continuation and expansion of Public Space Network webinars and networking events for public space researchers
- Completion of the book *Why Public Space Matters* by Setha Low for publication by Oxford University Press.
- Drafting a place attachment article with Terry Huang, Javier Otero and Setha Low examining the sociological characteristics of place attachment to parks
- Drafting a CFP article with Troy Simpson, Erin Lilli and Setha Low identifying the most important contributions of Geography and Urban Design to public space and how these insights can be integrated
- Book development by Setha Low and Mark Maguire on Security as a Keyword
- Book development by Setha Low and Julian Agyeman on Belonging: From Settler Colonialism to a Sense of Place
- Restructuring our current website (thepsrg.org [thepsrg.org]) to improve content access and navigability to allow the site to perform as a research/information dissemination tool and networking hub

Housing Environments Research Group (HERG)

Continued analysis and publications from our NSF project are anticipated in the coming year. We are also planning more analysis of the influence of neighborhood using GIS databases and applying child-related variables.

Here are the topics of HERG studies now in the planning stages:

- Housing tenure alternatives for low-income households: Community Land Trusts and market-based housing
- Renting, owning and psychological distress
- Community Land Trust Owners' social capital advantage over market rate owners and renters

Narrating Change Research Group

Proposal submitted to the Spencer Foundation, for which we are also seeking other funding sources: Daiute, C. & Love, H. *Twice Sheltered: Experiences of On-line Education by High School Students and Staff in the Covid-19 Pandemic*.

For further information and regular updates on the Center for Human Environments' projects and programs, be sure to consult our website at

www.gc.cuny.edu/che