

VOICES

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The Newsletter for the Community Informatics Initiative at the University of Illinois

Darder to Deliver Keynote at Fifth Annual CIS Symposium



Dr. Antonia Darder will appear as keynote speaker at the fifth annual Community as Intellectual Space (CIS) Symposium, co-organized by Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) in Chicago and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The symposium will be held June 12-14, 2009, on Paseo Boricua in Chicago. Darder is a professor in Educational Policy Studies and Latino/a Studies at the University of Illinois and has published extensively on the topic of critical pedagogy.

The theme of the symposium is "Critical Pedagogy: Community Building as Curriculum." Participants will explore how a wide range of organizations utilize dialectical methods to engage with communities. The symposium also will include panels such as:

- Social Emotional Learning at Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School
- Critical Pedagogy and its Application to Teacher Certification
- Designing an Urban Agriculture Curriculum based on Social Ecology and Sustainability of Community
- Community Based Practice and Research
- Community Inquiry and Informatics
- Critical Youth Inquiry and Community Health Issues: The Barrio Arts, Culture, and Communications Academy (BACCA) Program on Underage Drinking
- Critical Engagement through Community Field Studies
- Critical Literacy

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Introducing the 2009-2010 CII Fellows

Under the auspices of the *Illinois Informatics Institute*, the Community Informatics Initiative (CII) of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) received funds from the *Provost's Office of the University of Illinois*. The aim of the seed funding is to integrate community informatics into various disciplines across campus. In April 2009, a CII committee had the pleasure of awarding seed grants to ten faculty projects. These recipients will be appointed CII Fellows for 2009-10, collaborating with CII and sharing their work in the CII Research Series. Congratulations!



Annie Abbott (pictured left), Director of Advanced Spanish Language; Assistant Professor, Department of Spanish, Italian & Portuguese

Project Title: **Reaching More Latina/os: Using Social Media and Spanish Service-Learning to Expand Services to Local and Rural Non-Profits**

UIUC students will use social networking tools such as Facebook and YouTube to connect UIUC Spanish students with residents and community institutions in need of their services. The seed funds will provide support to locate additional funding to expand badly-needed translation services to Spanish-speaking residents of Champaign-Urbana and surrounding areas.

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C-U Community Organizes Around Broadband Issues



Martel Miller shares his thoughts on what the BAC's proposal should include

The passage of the stimulus bill by the United States Congress in January 2009 has prompted a flurry of activity on the UIUC campus and around the Champaign-Urbana (C-U) community related to broadband access. Part of the legislation aims to improve digital infrastructure, allocating \$7.2 billion for high speed internet, with a focus on rural and underserved communities, using broadband for health, energy and educational initiatives. The Champaign-Urbana Broadband Access Committee (BAC) in partnership with the University of Illinois will apply for at least \$30 million to improve access in C-U. As with any large effort, there are many important contributors; here we just mention a few of the people in this endeavor. Michael Smeltzer, director of networking at UIUC's Campus Information Technologies and Educational Services (CITES), has been a key leader, together with the BAC

members and other community activists. Community informatics faculty at GSLIS, as well as Community Informatics Initiative staff, are among those working with CITES and BAC to help ensure that the Champaign-Urbana broadband proposal focuses on the needs of the local community.

The BAC is a collaboration of the joint Champaign-Urbana Telecommunications Commission, charged with exploring the issue of Internet access in the two cities, particularly as it meets the needs of underserved and rural communities and neighborhoods. The group met on February 4, 2009, to discuss their mission statement and hear a presentation by Abdul Alkalimat, the newest committee member and a UI faculty member in community informatics at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS). Professor Alkalimat gave a brief history of his Internet access research, and discussed how transformations may occur in communities where the broadband access initiatives are being considered.

"We need at least one major catalytic agent to jumpstart the digital life of the community from the economic bottom up, to look at all aspects of community life that are actual, which can also be virtual. If the community is analog and the rest of the society is digital, there are serious implications over the long term," Alkalimat said.

