Poverty and the Economy

Faculty Research Grants Program | 2009 |

UGA RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.
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UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
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Introduction

With 91 counties in persistent poverty, Georgia is at the heart of the South’s poverty belt — a 242-county region in the southern United States that has experienced persistent poverty for the last three decades and has not been served by federal initiatives.

To improve the economic well being and quality of life for Georgians, the University of Georgia’s Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach has undertaken an initiative that aims to address issues of persistent poverty and the economy. One aspect of that initiative is the Poverty and the Economy Faculty Research Grants program, which is jointly supported by the University of Georgia Research Foundation (UGARF) and the Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach.

The grant program fosters applied research and creative scholarship related to poverty and contributes to the UGA research program. In particular, this program supports research that builds on understanding public policy barriers that inhibit or limit an individual’s ability to participate fully in the economy.

Multiple outcomes are expected, including: a better understanding of how the university can address the issue of persistent poverty through teaching, research, and outreach; reinforcement of the linkages between research, application, and policy; and new knowledge about persistent poverty and the conditions associated with it. This grant program also will initiate new research programs that have the potential to be supported by extramural funding.

UGARF awarded a total of $100,000 for the fourth round of grants in 2009. Four proposals, representing 13 faculty members from eight academic and public service units were funded.

This report highlights the major findings for the FY 2009 grant recipients.
2009 Poverty and the Economy Grant Recipients

• Janet Rechtman, Fanning Institute; Kimberly Clay, School of Social Work; Courtney Tobin, Fanning Institute; Rachel Hagues, Carl Vinson Institute of Government; “Partnering Across Disparities: Improving Prospects for Partnership When Poverty Divides Town From Gown;”

• Pamela Orpinas, College of Public Health; Steven Kogan, Institute of Behavioral Research; Gene Brody, Institute of Behavioral Research; “Familias Fuertes: A Program to Strengthen Latino Families;”

• David Okech, School of Social Work; Teresa Mauldin, Housing and Consumer Economics, College of Family and Consumer Sciences; Yoko Mimura, Housing Research Center, College of Family and Consumer Sciences; “Asset Building among Low-Income Households in Athens: The Role of Household Characteristics and Institutional Factors;” and

• Andrea Knapp, Math Education, UGA Griffin Campus; Jeffrey Jordan, Agricultural and Applied Economics, UGA Griffin Campus; Art Cain, Continuing Education, UGA Griffin Campus; “University of Georgia Math and Parent Partnership: A Collaborative Approach To Poverty Mitigation Through Education.”
This study explored factors that can contribute to and/or constrain participants in university-community partnerships as they create mutually beneficial relationships. Of particular interest to leaders of economically disadvantaged neighborhoods adjacent to a university, the study used the relationship between the University of Georgia and the community of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, as a case in point. Building on research by Sean Creighton (executive director, Southwest Ohio Council for Higher Education) and input from university personnel and community members, we developed a set of 30 statements that typify the experience of being in a university-community partnership. Using q-methodology, we tested this “q-deck” with 23 respondents to determine its utility in surfacing subjective impressions from partners. While findings from such a small sample are not generalizable, the initial research affirmed: (a) the utility of a tool of this type in evaluating university-community partnerships; (b) the value created by prompting conversations about mutual expectations and needs, and by surfacing and defusing perceptions prospective partners may have about each other; and (c) the potential to use the q-deck at all stages of a partnership.

We plan to develop this research further by: (1) refining the list of statements; (2) making sure each statement applies equally to university- and community-based
respondents; and (3) changing the verb tense so the statements can be used at any stage of the partnership. Further, we respectfully recommend that the University of Georgia incorporate a protocol for establishing mutual understanding and expectations into its policy regarding university-community partnership.

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Familias Fuertes:
*A Program to Strengthen Latino Families*

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The goal of this study was to conduct a pilot intervention and feasibility study of Familias Fuertes (i.e., Strong Families) in Georgia — a program for parents and youth aged 10-14 years originally developed at Iowa State and adapted by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) for Spanish-speaking countries.

The program’s long-term goal is to prevent the initiation of high-risk behaviors among adolescents by strengthening family relationships and by promoting self-regulation and positive conflict resolution strategies. Familias Fuertes — while adapted for Spanish-speaking countries — does not address the challenges that Latino immigrants to the United States confront. The specific aims of our study were to examine community interest; appropriateness of the training workshop, program materials, and evaluation methods; and feasibility of recruitment and implementation.

The main accomplishments of this study were:

1) **Community liaison.** We established a strong relationship with one large Latino community. Community leaders discussed the characteristics of the program, confidentiality of the data, and implementation details.

2) **Training.** The Pan-American Health Organization provided training and support. We conducted a three-day training workshop.

3) **Conceptual model.** After extensive review of the Familias Fuertes and English-version manuals, we proposed the conceptual model, which was subsequently modified to include possible cultural adaptations.

4) **Recruitment, retention.** The community liaison invited 12 families to participate and all accepted. Attendance to the seven-session family program was almost perfect.
5) **Implementation, evaluation.** We developed and conducted extensive process and outcome evaluations. Parents and children reported improvements in family relationships and satisfaction with the sessions.

**Next step:** This study was the basis for a large grant proposal submitted to the National Institutes of Health.

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Asset Building Among Low-Income Households in Athens: *The Role of Household Characteristics and Institutional Factors*

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Economic pressure is more than just financial inconvenience. It impedes the social, emotional, biological and intellectual growth of family members (Seccombe, 2000). Experiencing economic pressure and not being able to afford basic necessities like housing, food, clothing, healthcare or basic household goods has adverse effects on individuals and households, making them vulnerable to other risk factors (Conger, Rueter, & Conger, 2000; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998). In addition, economic hardship negatively impacts the cognitive, behavioral, emotional and physical development of adolescents (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; McLoyd, 1998).

This study’s objectives were to: 1) assess the measurement properties of the constructs of economic pressure and personal resilience; and 2) assess the associations between the constructs of economic pressure and personal resilience. Samples for this study were drawn from a population living in publicly subsidized housing in Athens, Ga. A total of 194 participants who identified themselves as heads of households completed the survey.

We found that economic pressure significantly predicts personal resilience ($\beta = 0.20$). Still, despite economic difficulties, people living in poverty demonstrated that they have strengths, determination, and resilience that carries them through and that can further be used to improve their status in society. Findings showed that poor people perceived themselves as individuals who live simply, are self reliant, focused, and able to meet their goals of educational attainment and quality of healthcare.

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UGA Math and Parent Partnerships:  
A Collaborative Approach to  
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The University of Georgia Math and Parent Partnerships program served four Title I elementary schools and one Title I middle school in 2008-2010. Parents and teachers from the schools attended 8-week mini-courses on numbers and operations, geometry, and algebra to help parents help their children and to strengthen teachers’ ability to implement the Georgia Performance Standards.

Graduate students in mathematics education who were also practicing teachers taught the mini-courses. Children attended as well, participating in math games and activities reflecting content the parents were learning. Parents and teachers were interviewed and tested, and were found to develop varying forms of mathematical knowledge for teaching. Parents increased their content knowledge as well as their desire to continue their own education.

Parent-child interaction around mathematics homework increased in quality and quantity. Furthermore, parents and teachers formed learning communities within the courses that strengthened parent-teacher relationships appreciated by the children. Teachers learned math-specific pedagogy and activities that supported student understanding of mathematics. Enjoyment of the learning process in a collaborative setting contributed to participant retention in the program. Finally, children improved their knowledge of mathematics. Several schools in the program improved their adequate yearly progress (AYP) status.

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