

WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the first installment of the Civic Engagement Newsletter. We hope to bring news to you on a regular basis regarding our recent research accomplishments, community activities, and upcoming public seminars. In this installment, we are pleased to announce several recent publications that present our research findings on neighborhood councils and the neighborhood council system in Los Angeles. We also preview some upcoming research on Homeowners Associations in China, as well as report some recent job offers accepted by members of our research team. Please pay particular attention to the column that lists upcoming research seminars. These seminars are open to all members of the public, as we hope to engage all stakeholders in discussion of our findings. If you have any questions about items mentioned here, or wish to

add your name to our email list, do not hesitate to contact me or any member of our team. Be sure to visit our website for regular updates as well, at www.usc-cei.org.

SPRING 2007 WORKSHOP SERIES

By Puna Chai

The Civic Engagement Initiative is excited to announce our 2007 Spring Workshop Series, which will feature a few of our distinguished doctoral students and highlight their exceptional work.

Kicking off the series for us, in late February Kyu-Nahm Jun, Ph.D., and Ellen Shiau discussed their research examining the potential of community organizations to provide local administrators with direct information on citizen satisfaction, focusing specifically on the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council System.

In late March, Melissa Gaeke, who serves as Director of USC's Volunteer Center, will conduct a workshop on youth civic engagement.

In early April, Feng Wang will discuss her work dealing with Home Owner's Associations in Beijing, China, and how recent efforts there may revolutionize civil society.

Also in April, Tom Bryer will discuss a newly published policy brief that was co-authored with Professor Terry L. Cooper and produced by the USC Urban Initiative.

SCHEDULE

Topic: Youth Civic Engagement (Title is TBD)

Presenter: Melissa Gaeke

Date: Tuesday, March 27

Time: 12-1:30p

CEI IN THE NEWS**CAROL BAKER THARP JOINS MAYOR'S TEAM**

By Rosalynn Silva

The below story appeared on the USC Public Relations website on Mar. 6, 2007. The original article can be accessed at www.usc.edu/uscnnews/stories/13527.html.



Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has appointed Carol Baker Tharp of the USC School of Policy, Planning, and Development to serve as the new general manager of the city's Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE).

Tharp has served as deputy director of the USC Civic Engagement Initiative for the past three years.

As general manager of Neighborhood Empowerment, Tharp will oversee the entire Los Angeles Neighborhood Council system, which consists of 86 local councils. Her leadership and experience with Southern California communities for more than 30 years will be crucial as the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council system undergoes a mandated review by a city-wide commission this year.

"The mayor has wisely recognized that Carol is uniquely positioned and extraordinarily well-equipped to lead DONE into the next stage of the development of the neighborhood councils," said Terry L. Cooper, SPPD's Maria B. Crutcher Professor in Citizenship and Democratic Values and director of the Civic Engagement Initiative. "We feel deeply gratified to see one of our own being recognized for this key leadership role that is important for the future of L.A. as well as for other cities around the world that are struggling to find ways to connect the people to the governance process."

Tharp, who wrote her dissertation on the Los Angeles Council system, came to USC after serving as the executive director of CORO Southern California, one of the oldest and most prestigious leadership education organizations in the nation.

At USC, Tharp helped the USC Civic Engagement Initiative become a leading academic center devoted to the study and research of neighborhood participation.

Location: RGL 215

Topic: Home Owners Associations in Beijing
(Title is TBD)

Presenter: Feng Wang

Date: Tuesday, April 3

Time: 12-1:30p

Location: RGL 215

Title: Negotiating Bureaucratic Responsiveness in Collaboration with Citizens: Findings from Action Research in Los Angeles

Presenter: Tom Bryer

Date: Monday, April 9

Time: 12-1:30p

Location: RGL 219

POST-CONFERENCE OUTREACH

By Rosalynn Silva

January proved to be a busy month for CEI as the Neighborhood Participation Project (NPP) team embarked on its post-December conference outreach efforts. The team officially began making its research findings available with presentations to various community organizations, including the Alliance of Neighborhood Councils, California Community Foundation, Coro Southern California, and the Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley.