GSLIS professor Kate Williams shared current research that could contribute to the establishment of ongoing national models for community informatics research. Another BAC board member discussed the exclusion of C-U's historically-black community from decision-making about major infrastructure and real estate development. As a result of this discussion, the committee agreed to support a community-wide forum on broadband access, specifically reaching out to local citizens who would benefit from the initiative.



**GSLIS Professor
Kate Williams**

The first forum met on April 25, 2009, at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science to discuss how the broadband stimulus can serve local needs, how to transform C-U into a national leader of community informatics, and how these improvements in access can increase quality of life for all members of the community. Meeting organizers reached out to churches, parent-teacher organizations, trade unions, librarians, parents, students, schools, social service agencies, farmers, farm workers, youth organizations and gangs, hip hop heads and all kinds of cultural producers, businesses, and political leadership at all levels, with a call to join the information revolution. The goal of the meeting was to help create a common vision and build networks of community organizations to carry out a program of action.

More information on this movement can be found at <http://cuopenaccess.org/>.

Professor Bishop Named University Scholar



**GSLIS Professor
Ann Bishop**

Professor Ann Bishop, co-director of the Community Informatics Initiative, is one of six UIUC faculty members to be recognized as a University Scholar this year. The University Scholars program was created in 1985 to honor outstanding faculty and provide them with career development funding. Professor Bishop will receive \$10,000 per year over the next three years to be used for travel, equipment, research assistants, books or other purposes.

"To me, the award speaks to the university's civic commitment, the importance we place on meaningful research and learning partnerships with communities such as north Champaign, East St. Louis, and Paseo Boricua in Chicago," Bishop said. "The award is especially meaningful to me as recognition of the innovative approach to scholarship fostered in GSLIS. It also acknowledges the important contributions of our community partners to generating new knowledge crucial to the life of the academy and to society at large. While the award marks one point in time, I am forever grateful to all my colleagues, including the incredible young people I've met all over, for their ongoing contributions to what is truly a collective endeavor."

University Vice President for Academic Affairs, Mrinalini "Meena" Chatta Rao said the University scholar designation is awarded for overall excellence, not for a specific project. Professor Bishop was recognized for a record of scholarly research, teaching and community engagement work that reaches back more than a decade at University of Illinois. Specific accomplishments included co-founding the Community Informatics Initiative (2007) and Prairienet (1994), one of the longest running freenets in the country; starting the Student Opportunities for After-school Resources (SOAR) program (formerly the Booker T. Washington After School Program); the Paseo Boricua Community Library Action Research Project; and creating the Community Informatics (CI) master's program.

The Launch of CI Reflections

The Community Informatics Initiative launched their new blog this March with the title "CI Reflections." Contributors to the blog are primarily students involved with community informatics, in addition to occasional posts from faculty and staff. The contributors to the blog cover a variety of topics from observations of community informatics in their daily life to reflections on interesting events they have attended. With a number of subscribers and contributors, the blog has already produced a lively atmosphere and plenty of dialogue for anyone wishing to participate.



CII encourages everyone to visit the blog and sign up as a subscriber today! The blog is located at: <http://blog.lis.uiuc.edu/imlscic/> or can be reached through the CII Web site at <http://www.cii.uiuc.edu>.

Highlights from the Third Annual EChicago Symposium



The third annual eChicago symposium, entitled “Cyber-navigating our Cultures,” brought together representatives from public libraries, local government, and academia to talk about how institutions and communities across Chicagoland are participating in the digital age. The symposium

took place on April 2-3 at Dominican University in River Forest, IL. Featured speakers included Steve Jones, Professor and Associate Dean, University of Illinois at Chicago, presenting survey data on Internet communications in immigrant communities, and Carolyn Anthony, director of Skokie Public Library, presenting on the innovative services that her library has developed for the Skokie community over the past several years. Panel speakers included community activists and those leading community-based networking initiatives, researchers, entrepreneurs and practitioners such as librarians and Cybernavigators.

