

# Center for Urban Research and Learning

Information on CURL University/Community Partnerships

LOYOLA  
UNIVERSITY  
CHICAGO



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## Participatory Evaluation: Joining Together to Learn What Works -- And Why

*What are the measures to assess the impact of a program to increase children's non-violent behavior?*

*What are the determinants to enhance career advancement for hard-to-employment adults?*

*What are the lessons learned at the grassroots level that can inform governmental policy?*

Increasingly, these are the kinds of questions raised by Chicago's community-based organizations (CBOs) in initial conversations with CURL. Such questions are prompted because CBOs are seeking the most effective and efficient ways to impact the lives of the people they serve. In addition, with better documentation of what works – and why – they can respond to the call from government and foundations to maximize shrinking financial support for community development and social services. The systematic compilation of "lessons learned" helps everyone.

The Center has responded to these kinds of inquiries by utilizing CURL's team-based research model developed over the past two years. In this model, community residents (including CBO staff), faculty, graduate and undergraduate students are active participants in all phases of the research. In the process, teaching and learning take place between and among all experience levels, e.g., community leaders teaching faculty, advanced graduate students teaching CBO staff, etc.

CURL has garnered considerable resources within Loyola to provide leadership for the participatory evaluation research model. Among the faculty involved is Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar (Psychology) who has extensive expertise in the field. Other faculty are Art Lurigio (Criminal Justice), Richard Block (Sociology), Joy Rogers (Education), and

Christine George (Sociology.) In addition, CURL Community Fellow, Mike Rohrbeck, community activist and former executive director of PRIDE, brings years of community capacity building and organizing experience to the team.

Currently, CURL and our partners have three participatory evaluations underway: 1) the STRIVE/Chicago Employment Service's Career Path Project; 2) an arts-based anti-violence education program of the Peace Museum; and 3) an HIV/AIDS risk-taking behavior reduction program among furloughed women from Cook County jail. In addition, Access Living, a citywide organization concerned with support for the disabled, has been undergoing a strategic planning process (described in the article on p. 3) which includes issues relevant to the evaluation needs of the organization.

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### *In this Issue . . .*

*Announcing PC<sup>4</sup> computer lab ready for use by community-based organizations --- See p. 6*



## Director's Corner . . .

We are pleased to report that as CURL research and action projects develop, we have been able to respond to the needs of our community partners by bringing in additional research resources, providing training workshops tailored to project needs, and developing new courses aimed at integrating exciting community-based research into the university's curriculum. We are demonstrating that Loyola is a dynamic institution and not set in its ways, offering only traditional courses, defined only by individual academic departments. We have "unwrapped" research and learning and taken it "out of the box" where knowledge can be shared with the broader community.

Our participatory evaluation research initiative is one way in which CURL has moved outside traditional boundaries of research and teaching. As described in the adjoining article, our research projects and training workshops are developed in response to needs that community-based organizations (CBOs) identify. The perspectives of the collaborative research team members help shape the directions of the research, and training workshops are organized in response to specific research needs. Just as universities traditionally train students to become "experts" and move into the workforce, CURL is helping CBOs build capacity to face the many challenges at the community level.

On the undergraduate teaching front, the College of Arts and Sciences and CURL have developed a course on Hunger, an outgrowth of a project with Faith and Community Partners in Action (FCPA), a group of religious congregations and food providers in Rogers Park. The idea for a new course came from conversations with University Ministry and students involved in the current project. They sought a course that would address the local, national, and international dimensions of hunger more carefully, with an eye toward practical solutions. A soon-to-be-released report, an outcome of the current FCPA/CURL project on hunger in Rogers Park, underscores the real and pressing issues of hunger around the Lake Shore Campus.

The course to be offered in the fall will be taught by Kale Williams (former Considine Chair and now CURL Senior Scholar), and Jacqueline Beale-del Vecchio, both of whom were involved in the FCPA/CURL project. Guest lecturers will include faculty from university departments as well as community activists. In addition, Mary Elsbernd (Institute of Pastoral Studies) will teach a course on social analysis that will use the FCPA/CURL project as a case study.

Phil Nyden

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Some of the features of the CURL participatory evaluation model are:

**Workshops** – CURL hosted two one-day workshops where 19 community and graduate student team members were exposed to the principles of participatory evaluation. **Dr. Suarez-Balcazar** and **Mike Rohrbeck** led the participants through a discussion of framework, definition, benefit, and process. CURL sees the workshop as a critical tool to expand the knowledge base for all team members, especially for CBO staff who will utilize this training for the on-going evaluation needs within their organizations. Workshops will be planned each semester.

