

The East St. Louis Action Research Project



College of Fine and Applied Arts
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Since 1987



*Enriching
young minds
through
community engagement*

Mission Statement

ESLARP establishes and nurtures mutually enhancing partnerships between community-based organizations in distressed urban areas, and students, staff, and faculty at the University of Illinois and on other campuses. Through these innovative partnerships, ESLARP promotes the revitalization of distressed areas as well as advances the University's research, teaching, service and civic commitment missions.

Why?

Distressed urban areas continue to confront serious environmental, social, and economic challenges. Local government agencies in these areas are unable to deal with the particular challenges they face, and this task is increasingly being left to community-based organizations. As local residents, organization members often know how best to deal with these challenges but need technical and logistical assistance in planning and implementing their efforts. At the same time, students need richer learning opportunities than currently available to them. They must better understand the real-world relevance of the concepts and skills they are taught; they must gain a greater and deeper awareness of the diverse realities that people experience in the world.

How?

ESLARP organizes technical and capacity-building assistance for community-based organizations by harnessing and leveraging the efforts of students, staff, and faculty. In the spirit of true partnership, community residents identify and prioritize tasks to be worked on, as well as the ends towards which campus efforts must be directed. Individuals from the campus learn from community residents, who have intimate and extensive knowledge of their community; in exchange for access to this knowledge, they work on projects that enhance and build community. ESLARP maintains and sustains this relationship regardless of the individuals, on campus and in the community, who might be involved at any given point.

ESLARP History

The University of Illinois first engaged with the people of East St. Louis in 1987 at the request of state Representative Wyvetter H. Younge. Through the School of Architecture's East St. Louis Revitalization Project, faculty and students proposed large-scale initiatives such as riverfront development and industrial and railroad redevelopment. In 1990, a neighborhood planning course pioneered a new, collaborative approach that now characterizes ESLARP. It brought together faculty and students from different campus units, together with East St. Louis residents, in a process of mutual learning and assistance. This new relationship was cemented in 1996, by the establishment in East St. Louis of a Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) with a staff of community development professionals, many of whom had been ESLARP alumni. NTAC staff provided community organizations with training and technical assistance. In 2003 ESLARP began to shift its technical assistance from NTAC to campus faculty, staff and students. Today, ESLARP is a mature model for sustained University engagement. Many faculty, staff, and students have benefited from the learning and practice opportunities it provides. Our alumni, those who have been touched by the ESLARP experience, have gone on to hold leadership positions in community organizations, consulting firms, private foundations, and local government. They are making a difference in the communities they serve. For all this we are grateful to the residents of East St. Louis.

Core Activities

ESLARP-focused Classes

Campus faculty involve their students in service learning and research activities in East St. Louis. Reflections from these students has been overwhelmingly positive. As one recent UP 260 student stated “this class has changed the course of my career.”

Recent Classes

ARCH 475 (Robert Selby, FAIA) Arch Design & Development	SW 402 (Jeff Scott) Practice with Communities
LA 438 (Laura Lawson) Design Workshop	UP 260 (Stacy Harwood) Social Inequality and Planning
LIS 451 (Martin Wolske) Intro to Networked Info Systems	UP 474 (Stacy Harwood) Neighborhood Planning
RST 457 (Bruce Wicks) Tourism Development	UP 478 (Stacy Harwood) Community Development Workshop

Outreach Weekends

ESLARP outreach weekends continue to be a vital part of the program. During the spring and fall '06 semesters ESLARP offered 8 outreach weekends with a total of 453 participants from the above involved courses plus other student volunteers. Volunteers assisted 21 community partners with everything from painting, drywalling and clearing debris from derelict lots to setting up Community Technology Centers in East St. Louis. The ESLARP Project Coordinator, with the help of a grad assistant, coordinates these activities.

Graduate Assistants

Funding from the Office of the Provost enables ESLARP to appoint Graduate Assistants who work closely with their faculty advisor on projects in East St. Louis. Grad students take an active role with community partners, most meet with their partner weekly and attend monthly neighborhood meetings. They each meet with the ESLARP Assistant Director weekly. One role of a grad assistant is to bring resident problems to campus and research ways to best assist with the problem. ESLARP appoints up to 13 grad assistants campus-wide each semester. Non-recurring funding for these assistants is committed through FY09. Our grad students are from many campus-wide units including Architecture, Education, History, Landscape Architecture, Library and Information Science, Recreation, Sport and Tourism and Urban Planning. Three students from the School of Music are also involved in East St. Louis activities.

Special Projects

Special projects within ESLARP are closely related to faculty research interests and include projects such as the oral history of long-time residents of East St. Louis, Riverweb (an online learning resource that centers on the political and cultural history of East St. Louis), cultural tourism development, a comprehensive study of predatory lending practices, and a study on student attitudes about social justice and professional direction as related to ESLARP. This valuable research is often published and presented at national and local conferences such as the annual HUD COPC conference.

