Dear USP Community,

As I write this letter fall semester is well under way, and it has been great to see our students back on campus and to reconnect with colleagues who I hadn’t seen in person for many months. Carrie is back in the office most days and we are open for business! We’re not quite back to normal yet and probably won’t be for a while longer, from the looks of things. But it is a stark contrast from last year at this time, when UWM looked like a virtual ghost town during my weekly visits to campus.

Last year was a challenge for us, as it was for other programs at UWM and across the country. We began fall semester with a mixture of online and face-to-face course offerings, but as Covid cases began rising rapidly in September and October, we had to move all our courses online. This wasn’t always easy for either instructors or students, but we made the best of a difficult situation and our students seemed to appreciate that. Having gone through all that, I’m especially grateful to be able to sit in a class once again this fall with a group of students.

Despite the impact of Covid on our activities, there is also some good news to report. I’m especially pleased to welcome and introduce four new faculty affiliates who joined the program last year. Derek Handley has joined us from the English Department, Linnea Laestadius from the Zilber School of Public Health, Lynne Woebrle from the College of Nursing, and Hyejin Yoon from the Geography Department. These additions to our faculty add significant breadth and depth to our program, and open up new possibilities for mentoring and advising graduate students, especially in fields like urban public health where we have had limited capacity to advise students (see new faculty affiliates spotlight on p. 4.)

We’re also pleased to welcome a very strong cohort of new graduate students, both master’s and doctoral, who have joined us since last fall. You can find out more about them in the following pages of this newsletter.

Finally, to our alumni, we hope that you and your loved ones have managed to stay safe and healthy throughout this pandemic. We’re especially grateful to those of you who made contributions to USP this past year. Your donations are used exclusively to fund scholarships for graduate students, many of whom have limited financial resources. Thank you for your generosity and support!

Best wishes for a happy, healthy, and productive year.

Joel Rast
Director

All of us in Urban Studies would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our donors whose gifts go directly to support undergraduate and graduate student research.

**Economic Development Fellowship**
Pamela S. Fendt (MS’96) in honor of Donald and Martha Merry

**USP General Fund**
Aaron Wolfe-Bertling (MS’79)
Jeff Egan (MS’78)
Michael Richard Ford (PhD’13)
Robert E. Koeing (MS’81)

**Kenneth E. Robinson (MS’80)**
Linda Scheible (PhD’91)
Linda A. Sunde (MS’87)
Steven Yaffe (MS’78)
Nancy D. Yttre (MS’93)
As part of the work of USP’s Racial Justice and Equity Task Force, a new grant program for Urban Studies students was created to help students pursue community-based activities that further racial equity and racial justice, broadly defined, in Milwaukee. The program provides student grants of $500 for the 2021-22 academic year to support work on a project with a community partner or partners. Examples include but are not limited to internships, volunteer positions, community organizing, urban gardening, and mentoring or tutoring of elementary or high-school students. Projects must include a community partner, such as an organization or agency hosting internships or volunteer positions. More info at: https://bit.ly/3GugW1k
Internship Highlight: Two Student Internships outside Milwaukee Region

Urban Studies major Eli Norlander’s internship involved working for the City of Sheboygan’s Planning and Development Department, while urban studies major Sedgwick (Sed) Smith’s internship was in the City of Fitchburg’s Planning Office, just outside Madison, Wisconsin. Both students had a connection to those regions as it was close to where their permanent home is located. Working on an internship outside Milwaukee, especially during the summer months, can be a way to gain new perspectives on urban development in other communities.

Eli writes that the staff he worked with were “extremely welcoming and helpful, and included me in leading small projects, partnering on medium projects, and sitting in to learn about major projects.” Internships can provide students with a diverse set of experiences over a very short period of time that can prove invaluable for setting future career goals and developing professional skills and networks. In Eli’s case, these included everything from preparing reports on affordable housing plans, to researching and updating TIF policies, working on a Community Development Block Grant program, revamping an historical building tour, working on a pedestrian mall project, and presenting to city staff across several departments on a city home repair program he developed entirely on his own.

For Sed, his internship focus revolved mostly around community development efforts in Fitchburg’s growing neighborhoods as one of the fastest growing regions in the state. Responsibilities included developing an RFP for a teen center, developing a framework for community engagement, attending meetings of neighborhood groups and community events, working on the Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative (HNI) and Neighborhood Navigator program to better connect residents to resources. Having exposure to community development work can be very interesting as Sed observed, since you get to see how specific programs and organizations serve as the main interface between city government and its residents and other stakeholders, and the various dynamics, tensions, and inequities that exist in that nexus, and which need to be acknowledged and addressed.

For more information about USP internships and service learning opportunities, visit: https://uwm.edu/urban-studies/undergraduate/internships/

2020-21 Major Events Recap

Due to the continuing pandemic USP events were significantly curtailed by our inability to meet in person.

