

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 17, 2013 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

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ADDRESSING POVERTY, VULNERABILITY, AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Session Moderator: Lucy Jarosz, Geography

085 MGH

1:15 PM to 2:45 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Coffee Culture: A Study of Social Responsibility Initiatives and their Socioeconomic Implications

Makenna Joy (Makenna) Hamre, Senior, Geography
Mentor: Lucy Jarosz, Geography

Due to the increasingly publicized socioeconomic disparities in coffee production, there is a high consumer demand for ethical bean sourcing. My research pertains to the transparency and functionality of Social Responsibility Initiatives (SRIs) within the coffee commodity chain, and their effects on power distribution. In particular, I investigate the SRIs of three Seattle based coffee companies: a multi-national corporation, a medium-sized coffee roaster and café, and a small local café. I analyze the incentives and drawbacks of these initiatives through semi-structured interviews with employees, as well as how the initiatives influence business decisions and situate power distribution along the commodity chain. In addition, I conduct participant observation while volunteering on a Honduran coffee farm in order to understand the relationship producers have with their coffee. Using SRIs as a lens to political and socioeconomic factors that influence interaction within the coffee industry, I conclude with suggestions for ways in which a more equitable distribution of power may benefit coffee producers and increase transparency in SRIs.

Works of Faith: Volunteering in Two Seattle Christian Organizations Addressing Homelessness

Kathryn Jean (Katy) Lundgren, Senior, Comparative Religion, Geography

Mary Gates Scholar

Mentor: Lucy Jarosz, Geography

The national government is relying increasingly on faith-based organizations for poverty relief, and especially to address homelessness. Some faith-based organizations are criticized for only addressing poverty's symptoms and perpetuating stereotypes about spiritual, ethical, mental, and moral

shortcomings of the impoverished. How can these organizations instead create spaces in which traditional assumptions about homelessness and community are disrupted, and new bonds of solidarity are created between people of different socio-economic classes? I seek to answer this question by focusing on how volunteers express and act upon their faith in the context of progressive faith-based organizations. I will conduct participant observation in two Seattle Christian faith-based organizations addressing homelessness in the Aurora area. I will also conduct interviews with volunteers and organization directors in order to examine how the theological foundations of these organizations may help volunteers become more invested in and involved with the entirety of their neighborhood community. This project will reveal how small-scale, faith-based work addressing homelessness can impact the communities in which they operate by shifting perceptions of poverty through cross-class exposure and an engagement with spirituality.

Homelessness, Mobility, and the City

Samuel Laurence (Sam) Nowak, Senior, Geography

Mary Gates Scholar

Mentor: Lucy Jarosz, Geography

On October 29th, 2012, King County Metro of Washington State implemented a set of congestion reduction policies, including the elimination of the Ride Free Area (RFA) in downtown Seattle, which was once an area in which any individual could ride a Metro bus without charge. The elimination of such a service stands to have a disproportionate impact on low-income and homeless individuals as many once used the RFA to reach social service agencies clustered in the downtown area and will now have to pay to reach those destinations. This research works to understand how different groups in the city have reacted and adapted to the end of the RFA (including activists, social service agencies, bus drivers, and low-income or no-income individuals) in order to theorize

around (im)mobilities of homelessness in the city. I draw on qualitative interviews, participant observation, and archival research in order to build an inductive, exploratory analysis of how homeless individuals are adapting to this policy implementation. In doing so, I call attention to the need for further research on the intersections of homelessness, mobility studies, and public transportation policy in human geography.

Comparing the Socioeconomic Status of Oil Refinery Fenceline Communities: San Francisco Bay Area, California and the Southeast Region of Louisiana

Alison Schmidt, Freshman, Environmental Studies (Bothell)
Mentor: Gwen Ottinger, Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

Communities located around industrial oil refinery facilities are exposed to toxic chemical emissions every day. It is the people who live in these communities who are suffering while corporations benefit financially. Neighborhoods with these facilities in their backyards that are directly affected by these harmful chemicals, referred to as fenceline communities, are the focus of this research. The information presented in this research is focused on comparing the socioeconomic status (SES) of residents living in fenceline communities in areas with high concentrations of oil refineries around the San Francisco Bay Area in California and in the Southeast Region of Louisiana. The purpose of this work is to find SES commonalities and differences of people living in these very different geographic regions to better understand the scope of inequity and disproportionate burdens that are put on poor and minority citizens. The methods used for this research will be based on data found using the United States Census Bureau American Community Survey. The first step in the process was to define which characteristics, specific to this research, of SES to examine and which criteria would be used to analyze the data. The results presented in this research will be based on four major characteristics: Education, Occupation, Income, and Wealth. The conclusions of this research will be based on results that will show the similarities and differences of the four characteristics between cities and towns in California compared to those in Louisiana and compare that to the population demographics based on race and ethnicity.

Social Justice and Mass Transit: Examining the Consequences of Transit Isolation on Marginalized Communities

Jennifer Ann (Jennifer) St Cyr, Junior, Social Welfare
Mentor: Gunnar Almgren, School of Social Work
Mentor: Edwyna Ho

The themes I explore in my research include the examination of population exclusion and social marginalization in car-centric communities and the resulting socioeconomic and geographic marginalization of communities due to transit structures. Accessibility to transit is a structural barrier that

contributes to opportunity inequalities which further stratify marginalized populations in terms of socioeconomics. My research highlights the consequences of creating communities and systems that are car dependent without incorporating effective mass transit. Populations considered in this research include youth, elderly, socioeconomically disadvantaged, differently abled, and those in international transition such as refugees or undocumented communities. I present an examination of such texts as Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Edward W. Soja's *Seeking Spatial Justice*, and *Highway Robbery* edited by Bullard, Johnson, and Torres. Using literary analysis and community feedback, I aim to illuminate the opportunity discrepancies of marginalized populations between communities with transit isolation and those with more comprehensive transit accessibility. Spatial and social restriction due to transit isolation bars marginalized communities from having equal access to employment, health, civic, housing, and educational opportunities.

Real Change Cross-Class Listening Circles: Advocacy, Empathy and New Understandings of Homelessness

Jessica Ashley (Jess) Wallach, Senior, Geography, Public Health-Global Health
Mentor: Lucy Jarosz, Geography

Current scholarship on geographies of encounter posits that situated encounters with difference, or bodies that represent difference, can create openings for new subjectivities, shifts in personal politics and new understandings of individual agency. This paper considers the possibilities of such encounters with difference in the context of the Real Change Cross-Class Advocacy Listening Circles. Listening Circles are community conversations that bring together individuals of different class backgrounds to reflect on questions of class and economic inequality. These conversations reach across class boundaries and differences to establish an open and respectful cross-class dialogue, one which is based on personal connection, empathy and understanding. Through interviews, participant observation and auto-ethnography, I investigate the Listening Circles as situated encounters with difference, where story-telling and shared experience actively (re)interpret and challenge the socio-political divisions which maintain class boundaries in everyday life. I consider how this model for disrupting class divisions in and through our everyday interactions might be applied to further the advocacy work of organizations like Real Change in cultivating critical, caring and empowered social justice actors.