“The Cybernavigators of Chicago Public Library” panel featured Cybernavigator Program Director, Roberto Pang, and Cybernavigators from five branch libraries, including recent GSLIS graduate, Anita Mechler. Pang gave some brief background of the purpose and history of the program, which began in early 2008 with a Chicago Public Library Foundation grant. This program aims to get patrons in low-resource neighborhoods online. The Cybernavigators are part-time employees of the foundation who provide one-on-one assistance and group training for patrons who need help with basic computer literacy. The group shared their experiences helping connect patrons to digital resources and teaching digital-age survival skills, and provided some inspiring examples of how their work has impacted their patrons’ lives.



GSLIS student Safiya Noble

CII research assistant and GSLIS master’s student, Safiya Noble, gave a talk on her thoughts about community informatics. She posed some key questions about the effects of information and communication technologies on “free culture,” and how we can work to put the means of digital production into the hands of the people. She brought an interesting perspective to the digital divide conversation: people of color are not always on the wrong side of the digital divide; they are often early adopters of technology.

Willie Cade of PC Rebuilders & Recyclers (PCRR) talked about his work with refurbishing old computer equipment and reselling it at an affordable cost to individuals, schools and international aid organizations. Cade also teaches a course on e-waste at the University of Illinois. He revealed some exciting research on new uses for e-waste, including using computer magnets attached to bicycle spokes to power computers in off-the-grid locations.



In the closing panel, E-Chicago organizer and GSLIS professor Kate Williams wrapped up the day’s events with the notion that Chicago, in light of the recent historical events such as the 2008 election and \$7 billion broadband stimulus funds, is in a unique position to be a leader in innovative uses of technology in communities and cyberdemocracy.

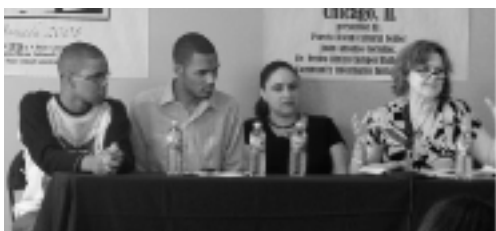
Participatory GIS for Empowering Low-Resource Communities

Work continues on Professor Jon Gant's "Participatory GIS" research project (GIS stands for Geographic Information System). Gant and his research team, master's students Jeanie Austin, Sarah Jackman, Karishma Muntashir, Yingbo Zhou, and undergraduate Danielle Ross, have been hard at work creating maps of three project sites: East St. Louis, IL, the North Lawndale neighborhood in Chicago, IL, and São Tomé, West Africa. The maps, which contain information about many community issues, from Internet access to local government services, education, healthcare, and more, show the distribution of resources across regions and communities. The plan is to share the information with the public in order to enhance community participation in decision-making.

This research study examines how citizen participation can be further enhanced to improve the effectiveness of participatory GIS tools in communities. By evaluating factors that contribute to user acceptance of GIS, Gant's team hopes to propose a model of how to incorporate elements of social participation and Web 2.0 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0) to support models of citizens' participation in community decision-making. The project uses a participatory approach to ensure that citizen feedback is reflected in decisions affecting their community. The researchers will use community members' knowledge to understand problems of Internet and information access and to design a GIS application to improve collaborative decision-making, providing research results to community groups.

The team has identified two issues critical to the success of this project. First, they must ensure that the maps do not become static -- they must enable individuals to share knowledge, analyze and create data, contribute their own experiences, and be empowered to engage other citizens and policy-makers to shape the policies regarding the development and operation of information access in their community. Second, they must incorporate practices to facilitate knowledge-sharing among the community of users. They must help community members overcome knowledge barriers, and build skills in the community to help support whatever system is implemented.

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Panel members at last year's symposium

Additionally, there will be workshops on organizing local knowledge through community archiving and cataloging, films and documentaries on Paseo Boricua, and a performance by Café Teatro Batey Urbano entitled *Crime Against Humanity*.