USP joined MSOE History Dept for a virtual talk with History Professor, Lizabeth Cohen about her new book, Saving America’s Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age, which just received the Bancroft Prize in American History.

Urban Studies Colloquium

As this year’s recipient of the Urban Studies Dissertation Research Grant award PhD candidate, Tathagato Chakraborty, presented his dissertation research at the Urban Studies Colloquium. His dissertation research explores a number of questions related to Low-income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) developments and his presentation focused on the applied methodology.
We welcome four new faculty affiliates who bring a diverse set of backgrounds and important research areas to USP.

**Dr. Derek Handley**

Dr. Handley is an associate professor in the Department of English. His research focuses on African American Rhetoric, civic engagement, and urban spaces. His current book project, “‘The Places We Knew So Well Are No More’: A Rhetorical History of Urban Renewal and the Black Freedom Movement,” examines the ways African-American residents in Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and St. Paul used counter-narratives and other rhetorical strategies to resist or modify urban renewal policies threatening their communities in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

**Dr. Linnea Laestadius**

Dr. Laestadius is an Associate Professor of Public Health Policy and Administration at the Zilber School of Public Health. Her research focuses on non-medical technologies and public health (with an emphasis on social media) and meeting community needs as they relate to policy research. She has also worked recently on a study examining the impact of COVID-19 on health and human services non-profits in the state.

**Dr. Lynne Woehrle**

Dr. Woehrle is an associate professor in the College of Nursing. She is currently the director of UWM Peacebuilding programs including the Master of Sustainable Peacebuilding and the undergraduate certificate in Peace and Conflict Studies. Her academic training is in the social sciences and peace studies. Her recent research focuses on studying social movements and change, mostly in urban areas. She is currently involved in research on resistance to suburban segregation from suburban residents.

**Dr. Hyejin Yoon**

Dr. Yoon is an associate professor in the Department of Geography. Her research interests center on how economic and non-economic factors affect regional economic development and flows of labor, products and technology. One recent research project involves reconsidering a concept of the third place, a public space, in the context of East Asian cities in the era of COVID-19. She would like to investigate narratives of the socio-economically marginalized group of people who hardly access information and all the related services that are based on the infrastructure of a smart city in South Korea, and how the state-led response and social distancing practices has excluded people from its urban spaces. Dr. Yoon is the profiled scholar in the Fall 2021 Issue of *e.polis*.

**Alumni News**

**Deborah Blanks** PhD ’18, developed a “Blackistory” app available on the Apple app store so people can easily learn about the Black history, culture, and politics.

**Brenda Hicks-Sorensen** (MS ’01) was named San Antonio’s new economic development director.

**Ashkan Rezvani Naraghi**, PhD ’16, who died tragically in a mountain climbing accident last December, and whose book, *A Social History of Modern Téhran: Space, Power, and the City*, which was nearly complete at the time of his death, will be published posthumously by Cambridge University Press. Prof. Jennifer Jordan, who was Ashkan’s PhD advisor, will be overseeing the production process.

**Melissa Songco** (nee Herguth), MS ’09, was named the new CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Waukesha County by their Board of Directors.
**Incoming Students**

**Jesse Campa (PhD Student)**
I’ve spent most of my life living in Rockford, Illinois and lived in Milwaukee during my graduate studies. As an AOP Fellow, I earned my MA in Sociology from UWM in 2019, and I also received my BA in Sociology from Beloit College in 2017. My Master’s thesis examined the empirical link between social media use and drug and alcohol use among high school students. I am interested in researching inequality within metropolitan areas ranging from disparities in education, incarceration rates, public health, and access to healthy dietary options for communities within food deserts. What intrigued me to join the Urban Studies program is the intersectional approach among various disciplines within the social sciences. As a first-generation college student from a disadvantaged background, scrutiny and eradication of the institutional barriers of inequality has been a key catalyst of my research and purpose for pursuing a PhD in Urban Studies at UWM. I am also excited to begin the next step of my academic journey as a project assistant for the Urban Affairs Association. I enjoy spending time with my daughter, reading, exercising, traveling, being outdoors, and listening to music.

**Elena Coleman (Master’s Student)**
After earning my BA in Sociology from UWM in 2017, I set a goal to focus on working to help promote equality in the world, in some capacity. In 2018, I applied to join the Peace Corps as a volunteer in Zambia and was accepted into the rural aquaculture program. We worked mainly to promote sustainability by providing education and resources to local farmers to construct, properly maintain and harvest fish farms. My experiences in Zambia opened my eyes to the importance of community development, which eventually led my interests into Urban Studies. I saw how crucial it is for communities to have the resources and opportunities needed for individuals to lead fulfilling and successful lives. I am eager to join the Urban Studies program at UWM this fall and can’t wait to become once again immersed in the campus community. Some of my hobbies include yoga and Pilates, as well as playing blues/rock flute. During the summer, I am almost always outside either bicycling, camping, or kayaking. Through my time working and going to school in Milwaukee, I have grown to love this city and all it has to offer. I am excited to continue to learn and grow, so that I can give back to the community which has served me so much.

