Urban Studies: Social Inequality and the Prospects of Equity and Sustainability in Southeastern Michigan

While specific research topics will vary, we believe that a regional emphasis on the conditions confronting populations in Southeast Michigan will provide the glue for this cross-disciplinary and cross-school cluster in urban studies. Bringing scholars and researchers together around the problems of 21st century urban areas in a region that is perhaps one of the most extreme expressions of the post-industrial condition offers a tremendous opportunity to address a global condition in a local compass and thus to dramatically expand the fields of urban studies. One can imagine a settlement-house approach to research that aims, collaboratively, to address problems endemic to the urban environment while contributing to bodies of knowledge in several fields. One can also imagine the generation of both knowledge of and proposals for the region that are generalizable to other urban locations, both nationally and internationally. What we envision is the creation of a “Detroit School” of urban studies which, like the Chicago School and the L.A. School in the past, will contribute new ways of thinking, especially about equity and sustainability, to the range of fields and interests that urban studies intersects.

To get at various aspects of these questions we are proposing a cluster of scholars from professional schools (Urban Planning and Social Work) and from graduate and undergraduate programs in LSA (CAAS, Sociology and the Residential College) in fields and disciplines relevant to classroom work, community-based learning and scholarship as well as cutting-edge research. Social Work will seek to hire a faculty member who has an interest in and experience with community based research, teaching, and practice with a focus on issues related to inequality, including unequal access to education, health care, transportation, and employment. Urban Planning’s search will focus on an interdisciplinary scholar with strong interest in the professional field’s concern about how planning and policy changes can lead to solving problems related to inequality in places. CAAS and the Residential College will team up to conduct a search for a senior scholar whose work speaks to questions of mass incarceration and how urban spaces are compromised by police and punishment practices. Sociology will search for a scholar with expertise in racial stratification and inequality, with a particular emphasis on urban health and/or employment issues, or the social conditions and circumstances that affect outcomes pertaining to one or both.

For all of these positions experience or interest in conducting research that learns from a particular city or region and contributes findings to the solution of urban and regional challenges is required. Equally important is to seek a team of scholars dedicated to undergraduate and graduate education, particularly in community-based contexts, in ways that build on and strengthen the UM’s existing commitments to the region and its peoples.