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## Transforming Justice: Action Research from the Ground Up

In Milwaukee County, more than half of African-American men in their 30s have served time in state prison. But in this, Milwaukee is not alone.

Such mass incarceration is a defining feature of the United States' political landscape and is the nation's central human rights and racial justice issue in the 21st century, according to an interdisciplinary team of UWM scholars who have mounted a research project called "Transforming Justice: Rethinking the Politics of Security, Mass Incarceration and Community Health."

"Imprisonment does not end at prison walls," they note on the project's website ([uwm.edu/transformingjustice/about](http://uwm.edu/transformingjustice/about)). "People return home to neighborhoods that continue to suffer from economic disinvestment, and are now struggling with the collective trauma of another form of community dislocation."

Transforming Justice is funded by one of two 2014-15 Transdisciplinary Challenge grants through the Center for 21st Century Studies.

A collaborative effort to create a grassroots history of criminalization and incarceration in Milwaukee, Transforming Justice brings together scholars, filmmakers, and community members working to re-frame conventional narratives about crime, health, safety, and justice and ultimately spur a shift in public policy.

This project is not only documenting and "giving voice" to these issues, but helping to develop strategies for re-defining security and health from the perspectives of individuals and communities directly affected by these forces.

"We want to look at that issue [health inequities] from a public health perspective...how mass incarceration is disrupting families and social ties within the neighborhoods," says Jenna Loyd, assistant professor of public health policy and administration in the Joseph J. Zilber School of Public Health. "We want to look at the geography and history. How is mass incarceration in Milwaukee tied to racism? What are the different impacts on men and women?"

Other members of the interdisciplinary team include Robert S. Smith, director of UWM's Cultures and Communities Program and associate professor of history, Lorraine Halinka Malcoe, associate



Overpass Light Brigade photos



FROM THE DIRECTOR:  
*Robert Smith*

## UWM Earns Carnegie Classification

In January 2015, UWM was officially selected as a “Community Engagement Classified Campus” by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. This prestigious recognition is thanks in part to work begun more than 15 years ago by the Cultures and Communities program and which continues today in community based learning, community-university partnership and engaged scholarship.

The Carnegie Foundation’s Classification for Community Engagement is “based on voluntary participation by institutions...and requires substantial effort invested by participating institutions. It is an evidence-based documentation of institutional practice...to determine whether the institution qualifies for recognition as a community engaged institution.” Put plainly, colleges and universities apply to be recognized for the Carnegie classification because of the prestige it carries. As a classified campus, UWM joins an impressive list of colleges and universities that serves as national leaders in community engagement.

### HOW DO WE DEFINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

In general, the definition is clear and easy. Community Engagement most often refers to collaborations between colleges/universities and local communities. However, recent trends and practices have broadened that definition to include engagement with local, regional, state, national and global communities. An important value in engagement at each of the community levels, and one that is central to the Carnegie classification, is that collaborations must inspire the “mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” When students, faculty and staff collaborate with non-profit organizations, neighborhood associations, K-12 schools, private corporations and community members, the collaborations should involve mutually determined goals and outcomes, shared planning and implementation, and an overall process whereby all parties involved and the various expertise they each bring are mutually valued.

One of our many vibrant collaborations that embraces this core value is [Project Picturing Milwaukee](#) conducted by Associate Professor of Architecture, Arijit H. Sen. This immersive learning experience explores the history and heritage of Milwaukee neighborhoods. Among the project’s objectives are “empowering local communities by hearing/responding to those voices that are often not heard in urban and official discourses,” and “collecting local histories of place and cultural relevance.” Visit [Project Picturing Milwaukee](#) and learn more about this ideal example of the type of community engagement expected of a Carnegie Classified Campus.

### WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

On this question, the Carnegie Foundation is clear: “The purpose of community engagement is ...to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic

responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.” These purposes of the Carnegie classification embrace the very definition of a liberal education that informs the [University of Wisconsin System Shared Learning Goals](#). These shared learning goals guide undergraduate education at each of our campuses across the state. UW campuses are charged with shaping in our students, *Critical and Creative Thinking Skills, Effective Communication Skills, Intercultural knowledge and Competence, and Individual, Social and Environmental Responsibility, which includes civic knowledge and engagement (both local and global), ethical reasoning, and action.* When we embarked on our Carnegie classification application, we did so as a campus that had embedded the values and practices inherent in the classification in our teaching, research and engagement efforts decades earlier.

### WHAT DO WE DO WITH OUR CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION?

First and foremost, we must recognize the scores of collaborations that make up the UWM Family. Our Carnegie classification demands we mutually share the recognition. More than ever, our collaborations have the capacity to define and address important issues affecting our region and state.

Second, we must herald our community engagement efforts and our Carnegie classification. UWM’s many rich collaborations underscore our collective impact across the region, state, nation and globe. In the coming months, these collaborations will be highlighted in fresh new ways.

Third, and not in the least, we must do more to maintain our status as a classified campus. In fact, the Carnegie Foundation is clear again: “Maintaining authentically collaborative, mutually beneficial partnerships takes ongoing commitment, and we urge institutions to continue their attention to this critical aspect of community engagement.” In order to maintain our Carnegie classification we must reapply in five years, and show concrete evidence that our community

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# Connecting UWM to the Community— One Project at a Time

By Nelida Cortes

UWM's Community-University Partnership (CUP) grant program is now in its fourteenth year and going strong!