**Seminars** – Regular meetings for all team members are held to update each evaluation project. It is a time for sharing and problem solving. Seminars are useful as a way to reinforce the practical application of participatory evaluation.

**CBO Staff meetings** – As a way to increase awareness of the importance of evaluation for the CBO, the STRIVE team presented the workplan to all STRIVE staff, all of whom will contribute to the success of the research process. □



### **Our Loss is Harvard's Gain**

We bid a fond farewell to Advisory Board member, **Guy Stuart**, who leaves as director of Partners in Community Development's FaithCorp Fund to join the faculty at the Kennedy School at Harvard. Bring on collaboration projects with our favorite Englishman in Cambridge!

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## Access Living

Established in 1979, Access Living is a service and advocacy organization that fosters the dignity, pride, and self esteem of people with disabilities. The citywide agency works to enhance the options available to those with disabilities so they may choose and maintain individualized and satisfying lifestyles. Much of their work has led to the development of public policies favorable to the disabled community. For example, they have promoted more inclusive policies concerning educational services to students with disabilities.

In the fall of 1997, **Marca Bristo**, Executive Director, and **Rene Luna**, Program Director, began discussions with CURL staff about the needs and interests of their organization in the area of research. It was strongly felt that their organization's effectiveness, particularly in the public policy arena, could be significantly enhanced through the development of a clearly defined research strategy that would identify and prioritize research topics as well as develop a specific approach for achieving success.

Excited by the unique and challenging nature of this request, CURL began a six-month project to provide the strategic planning assistance. A team consisting of **Louis Delgado**, CURL Policy and Program Analyst; **Joy Rogers**, Professor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Educational Psychology; and **Janine Weiss-Northcutt**, a CURL Graduate Fellow (Psychology), began working with Access Living staff to accomplish the overall objective.

A four-step process has been established to complete the task and includes the following: Interviewing a representative group of staff and board members regarding organizational capacity and interest in research; identifying potential research topics; examining organizational models to do research implemented by other advocacy organizations; and determining a course of action based upon information gathered. It is anticipated that the final plan will lead to the development of very specific research projects that Access Living will conduct in collaboration with CURL and others.

According to Rene Luna, "It has become very apparent that Access Living needs to work with researchers in various fields such as economics, urban planning, political science, and sociology. I believe it is vital we cooperate with one another in order to increase our knowledge and information about the political and policy issues that affect us all. Through collaboration we could better advocate for change."

This effort of Access Living is supported in part by the Woods Charitable Fund of Chicago. □



**Rene Luna, Access Living Program Director, and Graduate Fellow, Janine Weiss-Northcutt, were part of the participatory evaluation workshop at CURL.**

## Saying Goodbye is Hard

It's difficult to say goodbye to the incredibly gifted Graduate and Undergraduate Research Fellows we have gotten to know so well. There are, however, several bright spots to consider, namely all of the individuals will be out in the community doing wonderful things, and we get to know another good crop of students next year. So, here's to those we lose. Godspeed to **Jackie Beale-del Vecchio, Lawrence PeBenito, Denise Rose, Beth Ascher, Gerry Gorman, Laura Herrin, Michelle Fugate, Ellie Pridgen, Laura Oswald, and Betsy Mahler. Thanks one and all!**



## Urban Semester Students Present Findings

Undergraduates in the spring Urban Semester reported on their research at the CURL mini-conference on May 6. Their exposure to a wide variety of urban issues during the semester was evident as the students spoke of their experiences working on community-based projects. As members of research teams (each devoting 7.5 hours per week to a project), they worked closely with community-based organization staff and residents on such issues as hunger, welfare reform, home child care, school-based health centers, and HIV/AIDS education. CURL Graduate Fellows serve as immediate supervisors to the undergraduates with either Loyola faculty or CURL staff



The Faith and Community Partners in Action research team reports on food "insecurity" in Rogers Park. Seen left to right are Urban Semester students, Nyla Diab and Karla Fuentes; Jacqueline Beale-del Vecchio, Graduate Fellow; and Kale Williams, CURL Senior Scholar.

providing research direction for each project.

The Urban Semester is composed of a 6-hour seminar taught this past semester by **Dr. Maureen Hellwig**, Policy Research Action Group Coordinator, and **David Van Zytveld**, CURL Research Co-ordinator. A 3-hour elective in courses such as Chicago history, urban economics, or community psychology rounds out the 9-hour offering. The Urban Semester is open to sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Greg Hamill, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, oversees registration.