Terry Cooper, Chris Weare, Juliet Musso, and Tom Bryer presented their research findings and also reviewed their recommendations. The audience members wanted to know how they could gain greater influence in their respective communities and proved to be quite interested in the dialogue. At the California Community Foundation, building leadership capacity and representativeness were topics of main concern.

The NPP team hopes to continue doing presentations and attending public meetings in follow up to the December conference. The CEI team is also writing various opinion pieces in local community newspapers and on-line newsletters such as CityWatch.

"The interdisciplinary and action-research aspects of the Civic Engagement Initiative have made me feel at home," Tharp said. "By bringing scholars together from across disciplines to examine civic engagement, we have not only enriched our conversations about the societal arrangements that encourage effective public involvement in governance, but we've also built wonderful friendships across the university. We not only study community-building, we live it."

Tharp will appear before the Los Angeles City Council for confirmation in the coming weeks and is set to begin her new position on March 12.

The Civic Engagement Initiative is an interdisciplinary research group that examines the interaction between individuals and institutions, and studies the network of relationships that shape civic identity and people's connection to government. It holds workshop series throughout the academic year on democracy, civic participation and governance reform.

TAKING PULSE OF NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS

By Rosalynn Silva

The below story appeared on the USC Public Relations website on Dec. 20, 2006. The original article can be accessed at www.usc.edu/usnews/stories/13219.html.

The neighborhood council system in Los Angeles is not representative of the social and economic diversity of residents, according to a new report issued by the USC Civic Engagement Initiative.

The report also found that many of the city's neighborhood councils continue to struggle with outreach and infighting, which prevents them from addressing key community issues.

The findings, unveiled at a conference held Dec. 16, were based on citywide surveys of various stakeholders and on the Civic Engagement Initiative's 10-year study of the Los Angeles neighborhood council system, which was designed to allow participation in governance at the grassroots level.

The event was sponsored by the USC School of Policy, Planning, and Development and drew city commissioners, elected officials, neighborhood council members and community leaders.

Although the conference revealed significant findings about the current system, it also served as a forum for community members to voice their opinions about ways in which the current system can be improved.



NEW FACULTY POSITIONS

Thomas A. Bryer

Thomas Bryer has accepted an offer from the University of Central Florida in Orlando. He will serve as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Administration, College of Health and Public Affairs beginning Fall 2007.

Thomas is currently a Ph.D. candidate and Lead Research Assistant for the Collaborative Learning Project in the School of Policy, Planning and Development.

Kyu-Nahm Jun, Ph.D.

Kyu-Nahm Jun has accepted a position at Wayne State University in Detroit Michigan, where she will be teaching urban politics and policy starting this fall.

Kyu-Nahm is currently a post-doctoral research associate in the School of Policy, Planning and Development.

“It was a lively and constructive morning that provided research data on the accomplishments of the L.A. neighborhood councils to date as well as those areas where further work needs to be done,” said Terry L. Cooper, SPPD’s Maria B. Crutcher Professor in Citizenship and Democratic Values and director of the Civic Engagement Initiative.

“Members of the Neighborhood Review Commission, neighborhood council leaders, elected officials and their representatives, and scholars had an opportunity to talk together about this major innovation in urban governance that L.A. has undertaken,” Cooper said.

Over half of the city’s 86 neighborhood councils were represented at the conference. Following the session, participants were able to attend various workshops, where issues of neighborhood council diversity, capacity building, empowerment innovations and city department collaboration were discussed.

The Civic Engagement Initiative hopes to incorporate these discussions into its research before releasing its final report early next year.

“We were delighted that nearly 100 community and civic leaders were sufficiently interested in our research findings to turn out on a rainy Saturday in mid-December,” said Carol Baker Tharp, deputy director of the USC Civic Engagement Initiative. “We received excellent, thoughtful feedback on our research, and we will be incorporating public comments from the workshop into our final papers.

“The news coverage of the event is giving us additional opportunities to discuss and disseminate our reports,” Tharp said. “We are proud to be part of the public conversation reviewing the Los Angeles neighborhood council system, and are pleased that the 10 years of research investment we [and our donors] have made is now able to influence the policies governing the system.”

