

January 12, 2009

College of Fine and Applied Arts
Auxiliary Unit Budget Report
East St. Louis Action Research Project

State of the Unit

Building on over twenty years of engagement, the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) is recognized nationally as a model for university-community partnerships. As stated in the ESLARP mission:

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, and service missions.

In the context of university-community design partnerships, which is the model best associated with ESLARP's beginnings, ESLARP emerges as one of the oldest remaining programs (possibly 6 programs predate ESLARP that are active) and stands out as unique in its increasingly interdisciplinary participation across campus, its focus on action research, and the knowledge gained from sustained commitment to partnering organizations in one community.

In this past year, we began a strategic planning effort to affirm ESLARP's position as a scholarly and pedagogically grounded *action research center*. While still strongly committed to mutually beneficial partnerships, we are seeking more critical evaluation of the scholarly and learning outcomes that are made possible through engagement that serves our community partners' needs. This new focus will have an inevitable impact on our projects and funding priorities.

Based on the ESLARP mission, the program is accountable to multiple participants, including:

- **Community Partners:** ESLARP has partnered with over 50 organizations and agencies in the greater East St. Louis area, including neighborhood organizations, nonprofit organizations, service providers, municipal government entities, and community development corporations. In Dec. 2008, we held a community forum – attended by 30 residents representing partnering organizations and 15 faculty, students, and staff – to discuss partners' needs and goals for the next 5 years of this partnership.
- **Staff:** ESLARP currently employs two full-time permanent staff. Billie Turner is Community Liaison located in East St. Louis and Vicki Eddings is Project Coordinator located on Campus.
- **Faculty:** Faculty members participate on a voluntary basis because of their commitment to engaged teaching and research. Many departments are represented through faculty participants, including Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning, Landscape Architecture, Recreation Sport and Tourism, Library and Information Science, and History.
- **Graduate Research Assistants (GAs):** ESLARP currently employs 11 graduate students (1 at 33% and 10 at 25%) to assist in 4 areas: outreach weekend support, teaching, community liaisons, and special faculty projects. Non-recurring funds from the Office of the Provost support ESLARP GAs through Spring 2009.
- **Students:** University of Illinois graduate and undergraduate students from a range of departments and backgrounds become involved through courses, outreach weekends, and other activities.

We are currently in the process of re-evaluating the work that ESLARP accomplishes. This is an important effort since our work varies based on campus participants and interests, resources, and partners' needs. In the recent past, the focus has been framed as "technical assistance" to our partners and service learning for students. In our efforts to be more specific about what action research means, we have conducted an internal evaluation of projects, teaching, and scholarship. The following 7 categories help frame the work we do and suggest new directions and possible funding priorities: student learning, community information and technology, neighborhood

and planning, parks and open space, design assistance and construction, organizational capacity building, and advocacy.

1. Student Learning: ESLARP represents one of the premier avenues for civically-engaged student learning at UIUC, and is a model for universities nationwide. Guided by service-learning literature that identifies 3 critical phases – student preparation, an experience working with community, and reflection, ESLARP has taken a more active role in developing its own courses – FAA 291 and FAA 391 – and orienting the Outreach Weekends to courses instead of volunteers. Both courses were taught by GAs and supported through non-recurring funds from the Provost.

FAA 291 (listed in F08 as FAA 199: Civic Engagement in East St. Louis) was a new course offered in fall 2008. Enrollment included 38 students (over two sections) representing 8 majors. Through participation in an outreach weekend, students assisted community partners with building their organizational capacity, addressing site-specific design issues, and beautifying neighborhoods. Reflection exercises encouraged students to think about the impact of civic engagement in distressed communities, the physical and institutional challenges residents of East St. Louis face on a daily basis, and how student and faculty knowledge can be utilized to address some of those challenges. In a survey of students from the second section of FAA 199, 19 of 20 students felt the course was either “valuable” or “extremely valuable.” The same number of students felt the fieldtrip to East St. Louis was either “valuable” or “extremely valuable” as a learning experience. Due to the strong response and demand, we have expanded the course size for the Spring 2009 semester.

In fall 2008, *FAA 391* (Community Engagement and Action Research in East St. Louis) included 9 students representing Urban & Regional Planning, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Psychology. Students worked with The Eagle’s Nest, an aspiring homeless veterans’ transitional living center. In Spring 2009, a new class will begin in-depth qualitative research with homeless men to continue to build the capacity of The Eagle’s Nest’s programs and physical surroundings.