**Muriel Marseille (PhD Student)**
A Chicago native, I received my bachelor’s degree from the University of Illinois-Champaign Urbana in French Literature and Political Science. Through those programs, I had the pleasure of studying and living abroad for several years in Paris, France and Leuven, Belgium. I later studied International Relations. After a number of years working for a non-profit that supported community building initiatives worldwide, I turned my professional focus to economic development which brought me to the discipline of geography and GIS. After completing a graduate thesis where I explored the legacies of redlining, disinvestment, crime, neighborhood dynamics, and presented case studies on urban agriculture initiatives in impoverished community areas, I packed my bags for UWM and eventual entry to the Urban Studies Program. My current research interests include: dual city narratives, the intersection of economic and cultural geographies, the urban built environment, and emotional geographies of place. My dissertation on theaters in Chicago explores those themes further. I supplement my academic studies with service to the Association of American Geographer’s Black Geographies Specialty Group as its Communications Director, to AAG’s Cultural Geography Specialty Group as its Student Representative, and to the Village of Gurnee as a seasonal GIS specialist. Outside of school stuff, I like to play. Some hobbies include: soccer (watching it not playing it), cultural & language activities, theater, any outdoor music concert.

**Alexis Nehmer (Master’s Student)**
I graduated with my BA in Journalism, Advertising and Media Studies and a minor in Global Studies. After taking an Urban Studies class in my final semester, I immediately researched the Master’s program for Urban Studies. After my first semester in the MS program, I found myself more immersed in the city of Milwaukee than I have ever felt in my last 4 years of living here. I wanted to become a part of a change within the environment for a cleaner city and safety for all kinds of city travel. Working with and listening to the community through my classes, projects I work on through my internship, and attending community group meeting such as the Pedestrian and Bicycle Task Force, inspires me. I currently have an internship with the City of Milwaukee in the DPW’s Multimodal Unit where I help manage the Scooter Pilot Study Program, collect traffic data for future infrastructure changes, create safer ways to bike through Milwaukee, and so much more to make the city safer for people on foot, bikes and in cars. During my free time I enjoy being a dog mom, sewing clothing, biking, and thrifting at local vintage stores. I look forward to beginning my role as a project assistant for the next year dedicating my time to environmental research.
Jack Rongstad, BA ’21 (Magna Cum Laude, Honors degree with distinction)

When I first encountered Urban Studies, I had been feeling a bit lost. At the time, it was my junior year, and I was on track to major in Sociology. However, as I became more familiar with the major, I began to feel disillusioned with its heavy emphasis on quantitative research and the many rules one had to follow if one wanted to continue studying in the field after graduation. After taking my first Urban Studies course, I knew it would be a better fit and quickly switched over. The field’s interdisciplinary nature and that it is grounded in material reality (teaches you skills you can use outside of academia, in community development, etc.) made it a much better fit for me. Over the past year, I completed a senior thesis that focused on the history of Mitchell Park and the Conservatory located on the site (the ‘Domes’). I first conceived of my thesis as a project that could provide a more complex and detailed history of Mitchell Park than currently exists. By excavating the past, the thesis identifies and analyzes the social and cultural forces informing park design and development in Milwaukee. The thesis broadly used the Domes as a microcosm for the history of urban development in America through three distinct eras: Golden Age Milwaukee (1880-1930), Postwar Milwaukee (1945-1972), and Neoliberal Milwaukee (1972-ongoing), and in turn, how each era influenced park design and development. I found that the history of Mitchell Park and its Conservatory helped explain the changing metropolis amidst the uneven geographic development of capitalism. I am currently applying to graduate programs in Urban Studies and other similar fields. Now, I’m spending much of my time organizing with various activist organizations, including the group I helped start on campus last year, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Anyone interested in activism should find us on Facebook and come to a meeting (we would love to have you!). I’ve always wanted to find a path where I could help marginalized communities in some way, and I am excited to see what the future holds.

Alumni Spotlight In Their Own Words

Ayodeji Obayomi (PhD Student)

It’s been two interesting and challenging years away from my home country, Nigeria. Learning a new culture and living in an entirely different climate, have shown me the reality of diversity and beauty of the revolving planet earth. I graduated last Spring with a Master’s degree in Urban Studies, and I am looking forward to furthering my education in the PhD program. My Master’s thesis examined the gender inequity inherent in the conventions of Milwaukee’s street naming from 1920-2021. The project gave me great insights into how inequality in history making and preservation is socially constructed from the contour of gender, as well as how the street names embody rich urban archival materials. I plan to continue in this new area of research interest to unravel the embedded social relations that produce(d) the gendered, racialized, and other systems of exclusion in contemporary urban historical spaces. [Ayodeji will be working as a TA in History, and he is also a Maier Award recipient.]