In conjunction with the conference, Professor Ann Bishop will be teaching LIS 590 Community Information Systems. Enrollment is open to graduate students in any department or community credit students with the professor's permission. This course is offered for two credit hours, and students are required to attend the conference, but at a discounted rate. For more information on the class, visit <http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/oc/courses/coursedetail.html?id=LIS590CIO&year=2009&semester=S2>.

Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDUs) will also be available.

For additional information and registration information please visit <http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/programs/cpd/CIS2009>.

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May Berenbaum (pictured left), Professor, Department of Entomology; **David Forsyth**, Professor, Department of Computer Science; **George Reese**, Director, MSTE, College of Education
Project Title: **BeeSpotter in the Classroom and Community**

This project provides a mechanism to apply cyberinfrastructure to teaching and learning biology. BeeSpotter is a citizen-science, Internet-based bee monitoring project started in 2007 as a way to systematically address the documentation of pollinator status. The current phase will include more bee families in Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin in partnership with local schools, UI extension, Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, and the St. Louis Zoo. To scale up regionally, the project will develop image-recognition software to automate bee identification.

Ian Brooks (pictured right), Research Scientist, National Center of Supercomputing Applications
Project Title: **Culture-Sensitive Interface Design for an Endemic Disease Information System**



This project will examine the impact of graphical user interfaces on the ease of use and understanding of an advanced information system for the control of endemic disease. Conducted in collaboration with CII and partners on the island of São Tomé, the study also will inform related projects, including the production of an information system to help control malaria in Kenya.



Ruth Nicole Brown (pictured left), Assistant Professor, Gender and Women's Studies and Educational Policy Studies
Project Title: **When I Look At You: Portraits and Performances of Black Girlhood in Everyday Life**

How does power and powerlessness shape the experiences of black girls? By working in educational settings to critique representations of black girlhood and creating new ways of seeing black girls through multi-media theatrical performances based on participants' lived experiences, this project continues the compelling collaborations that have been nurtured over the past several years. The funding will be used to enhance the use of multi-media technologies in theatrical performances, the instruction of critical media literacy skills, and the production of digital media art (photography) and communicative forums (website) in Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT).

Lynne M. Dearborn (pictured right), Assistant Professor, School of Architecture
Project Title: **Community Housing Needs Assessment for Metro East St. Louis**



This project will employ a service-learning model in research-based courses in architecture to bring together various types of community and regional housing data to create a web-based tool that will make these data easily accessible and useful for housing advocates and service providers in the Metro East St. Louis area. These courses and this research will be conducted through the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP). By working with ESLARP's community housing partners and facilitating access to current data and analyses, Professor Dearborn and her students will collaborate with partners in East St. Louis to address pressing questions about conditions of housing and homelessness in the area.



Rebecca J. Ginsburg (pictured left), assistant professor, Landscape Architecture
Project Title: **A Safe Space for Learning: Creating a Higher Education Community at a Medium-High Security Illinois Prison**

The Education Justice Project (EJP) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign operates a college-in-prison program at Danville Correctional Center (DCC). The program operates a Resource Room, a multipurpose center that includes a library, computer lab, study hall, and tutoring center.

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The seed funds will be used to “bolster the social and intellectual benefits that are delivered to EJP students through the Resource Room.” Through partnerships with Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, the Office of Continuing Education, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the home departments of the program’s instructors, EJP offers four upper-division courses in the prison’s education building. It is the only program of its kind in Illinois.



Laura Lawson (pictured left), Director of East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP); Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture
Project Title: **Participatory Design to Revitalize Public Space in São Tomé, West Africa**

Funding will support curriculum development for an interdisciplinary, international community-engaged design studio. Residents in São Tomé and Príncipe will help design, planning and engineering students to redesign Independence Plaza and its adjacent seawall and street. The project will involve historical research as well.