In addition, there are departmental courses working with ESLARP and partners. In 2008-9, courses include: Neighborhood Planning (UP 474, Stacy Harwood); Landscape Architecture Design Workshop (LA336/438, Laura Lawson); Natural Precedent in Planting (LA 452, Gale Fulton); Introduction to Network Systems (LIS 451, Martin Wolske); Administration and Use Archival Materials (LIS 581, Anke Voss); Action Research Independent Study (RST 393, Bruce Wicks). ESLARP provided support for class-related travel, primarily through Outreach Weekends.

Outreach Weekends, which occur 4-6 times per year, bring hundreds of students down to East St. Louis for an over-night experience that includes an orientation, work with community partners, and lively discussions during meals and travel. In 2008, over 460 students participated.

ESLARP has also established a relationship with the Leadership Center to acknowledge and encourage students to apply their ESLARP experience toward leadership skill development.

2. Community Information and Technology: This effort has produced/maintained 29 community technology centers and current efforts are underway to develop a community geographic information system. In the past year, this work has been presented at conferences in Chicago and Italy. It has been the subject area for one dissertation, completed in 2007.

Valuable lessons have been learned from this work in East St. Louis that are now being used to forge new partnerships between University of Illinois faculty and students with partners in the country of Sao Tome and Principe. This work has been supported through non-recurring funding from the Office of the Provost through this fiscal year.

3. Neighborhood and Planning: Based on the multiple participatory neighborhood planning efforts over the past 20 years, ESLARP has an accumulated knowledge of engagement, methods, and results. For FY09, this category engaged courses (UP 260, 474) and masters’ projects. Recent work was presented at the Planner’s

Network Conference in Winnipeg. It was the subject area for one dissertation, completed in 2008. There is interest by faculty and community leaders in other contexts to export this model of neighborhood planning.

4. **Parks and Open Space:** ESLARP works with partners to improve the social, recreational, cultural and environmental capacities of parks, open space, and vacant land in East St. Louis. This year, work continues through courses (LA 452, 336/438; RST393).

5. **Design Assistance and Construction:** Partners' needs for design assistance, construction projects, and renovation offer applied learning experiences for design students. A current publication illustrates this work: Lynne Dearborn, "Rehab, Rebuild, Renew: ESLARP's Work with Two Community Partners," in *Activist Architecture: The Philosophy and Practice of Community Design Center* (edited by Craig Wilkins, NY: Princeton Architecture Press, forthcoming).

6. **Organizational Capacity Building:** ESLARP assists partners with grant-writing, fundraising, donation seeking, event planning, volunteers to assist in events, and graphic design and layout assistance for promotional materials and websites. Much of this work occurs through the capacities of the ESLARP GAs and courses (UP 260).

7. **Advocacy:** ESLARP provides support and increase awareness of issues faced by residents in East St. Louis and includes publications, presentations, and expert testimonies.

These 7 categories clarify the *current capacities* within the faculty, students, and staff, as well as some of the needs identified by our community partners. New opportunities are unfolding as well. At a recent community forum (Dec. 2008), representatives from community organizations and campus discussed directions for the partnership in the next five years and identified the following opportunities: presenting the community with research on the overall state of East St. Louis, capacity building for partners, youth mentoring and education, history and tourism, presenting good news about the community, business development, and safety. The challenge in the next year, therefore, is to attract interest by relevant departments, faculty, and students. This work can be accomplished through new service-learning courses, action research agendas, and more traditional scholarly research. We are already negotiating a collaboration with the School of Business Social Entrepreneur Summer Institute (SESI) to work with some of our partners on capacity building and business development. We are also working with the School of Education and the Dept. of African American Studies to engage faculty research and support in these identified areas.

This year we are also actively promoting the visibility of ESLARP on campus, to community partners, to other universities, and to the general public. We are improving our website to include up-to-date information and interactive elements. Through funding received by the Civic Engagement Task Force Funds (in 2006), we are about to complete a new informational video, being produced by the ACES Information Technology Communication Services. We have presented ESLARP at multiple conferences in varied fields, including the Planners Network Conference in Winnipeg, Imagining America Conference in Los Angeles, Erasing Boundaries / Supporting Communities in New York City, and others.

This year, ESLARP invested in new computers and software to enable the work of staff and GAs. We purchased 6 computers to replace the previous ones that had been recycled from other FAA units several years ago. This expense came out of our recurring funds.

ESLARP has changed its organizational structure. ESLARP is led by a faculty director who appointed by the Dean. The Campus Advisory Committee (CAC) - consisting of faculty, staff, and a student representative - meets monthly and is charged with advising on relevant matters both on campus and in the community. A CAC subgroup (the "executive committee") meets biweekly. In June, our assistant director left for an academic position and we did not refill the position due to budget concerns and acknowledgement of possible restructuring. This allowed for hiring a part-time, hourly staff person at 50% time, whose responsibilities include teaching FAA 291 and redesign of our website. Other funding made available by the loss of the assistant director was used to offset existing programs. Given budget concerns, we are considering options to support the faculty director as a partial administrative position, increased responsibility to existing staff, and new roles for GAs.