RECENT RESEARCH

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOAS IN URBAN CHINA

By Feng Wang

We are interested in examining the roles of Chinese Homeowner Associations (HOAs) in promoting residents’ civic awareness, developing property and political rights and improving democratic governance in urban China by looking at HOAs registered in Beijing. Specifically, we will answer the following questions: 1) How external institutions impede the roles of Chinese HOAs in promoting residents’ civic awareness and improving democratic governance; 2) How HOAs’ effectiveness in addressing neighborhood problems and improving democratic governance varies with the neighborhood and organizational characteristics; and 3) What are the impacts of HOAs’ governing activities on residents’ civic awareness and local democratic governance?

Chinese HOAs have burgeoned since the 1998 housing reforms. Three features of Chinese HOAs are noteworthy. First, urban residents’ dwellings were provided by the state until the 1998 housing reform, and HOA members are the first generation who truly own their houses/apartments in urban China after 1949. Second, HOA members are an educated and affluent elite in Chinese society. They are less likely to settle for either authoritarian government or some notion of a market economy that ignores property and political rights. Third, HOAs are the only form of citizen-initiated and self-governing neighborhood organizations in contemporary China.

The dissertation project started in April 2006. Chinese HOAs were chosen from Beijing City, as Beijing is representative of cities in

China where HOAs have developed various governance structures and demonstrated different levels of effectiveness in addressing neighborhood problems and participation in local policy-making. Beijing is also the place in which our professional and academic contacts enable us to pursue the research plan. A sample of 100 HOAs would be randomly drawn from the 396 registered HOAs with Beijing. During April-June 2006 and November 2006 - January 2007, we have conducted face-to-face interviews with leaders of 60 HOAs and participated in many HOA conferences and meetings. We expect to finish data collection by summer 2007.

MEASURING PUBLIC AGENCY PERFORMANCE

By Dr. Kyu-Nahm Jun and Ellen Shiau

In December 2006, post-doctoral researcher Kyu-Nahm Jun and graduate researcher Ellen Shiau presented a paper co-authored with Professor Chris Weare on measuring the performance of public agencies through participatory mechanisms at an academic conference at the University of Hong Kong. The Public Research Management Association hosted the three-day conference, which featured research regarding the evaluation of governmental performance. Kyu-Nahm, Chris and Ellen's paper—"Determinants of Department Responsiveness as a Local Government Performance Measure: The Case of the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council System"—considered whether community-representing organizations can serve as a useful means for assessing the performance of government. Using survey data on Los Angeles' Neighborhood Councils collected by CEI's Neighborhood Participation Project, the paper examined whether deliberative citizen bodies can provide valuable performance information and whether the information provided influences administrative decision making. Among the 16 papers presented at the conference in Hong Kong, this paper was selected to be published as a part of an upcoming symposium in the journal *Public Administration*.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROJECT POLICY BRIEF

By Thomas A. Bryer

We are pleased to announce the publication of a new policy brief from the USC Civic Engagement Initiative and the USC Urban Initiative. It is entitled "Collaboration Between Los Angeles City Departments and Neighborhood Councils: Findings and Recommendations from the USC Collaborative Learning Project," written by Terry L. Cooper and Thomas A. Bryer.

The report outlines key findings and recommendations from a three year project in which the Collaborative Learning Project facilitated collaboration between representatives from three city agencies and neighborhood councils. Final recommendations are broken into three categories: making collaboration happen, making collaboration politically relevant, and making collaboration sustainable. These recommendations can enable future government-citizen collaboration in Los Angeles. They can also assist other jurisdictions where citizens are seeking a voice in governance or where government officials are seeking to engage citizens with their agencies.

This work would not have been possible without the support of our professional facilitator, Ron Kuramoto. Additional research assistance has been provided by Grace Bae, Mahabat Baimyrzaeva, Mark Elliot, Pradeep Kathi, Jack Meek, Cristian Pliscoff, Joshua Steinberger, and Feng Wang. The research was supported by grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and James Irvine Foundation.

The report can be downloaded at www.usc-cei.org/pdfs/CLPbrief.pdf.

FOR SUGGESTIONS OR COMMENTS ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

Please contact Rosalynn Silva at rosalyns@usc.edu.

Please also visit our website at www.usc-cei.org, where you can download a copy of this newsletter in pdf. format.

ABOUT CEI

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