The CUP grant program aims to provide funding for limited-term projects, events, and activities that build relationships and partnerships between members of the UWM community and the city it serves. With an eye towards project sustainability, the CUP program welcomes the opportunity to support projects, events and activities that provide UWM students with the chance to interact with community members, while at the same time positively impacting local neighborhood residents.

The 2014-2015 grant cycle saw an increase in qualified application submissions. After carefully reviewing each application, the final award recipients included:

- *Milwaukee Muslim Film Festival*
- *Washington Park Peacebuilding Project*
- *New Days: Assessing Milwaukee's LGBT Aging Communities*
- *A Bridge Over Troubled Water: Africology NOW Youth Initiative*
- *The Other Side of the Mirror: Fostering Creative Expression and Literacy in Communities Impacted by Incarceration*
- *Johnsons Park Neighborhood Association Community Art Project*

As our award recipients continue rolling out their impressive projects, we would like to share two that have reached completion.

The Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Field School in Washington Park, run by Dr. Arijit Sen of UWM and Ms. Bess Earl of Washington Park Partners. UWM students enrolled in the Field School this past summer interviewed residents of

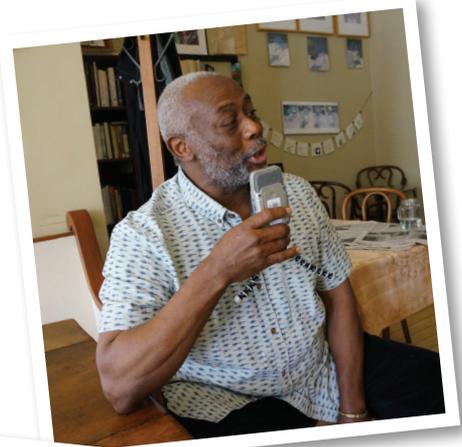
Washington Park in an effort to collect and interpret stories of resident homes as "repositories of community memory, spaces of caring, and markers of civic pride." The school was a huge success!

The Puente Project: Building Communities by Combining Personal Stories with English - Spanish Interpretations, brought together UWM's Dr. Leah Leone, ExFabula's Megan McGee, and CORE/El Centro's Ana Paula Soares Lynch. This highly successful CUP project paired UWM English-Spanish translation students with Spanish-speaking Milwaukee residents. The residents shared their stories in Spanish with the students, who then worked on translating the stories into English. The student/resident pair then performed the story before a live audience at ExFabula's Spectacular held in December. The show was a hit!

"I like this idea of sharing personal stories. I've always believed that stories can motivate, influence and even change lives," said Dulce Lagunas, one of the Spanish speaking storytellers.

The upcoming 2015-2016 CUP grant cycle promises to be equally exciting as we move through different corners of the city presenting the CUP grant opportunity to a diverse range of community members and UWM affiliates. We will no doubt enjoy our continued commitment to supporting sustainable projects that bridge UWM and the community at large!

**For more information, please visit [cup.uwm.edu](http://cup.uwm.edu), or email Nelida Cortes, CUP Program Assistant, at [cortes@uwm.edu](mailto:cortes@uwm.edu).**



*Above middle: UWM students in the Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Field School in Washington Park.  
Above top: Washington Park neighborhood resident sharing his story with students.*



*Working together in the Puente Project are community health promoter Joelisa Castillo who shares her story with Maria Valerio, a UWM interpreting student.  
Photo by Art Montes*

## Transforming Justice: Action Research from the Ground Up continued...

professor of epidemiology in the Zilber School; Anne Bonds, assistant professor of geography, Jenny Plevin, program director of doc|UWM in the Peck School of the Arts and Will Tchakirides and Yui Hashimoto, project assistants.

One of the things that this history helps us think about, says Loyd, is how the demands of the Civil Rights Movement for economic justice, including jobs creation and an adequate income for all, remain unmet and were undermined nationwide through an embrace of law-and-order politics.

The research team, including graduate students, has conducted a series of workshops with community members to facilitate conversations about how incarceration affects mental health, exacerbates problems of historic inequity and segregation and adds to a climate of violence and trauma. Individual community members will use digital video to document their own experiences, and help with making a collaboratively edited documentary.

"We've done a great job of bringing together community voices to talk about policing and criminal justice and a range of related issues," says Smith.

Adds Malcoe, "The idea of this type of community-based participatory action research," is not to assume academics have all the answers. Several hundred members of the community have attended the workshops and shared their own experiences.

"Creating health justice will mean shifting explanations for mass incarceration away from so-called 'problem neighborhoods' and onto local, state, and federal policies. It will also mean grappling with and transforming histories of racism and geographies of segregation. Our project aims to transform research and conversations on criminal justice to foreground social justice."

*Adapted from an article by Kathy Quirk, UWM News Services*

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## From the Director continued...

engagement efforts are better integrated, more pervasive and sustainable. In 2020, the depth, quality and sustainability of our collective efforts will experience rigorous review.

Stay tuned for more information on our Carnegie classification.

### **CARNEGIE:**

<http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/>

### **PICTURING MILWAUKEE:**

<http://thefieldschool.weebly.com>

### **UW SYSTEM SHARED LEARNING GOALS:**

<https://committees.uwsp.edu/gedpolrev/Shared Documents/Documents/UW System Shared Learning Goals.pdf>

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