Unit Strategic Goals (3)

i. Increase recognition and capacity for action research scholarship associated with ESLARP.

Even though many people on campus have heard of ESLARP, there is an urgent need to “reintroduce” the program so that faculty, students, and administrators understand it as more than service but as a resource for *civically-engaged learning and scholarship*. This goal addresses three critical needs. First, to date much of ESLARP’s work remains invisible to the larger university community because it has been framed as service, service-learning teaching, or outreach when in fact much of this work, when framed as sustained action research, contributes new knowledge to multiple fields. Second, there has been a decline in department and faculty involvement, and one factor may be the perception of this work as service that does not address current promotion and tenure priorities. Third, community partners have identified needs that cannot be adequately addressed by faculty and students who are currently involved, and many of these needs can be framed in the context of larger action research agendas. Over the next few years, ESLARP can be reframed as an action-research center that is at the forefront of civic engagement scholarship, evaluation, and advocacy. It can fill a need on campus for support for community-based teaching and research.

Metrics:

- Highlight action research teaching and scholarship accomplishments through scholarly publications, website, and other promotional materials
- Allocate ESLARP GA support toward faculty research and teaching aligned with recently identified community needs and associated with scholarly potential. In particular, engage faculty from Education, African American Studies, and Business.
- Increase number of courses that engage with ESLARP
- Move ESLARP offices to more central location in FAA to encourage it as a site for contact and dialogue amongst faculty, students, and staff. This new office would include meeting space for seminars, colloquia, and other events to encourage dialogue.
- Arrange orientation tours for administrators, faculty, and others who might be interested in becoming involved in ESLARP. This would be modeled after tour with Dean’s office in summer 2009.
- Develop mutually beneficial collaborations with departments, other centers and institutes on campus, and the Office of Public Engagement.
- Identify and successfully pursue possible funding sources internal and external to campus to support the development of scholarship associated with ESLARP.

ii. Launch the Illinois Global Action Research Project

Aligned with the goal to increase the recognition and scholarly capacity of ESLARP is the goal to bridge this research out of one context and into a broader discourse that engages other communities as well. Recognizing that the 20-year commitment in one community has taught important lessons on process and partnerships that can be expanded to new communities, ESLARP intends to establish the Illinois Global Action Research Project (IGARP) to facilitate dialogue amongst faculty and students involved in sustained action research in multiple communities, from the local to the global. Much of this work is also aligned with social entrepreneurial activities. The goal to develop a stronger base for civically-engaged learning, scholarship, and recruitment of faculty interested in this research area.

We envision the program to provide initial support for new action research agendas, support ongoing dialogue between faculty and students engaged in this work, and facilitate scholarship and publication. Part of the program would be modeled along the lines of a “fellows” program, with faculty and graduate students selected for a year-long commitment that is associated with financial support (primarily travel funds and graduate assistantships, although other funding needs may be justified; it is hoped that this program might grow to support course buyouts). Fellows would meet monthly to discuss their work together, creating opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas and possible collaborations. At the end of the year, fellows would contribute to a working

paper series to be distributed on campus and elsewhere as appropriate. This program could be used to attract doctoral students interested in action research.

This new program will initially be housed within ESLARP but may ultimately serve as the umbrella organization for ESLARP and other programs. We intend to request funding and resources from the Office of the Provost, the College of Fine and Applied Arts, and other colleges and departments, as well as seek external funding to support this effort.

iii. Address ESLARP's leadership and funding sustainability

As ESLARP increases its responsibilities to campus relations and interdisciplinary development, the production of scholarship, and civically engaged research and teaching, it is increasingly important to address the sustainability of ESLARP's leadership. The previous model of a 0% time rotating faculty director is not sustainable. Several different models of leadership have been discussed in the past year. ESLARP is considering possible alternatives, including this appointment as a 50% faculty administrative appointment or as an academic professional position.

This would have significant impact on the existing ESLARP projects as it would shift more of ESLARP's recurring funds toward staff and administrative expenses. We are looking into possible funding sources that could be used to fund ESLARP's teaching and research- associated projects. With changes in the federal government administration and priorities, we will watch carefully for new funding opportunities that align with community development and engagement. We will also work on a development strategy with our FAA Advancement Office and the Foundation.