Deana McDonagh (pictured right), Associate Professor, Department of Industrial Design; Gender and Women’s Studies; Beckman Institute; **Susann Heft Sears**, Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services, Applied Health Sciences; **M. Lydia Khuri**, Program Coordinator, Housing Division



Project Title: **Disability + Relevant Design—Social Inclusion Component**

The “Disability + Relevant Design” course will be revised to engage a wider student population beyond design majors. The assignments for the course will focus on the creation of technologies that will increase community-based leisure participation for people with disabilities. Field trips will highlight challenges that people with disabilities face in daily experience.



Stephen J. Notaro (pictured left), Lecturer, Kinesiology & Community Health
Project Title: **GIS Analysis of Patient Origin and Diagnosis at a Free Health Clinic**

Geographic Information System (GIS) software will help map the addresses of approximately 4000 clients and their diagnosed health conditions from the Champaign County Christian Health Center (CCCHC), a free health center in Champaign, Illinois. This research will provide insights and assist decision-making through understanding patient origin, clusters of conditions, patient barriers to care, and service to rural and metropolitan residents. This analysis will provide the researchers and the CCCHC information on how to provide more effective health services to the uninsured in a clinic setting and reduce the overcrowding in hospital emergency rooms.

Lisette M. Piedra (pictured right), Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
Project Title: **Puentes y Estrellas del Mar: Using Community Informatics to Build Enduring Service Infrastructures in New Growth Communities**



This project envisions a community-organizing model for service providers in new growth immigrant communities throughout Illinois and the nation. The Latino Partnership of Champaign County (LPCC) and the University of Illinois will team up to build a Web site for community-specific information that will serve as both a repository of knowledge and an instrument for community building and problem-solving at the local level. In addition, a new service learning component within an existing social work course--cross-listed with Latino/Latina Studies and the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies--will be created to benefit UI students and the local Latino community.

Award to GSLIS Alum from Haiti

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GSLIS alumna
Dr. Elisabeth Pierre-Louis

In April 2009, the 2008 Charles C. Stewart International Young Humanitarian Award was presented to **Dr. Elisabeth Pierre-Louis**, a University of Illinois alumna who received her master's in Library and Information Science in 2003. Sponsored by the associate provost for international affairs, this award was established in 2005 to recognize the accomplishments of university alums under 35 years of age who have dedicated themselves to international service. Dr. Pierre-Louis attended the International Awards Banquet on campus in Champaign and also spoke at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science the day before the banquet in a presentation entitled "Yes to Books, Youth and Reading against Exclusion in Haiti."

After completion of her library science degree, Dr. Pierre-Louis went on to study at the University of Paris X, Nanterre, and obtained her PhD in demography in July 2004. Then Dr. Pierre-Louis returned to Haiti and accepted a position as Library Program Coordinator for the Fondation Connaissance et Liberté/Fondasyon Konesans Ak Libète (FOKAL <http://www.fokal.org/>). FOKAL is an independent organization that works to provide a range of economic and educational opportunities in Haiti, especially for women and children. Dr. Pierre-Louis coordinates the training and management of staff in 45 community libraries across Haiti. Many of these communities are difficult to reach due to mountainous terrain and poor roads, so Dr. Pierre-Louis spends many hours traveling in order to visit the facilities.

In her lecture, Pierre-Louis spoke about the place of books, reading, and youth in Haitian society today. One key question for her organization is, with half the Haitian population under 18 years of age, how should libraries address their reading needs in order to nurture and prepare this young population for their future? She highlighted various ways that FOKAL encourages involvement with learning, through book clubs, family-friendly festivals, theatrical performances, and gardening. Haitians also have the problem of access to books in Creole. She stressed the importance of support to those in Haiti from individuals and groups, such as Haitians living abroad and Africans who supply books in French as well as organizations like Librarians without Borders (<http://www.lwb-online.org/>) and the Open Society Institute (<http://www.soros.org/>).

Community Informatics Initiative

Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
501 East Daniel Street
Champaign, IL 61820 USA
<http://www.cii.uiuc.edu>
Email cii@illinois.edu
Telephone 217.333.3280
Fax 217.244.3302



I L L I N O I S
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF **LIBRARY AND**
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