## Reception for CURL Community Fellows

A reception to publicly introduce CURL's first Community Fellows was held February 24. Each of the four, seen below with **Fr. John Piderit**, President of Loyola University, has been awarded \$10,000 to work at CURL on specific community or policy-based projects in 1998. Just as CURL and the university are able to support research by faculty and graduate students, the fellowships are one way to "level the playing field" by directing



resources to community leaders as they undertake community-based research. The fellows work on issues such as youth literacy, community capacity building, art of "deal making", and a market study to make a community resource more available to local constituents. The fellowships are made possible by grants from the McCormick Tribune Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

From left to right, Doug Dobmeyer, Mike Rohrbeck, Marrice Coverson, Fr. Piderit, and Gwen Griffin.



## Friday Morning Seminars At CURL

*"Friday sessions at CURL are an example of university students and faculty working with community practitioners to make sense out of complex social issues or collaborative research. The process lifts the fog that permeates our thinking about social issues in this country. I find them terribly stimulating."* Doug Dobbmeyer, CURL Community Fellow

Doug Dobbmeyer isn't alone in his assessment of what happens at CURL most Friday mornings during the academic year. What began as staff meetings with graduate students to discuss particular issues around collaborative projects has evolved into invigorating seminars. The informal gatherings attract some 15 -20 graduate students, CURL Faculty Fellows, Community Fellows, and staff where discussion ranges from research methodology, to gentrification or ownership of research. Over time we have visited sites of a research team's project. One such fieldtrip was to the Garfield Park Conservatory where we enjoyed a tour of this marvelous West Side facility and an update on the market study to make the conservatory more relevant to local residents. Community Fellow **Gwen Griffin** and **Laura Oswald**, a Graduate Business Scholars Assistant, shared the status of their project. We couldn't leave the West Side without lunch at Edna's Soul Food Restaurant.

Friday seminars are open to anyone. They run from 10:30 a.m. to noon most Fridays, as the academic calendar allows. A schedule will be prepared for the fall, so please call (312-915-7760) to ask for one.



A Friday seminar at the historic Garfield Park Conservatory. Matthew Frazel, Executive Director of the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance, talks about the history and the valuable plant specimens within the conservatory.

## Thanks Dean McCourt!

Dr. Kathleen McCourt steps down as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in June. She has held the post for almost ten years, and after a well deserved semester away, she will return to the Department of Sociology. We gratefully acknowledge her steadfast support of CURL as one way in which the university fulfills its mission as a Jesuit institution. CURL, along with the entire university, extends our appreciation to her for a job well done. We look forward to her return to active community/university collaborative research.



# PC<sup>4</sup> Is Ready for Community Use

## Announcement, Announcement, Announcement!

Twelve Pentium computers, with priority for community use, are in place. The lab, called PC<sup>4</sup> which stands for *Passport to Chicago Community Computer Center*, has been developed by Science Linkages in the Community (SLIC), our sister organization housed with CURL. It will be staffed over the summer by graduate students and SLIC staff and is available to community-based organizations for a range of services, such as:

- ⇒ Training in such programs as Access, Pagemaker, SPSS, GIS
- ⇒ Web page development
- ⇒ Navigating the Internet

**Who can use PC<sup>4</sup>?** Any community-based organization that makes reservations.

**Is there any cost?** There is no cost for use of the lab, assuming availability. We are also willing to work with community-based organizations to identify available software for training and research activities.

**How are reservations made?** Just phone Lin Von Dreele (312-915-7762) or David Van Zytveld (312-915-8629) to discuss what your needs are. We want to be sure we can adequately accommodate you so reservations are necessary.

## CURL Briefs . . .

✻ **"Black, White, and Shades of Brown: Fair Housing and Economic Opportunity in the Chicago Region,"** published in cooperation with the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, made front page news in the *Chicago Tribune* February 22, 1998. The authors of the study are **Mike Leachman** and **Phil Nyden** (Loyola) and **Bill Peterman** (Chicago State University). Two Urban Semester students, **Erica Chung** and **Angela Baker**, assisted in the research.

✻ We welcome four additions to the CURL Advisory Board: **Rene Luna**, Access Living; **Ken Blair**, Loyola University Medical Center; **Sally Schreiner**, Reba Place Church; **Jeff Bartow**, Interfaith Leadership Project of Cicero, Berwyn and Stickney.

✻ Associate Director **Lin Von Dreele** has joined the Board of Director of DevCorp North, the community development corporation and chamber of commerce of Rogers Park.



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