Metrics

- Discussions with Dean and Heads of involved departments to discuss alternatives that might address mutual needs
- Discussions with other campus centers to learn about alternative organizational structures, funding, etc.
- Advance a development strategy that engages ESLARP alumni and others in the support of ESLARP programs

Future Plans

i. Initiate ESLARP book project

To fill the need for more information about ESLARP's history, work, evolution, and contributions to scholarship, we intend to develop an edited manuscript that will include descriptive pieces, photo-essays, interviews, scholarly papers, and brief "letters" from alumni and community members. We expect to submit an initial proposal to identified publishers by the end of spring 2009 and work on the manuscript in the coming summer and fall.

ii. Re-frame outreach weekends as action research and civic engagement

In the coming year, we will continue to improve the learning outcomes associated with civic engagement by focusing our Outreach Weekends on courses and engaging students in activities that involve partners and work towards research needs/agendas. With the development of FAA 291 and FAA 391, we have the opportunity to focus our engagement so that we can assure appropriate student preparation and reflection. We will work with campus experts to incorporate diversity training and multicultural learning. We can also begin to strategize activities on the weekends that serve both our partners' immediate needs as well as collecting data and information that will help in ongoing action research. We also have the opportunity to evaluate student learning outcomes as a way to gauge our impact and to provide longitudinal data.

iii. Launch the Illinois Global Action Research Project

In Spring 2009, we will explore various models for this program, using existing programs on campus and elsewhere. We hope to announce this effort by the beginning of fall 2009, using the next year to advertise and promote the program throughout the College and campus. Our ability to engage GAs and provide travel support for this effort is dependent on receiving non-recurring funds.

iv. Develop community partner advisory committee

Our December 2008 community forum meeting reaffirmed the need for more consistent reporting and discussion with community partners about needs and opportunities. We propose to develop an informal community partner advisory committee that would meet once per semester or as needed.

Interdisciplinary Activities

The following courses are engaged in ESLARP-related activities (Fall 2008 and Spring):

FAA 199/291 (Sang Lee): Civic Engagement in East St. Louis
FAA 391 (Abby Harmon): Undergraduate Action Research
LA 336/438 (Laura Lawson): East St. Louis Community-based Design Studio
LA 452 (Gale Fulton): Precedents in Planting
LIS 451 (Martin Wolske): Introduction to Networked Information Systems
LIS 581 (Anke Voss): Archival Materials
RST 392 (Bruce Wicks): Action Research Independent Study
RST 457 (Bruce Wicks): Tourism Development
UP 474 (Stacy Harwood): Neighborhood Planning

Several special projects were supported:

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, partial GA funding to Elizabeth Sweet, Assistant Professor, to support her efforts to establish The Gender and Race Intersections in Planning Lab.

Graduate School of Library and Information Science, support to Paul Adams for work in Sao Tome and Principe, West Africa. During the Summer of 2008 Paul led an educational trip to Sao Tome & Principe (West Africa) to explore information and technology needs and investigate how lessons learned in East St. Louis might be applied in this international setting. University and East St. Louis community students partnered to teach basic computer maintenance skills, teach English as a second language, create and maintain community technology centers and create a documentary about the experience. Three youth and two adults from East St. Louis joined Paul and other graduate students on this research trip.

School of Education, GA funding for initial research on East St. Louis Public School

Financial Standing

Currently the main funding sources for ESLARP are recurring funds and non-recurring funds provided until the end of this fiscal year from the Office of the Provost. The current level of recurring funding is approximately \$183,000. This funding is used to support administration expenses – payroll, travel associated with the ESLARP office, and basic office materials. In the past, ESLARP has received nonrecurring funding from the Office of the Provost on a regular basis. This funding represents 38.5% of our overall university funding. We have submitted a proposal for non-recurring funds for the next fiscal year.

Some ESLARP-related projects have acquired additional funds to support the work. For example, in addition to the funding support from the Office of the Provost to ESLARP, our work in Sao Tome and Principe received \$20,000 from the Community Informatics during this past academic year. To support ongoing technical projects in East St. Louis and elsewhere, GSLIS/Community Informatics Initiative has applied to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Digital Divide Fund in the amount of \$75,000. Pending approval, funds will be available July 1, 2009.

Faculty participants pursue other campus funding opportunities to support their action research and teaching work associated with ESLARP. For example, Stacy Harwood received a Community Informatics grant for her work in Springfield and East St. Louis. Part of this funding was used to support a GA who worked closely with ESLARP-funded GAs.

ESLARP is also assisting community partners in their efforts to acquire grants. In the past year, Bruce Wicks worked with the East St. Louis Parks District on an Illinois Department of Natural Resources grant application for \$250,000; unfortunately, it was not funded. A current request to Kaboom for \$50,000 is in process.