

The East St. Louis Action Research Project



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

ESLARP



2007/08

*Enriching
young minds
through
community engagement*

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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

FAA 199 (Sang Lee) Civic Engagement	LIS 581 (Anke Voss) Archival Materials
FAA 391 (Abby Harmon) Undergrad Action Research	RST 393 (Bruce Wicks) Action Research Independent Study
LA 452 (Gale Fulton) Precedent in Planting	RST 457 (Bruce Wicks) Tourism Development
LIS 451 (Martin Wolske) Intro to Networked Info Systems	UP 474 (Stacy Harwood) Neighborhood Planning

Outreach Weekends

ESLARP outreach weekends continue to be a vital part of the program. During the spring and fall '07 semesters ESLARP offered 6 outreach weekends with a total of 500 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

Non-recurring 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), studies on the homeless population of East St. Louis, 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

ESLARP's strategic goals and are determined each year by the outcomes of its Annual Retreat.

1. The most critical activities currently facing ESLARP is its ability to secure additional funding through for 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 addition to allowing ESLARP to grow and reach out in new and innovative directions.
2. ESLARP seeks to support additional faculty initiatives on a campus-wide basis. To address the 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. ESLARP has created a College-based interdisciplinary course; FAA 391, Undergraduate Research Methods class focused on Action Research in East St. Louis. The concept behind this course is to have undergraduate students work with ESLARP and their 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 taking its model outside the Metro East area. ESLARP continues to partner with the School of Architecture and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science on the continued work on in the Global Action Research effort in Sao Tome e Principe, a small country off the west coast of Africa, to provide community development, technology transfer, online education and physical improvements. To date numerous faculty, staff and students have traveled to Sao Tome to further the effort.

ESLARP is also taking its model to the city of Springfield, Illinois. With the efforts of faculty from Architecture and Urban Planning, we are working with The Springfield Project on planning issues facing that city.



October 15, 2008



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The People of ESLARP

ESLARP Staff

ESLARP employs one staff, Billie Turner, in East St. Louis and two campus staff, one full-time, Vicki Eddings and one half time, Sang Lee, both in Noble Hall.

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.

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.

Laura Lawson

Director and Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture

Paul Adams

Director of Community Networking, Graduate School of Library & Information Science

Mike Andrejasich

Associate Dean, College of Fine and Applied Arts

Vernon Burton

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

Lynne Dearborn

Assistant Professor, Architecture

Vicki Eddings

Project Administrative Coordinator, Campus Staff

Gale Fulton,

Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture

Cynthea Geerdes

Director, Transactions & Community Economic Development Clinic, College of Law

Abby Harmon

Ph.D. Candidate, Landscape Architecture

Stacy Harwood

Associate Professor, Urban and Regional Planning

Ken Salo

Lecturer, Urban and Regional Planning

Robert Selby, FAIA

Associate Director for Graduate Studies and Associate Professor, Architecture

Elizabeth Sweet

Assistant Director, Urban and Regional Planning

Billie Turner

Community Liaison, East St. Louis Staff

Bruce Wicks

Associate Professor, Recreation Sport and Tourism

Martin Wolske

Senior Research Scientist, Graduate School of Library and Information Science

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
Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance	
Neighborhood Law Office	State Representative Wyvetter Younge
Olivette Park Neighborhood Org	University Extension Office (UIUC)
Opal's House	University Outreach and Public Service (UIUC)

Annual Budget

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

FY08 Budget	
REVENUE	
Recurring State	177,926
Non-recurring Provost	<u>115,000</u>
TOTAL REVENUE	\$292,926
PROJECTED EXPENSES	
Administration	123,226
Outreach Weekends	51,300
Service Learning/Technical Assistance	<u>118,400</u>
TOTAL EXPECTED EXPENSES	\$292,926