Strategic Goals

1. One of the most critical activities facing ESLARP in FY08 will be to fund more ESLARP activities through external grants. Although federal HUD funds that supported ESLARP activities in the past have largely disappeared, other albeit smaller, funding sources are being sought and applied for. Such resources will be used to help fund critical staff positions and the general mission of the unit. In January ESLARP will submit a proposal (Community Based Research in East St. Louis: Expanding Technical Assistance Partnerships to Include Research and Education) to the Bonner Foundation and Princeton University.
2. ESLARP seeks to support additional faculty initiatives on a campus-wide basis. The types of assistance our community partners request has grown from basic concerns about infrastructure to include those concerning quality of life such as health, recreation and economic development. To address these local needs new faculty partnerships across campus are emerging. Creating such interdisciplinary connectivities by funding graduate students and supporting class work will foster new synergies and possibly open doors for additional external funding. Such a broadening of scope will allow ESLARP to help address emerging needs in ESL and also actively engage new students as well as faculty to the profound benefits of experiential learning, action research and civic commitment.
3. For the first time ESLARP will offer a new and innovative interdisciplinary undergraduate Research Methods class focused on Action Research in East St. Louis. The concept behind this new course offering is to have undergraduate students work with ESLARP faculty and community partners on projects that address local needs through the theory and methods of their discipline. This course is designed to offer undergraduate students the opportunity to develop research skills and an appreciation for research activities as applied to real life needs in distressed urban communities. Unlike a traditional methods class, this course requires students to fully engage in the entire research process. Students are expected to complete a project of sufficient quality to be submitted for publication or presentation.
4. ESLARP is partnering with the School of Architecture and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science to launch an exploratory Global Action Research effort with new International clientele (Sao Tome e Principe, a small country off the west coast of Africa) to provide community development, technology transfer, online education, physical improvement and tourism development. A small group (5 UIUC staff and students) will travel to Sao Tome in February to conduct a fact-finding mission. Plans include a larger follow-up trip scheduled in June of 2007.



January 15, 2007



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The People of ESLARP

Campus Advisory Committee

The Campus Advisory Committee (CAC) is comprised of faculty, staff and students from interdisciplinary units across campus. Members of the CAC meet frequently during the semester and are actively involved in ESLARP activities.

Involved Faculty

Faculty involved in ESLARP are working with East St. Louis government officials, neighborhood leaders and residents in many areas of their expertise: Neighborhood planning and design; social issues; affordable housing; landscape design and use; tourism development; community technology centers; history of the Metro East area; legal issues; and music, theatre and education in the schools. Many are working on special projects with community partners and grad students.

Bruce Wicks (CAC)

Director, ESLARP and Associate Professor, Recreation Sport and Tourism
Katherine Dunham Center for Arts and Humanities - Board Member

Mike Andrejasich (CAC)

Interim Assoc. Dean, Undergrad Affairs, FAA and Assoc Professor, Architecture

Paul Adams(CAC)

Director, Prairienet (GSLIS)

Vernon Burton (CAC)

Professor, History & Sociology, Professor and Senior Research Scientist, NCSA

Lynne Dearborn

Assistant Professor, Architecture

Cynthia Geerdes (CAC)

Director, Transactions & Community Economic Development Clinic, and Associate
Clinical Professor, College of Law

I. Shevon Harvey

Assistant Professor, Kinesiology and Community Health

Stacy Harwood (CAC)

Assistant Professor, Urban and Regional Planning

Gary Kesler (CAC)

Associate Head and Associate Professor Landscape Architecture

Laura Lawson (CAC)

Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture

Charles McNeill

Associate Professor, School of Music

Robert Selby, FAIA (CAC)

Associate Director for Graduate Studies and Associate Professor, Architecture

Sharon Tettegah

Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology

ESLARP Staff

Currently three University staff are working closely with residents, faculty and students. One of our staff, Billie Turner, lives and works in East St. Louis. She is the University's first point of contact for most of our partners.

Vicki Eddings (CAC ex officio), Project Administrative Coordinator, Campus
(Budget, Outreach weekends, partner coordination, office management)

Janni Sorensen (CAC ex officio), Ph.D. Candidate & Assistant Director, Campus
(Graduate Assistants, fund development, ESLARP-based Action Research course, conferences)

Billie Turner, Community Liaison, East St. Louis
(Resident/University relationship building)

The People of ESLARP (continued)

Major Community Partners

41 st st. Neighborhood Group	Project H.e.a.v.e.n
Alta Sita Neighbors Inc. (ASNI)	Rush City Improvement Association
American Bottom Conservancy	Sanders Development Center
Catholic Urban Programs	South End New Development Organization
Community Concepts	Washington Park
Concerned Citizens of Precinct 12	City of Brooklyn
Digital ESL Collaborative	City of East St. Louis City Manager
Eagle's Nest of St. Clair County	City of East St. Louis Mayor
Emerson Park Development Corporation	East St. Louis Park District
Jackie Joyner Kersee Center	East St. Louis School District 189
Katherine Dunham Centers	Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE)
Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance	State Representative Wyvetter Younge
Neighborhood Law Office	University Extension Office (UIUC)
Olivette Park Neighborhood Org	University Outreach and Public Service (UIUC)
Opal's House	

Annual Budget

ESLARP functions on an annual recurring increment from the College of Fine and Applied Arts. Since 2003 the Office of the Provost has provided non-recurring funding which will continue through FY09. ESLARP is actively seeking outside funding from federal agencies and foundations.

FY07 Budget	
REVENUE	
Recurring State	177,926
ICR carryover	60,000
Non-recurring Provost	30,000
TOTAL REVENUES	\$267,926
PROJECTED EXPENSES	
Administration	107,226
Outreach Weekends	54,200
Service Learning/Technical Assistance	106,500
TOTAL PROJECTED EXPENSES	\$267,926
FY08 Projected Budget	
REVENUE	
Recurring State	177,926
Non-recurring Provost	115,000
TOTAL REVENUES	\$292,926
PROJECTED EXPENSES	
Administration	123,226
Outreach Weekends	51,300
Service Learning/Technical Assistance	118,400
TOTAL EXPECTED EXPENSES	\$292,926

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