Nateya Taylor (Master’s Student)

A Milwaukee native, I graduated from Carthage College with a Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice in 2020. My undergraduate senior thesis, “Milwaukee Black Health: How Public Policy and Criminal Justice Collude to Disadvantage Black Milwaukeeans” explored the negative impacts residential segregation has on the overall health of Black residents in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This research was presented at the Wisconsin Sociological Association Conference in the ‘Perspectives of Justice’ session in October 2019. I hope to continue similar research at UW–Milwaukee as an Urban Studies graduate student. The following summer after graduating, I worked for the City of Racine as a Racial Equity Fellow in Climate Resilience Planning where I conducted a community needs assessment for the City of Racine to understand and find solutions to residents’ experience with environmental challenges related to water, climate change, housing, and transportation. Most recently, I served as an Elementary Literacy Tutor for the Wisconsin Reading Corps and interned with the Wisconsin AHEC (Area Health Education Centers) as a Research Assistant and Project Specialist for a local, Black owned health and wellness business, HoneyBee Sage Wellness & Apothecary. Outside of academics, I enjoy making YouTube videos and creating content that centers around art and activism for my business Naesthetycs LLC. [Nateya is a Project Assistant and also a Maier Award recipient.]

Incoming Students (continued)
Bernard Apeku, MS ‘21

My masters’ thesis was premised on the belief that a renewed understanding of urban informality that is different from the everyday notion of informality, will help us as urban scholars and urban policy makers to rethink the approaches of intervening with urban informality and urban poverty. Scholars have shown that policy interventions to reduce or remove urban informal settlements and or urban informal economic activities have not only woefully failed, but have further reproduced the same urban phenomenon of informality. I argued in this study that this problem is partly because of a lack of consensus between urban policy makers and the urban poor, on what constitutes urban informality and where we should go from urban informality. Using Nima Accra Ghana as a case study, my research showed that the residents of the community have a varied perception of their community from the outsiders and policy makers. Their notion of urban redevelopment were also in contrast with what the urban policy makers had planned. I concluded that there is a need for a renewed and common understanding of urban informality through the perspectives of the key stakeholders, who are in fact the residents of the communities deemed as informal. As an international student in the program, there was a bit of cultural shock at the beginning. Having to learn and conduct research in a new and totally different environment was not easy for me. However, the experienced faculty and staff were very helpful and understanding and they made all these things easier. Time was a great asset too and to any international student, it always gets better by the day. Looking forward to starting my doctoral program in UWM’s BLC (Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures) program in SARUP (School of Architecture and Urban Planning) this coming fall, and I am so thankful to the urban studies department. Someday, I hope to be a professor and I would be extremely honored to be part of the urban studies faculty!

Renee Scampini, PhD ‘21

As part of my dissertation research, I examined the dominant ways of understanding hunger that informed the Food Stamp Program (FSP), now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) between 2000-2018. I grounded my examination of neoliberal legislative discourses about hunger within shifting dynamics of race, class, and gender in the United States, and my discourse analysis interrogated the logics and rhetoric shaping post-welfare reform shifts in debate on FSP and SNAP policy. My research demonstrated how after welfare reform, legislative debates on federal hunger relief became increasingly focused on disciplining what I term, drawing from Katz’s (1989) critical work on poverty, the “undeserving hungry.” Examining legislative debates about hunger is critically important as widely circulated understandings of hunger shape federal anti-hunger policies in ways that determine access to the life sustaining resource of food for some of the country’s most vulnerable populations.

The Urban Studies Program was a rare interdisciplinary home where I could combine my background in the health sciences with new insight from the social sciences. USP classmates, instructors, and colleagues, offered challenging and insightful seminars and writing spaces for re-learning and un-learning my previous decades of academic training. My advisor and dissertation committee members were deeply thoughtful, critical, brilliant, and kind scholars who brought unique yet overlapping expertise and advice through health equity, feminist and intersectional perspectives, urban scholarship, and food studies. Each challenged me to further contextualize my analysis to better explain and ground my ideas, and my dissertation was much better for it!

This fall I started my position as lecturer and MPH advisor at UWM’s Joseph J. Zilber School of Public Health in the Public Health Policy & Administration track. As an urban studies scholar with a background in nutritional science, I am uniquely positioned to analyze the interwoven discourses of food, health, and politics. I am thrilled to incorporate my experience from my dissertation analyzing policy so my students can learn to review and analyze the drivers of policy development as well as the vast policy impact on health equity.

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