A SEMESTER TO REMEMBER

BY SCOTT TRUEX, DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Spring 2020 was one of the strangest semesters in my 40-year history at Ball State. The sudden transition to online teaching and learning created many challenges for both faculty and students. Being with students over spring break continued on next page

OUR GRADS:

SARAH MURRAY
LOGAN LANE
PATTY SALGADO
HANNAH MORAN
JACK TREBER
CATHERINE REYNOLDS
COLTON MARVEL
MICHAEL TERRONEZ
in El Paso and studying immigration issues as Covid-19 was ramping up may have heightened my anxiety. The idea that we might need an alternative route back to Muncie due to canceled flights was an overshadowing thought.

The week after break was highlighted by a visit from Mayor Knox White talking about the success of downtown Greenville, SC, which made the transition seem even more abrupt.

We had the weekend to transition to online content, and our students and faculty worked to make the best of this challenging situation. You can read some of their stories in the pages of this newsletter.

I am grateful to many alumni who took time out to meet with PLAN 100 students in small groups via WebEx and Zoom. The commitment by over twenty alumni during the craziness of spring semester made these interviews even more gratifying. We also began recording presentations on “What do planners do?” as part of PLAN 100. We usually have alumni come to class to share their careers with students, but those visits were cut short this semester, of course. We are starting a library of these interviews. Please consider adding your story to the collection.

The pandemic, racial justice, and social equity are current topics critical for all of us and especially future planners and designers. We all are trying to understand how communities will be changing: obviously, many of you are at the forefront of these changes. We need your stories and observations as part of our continued growth as a department. We are just beginning a conversation with alumni on how best to engage in a path to lead communities forward around justice and inclusion issues. Please consider how you can assist us in preparing the next generation of UP grads in this transition.

Many of you were part of past trips to Baltimore and other cities that challenged our perceptions and understanding of urban communities. We need to hear from you how these experiences helped shape your education and how we can continue to improve our program. I have been reflecting on my own experiences and am so thankful for what I have learned through relationships with people who are different from me. "Black lives that matter to me" is how I choose to reflect on so many people who have poured into BSU students and me.

Our summary of the spring semester in this volume seeks to give you a variety of reflections and updates on faculty and students’ activities. Please be well and stay safe.
Statement on social justice

The Department of Urban Planning at Ball State University is committed to a learning environment of diversity and inclusion, while promoting values of equity and social justice.

We mourn the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many other African Americans killed by the police. We believe that Black lives matter, and that by recognizing this, we support the value and dignity of all. We also mourn more than 110,000 Americans who died due to Covid-19 and the disproportionate impact this has had on vulnerable populations, workers who could not quarantine, and especially historically marginalized groups. These deaths exposed violence, injustice and inequity in America.

We recognize that planners have a role in creating or allowing systemic racism, violence, injustice and inequity. It is manifest in designs for the built environment, in development practice, in transportation access, in infrastructure siting, in housing policy, in finance, and in the location of polluting industry. We recognize our duty and responsibility to do better by revealing and challenging the inequities and injustices that exist. We must use our agency and position to support historically marginalized groups. In doing so, we defend the public interest.

Our faculty, staff, students and alumni engage, as advocates, as technical assistants, and as scholars working in communities across the state of Indiana and beyond. As such, we share responsibility for these problems. As a department we pledge to do better.

Announcing our fall book club

This fall, we will introduce a “Department Reader” – a book we will read together. The CAP Diversity and Inclusion Committee generated a list of books, and as a department, we will start with White Fragility by Robin Diangelo. We welcome alumni to join our online discussions. Contact us at planning@bsu.edu or follow us on social media for details. Freshmen in PLAN 100 will read a similar book to emphasize the importance of justice and inclusion in the profession. Ideally, we will send books out this summer to students. The undertaking will require $2,000; we are looking for partner firms, agencies, or individuals to help us implement these programs through sponsorships.

donate
connect.bsu.edu/18/give
2020 HEEF CASE CHALLENGE: WINNING REMOTELY
BY JEB REECE, BUPD 2020

After an exciting win in the 2019 NAIOP-ULI Real Estate competition, our team was looking forward to participating in the 2020 Harold E. Eisnenberg Foundation (HEEF) Case Challenge. The team, consisting of Jeffery Tompkins, Jacob McQueen, Alex Pope, and myself, was guided by Dr. Bruce Frankel.

The project site was six blocks in downtown Chicago, formerly owned by Moody Bible Institute (MBI). MBI is in the process of selling the site as they continue to focus on their core campus just east of the area. The challenge was split in two parts. The first was to develop the site using the highest and best uses. The second was to design a master plan for MBI’s core campus. The five of us visited the site one blustery Saturday before spring break.

Uncertainty set in after spring break, as the Covid-19 pandemic began shutting down classes, events, and stores. Even as classes ceased, we continued our work on the project. The Foundation reached out to us with a plan less than a week after classes were canceled. Our final presentation would be held virtually via Zoom. Our team adapted accordingly. In the weeks leading up to the project deadline, we worked remotely from our homes in South Bend, Fishers, and Muncie.

Our proposal included a two-phase approach. To begin, MBI would retain ownership of the land and become an equity partner in the project. Phase I called for the construction of a 73-story mixed-income residential high-rise. Profits from the top 20 floors, for-sale luxury condos that offered skyline and lake views, subsidized affordable units in the lower part of the building. Affordability was a reoccurring theme throughout the project.

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WINNING REMOTELY

Phase II included the construction of two office/residential buildings (affordable housing included) as well as a hotel. In total, our project would produce 500 affordable housing units. Our team felt that this component was critical because of the growing wealth inequality and gentrification in urban places like Chicago. Throughout the plan, implementation of good urbanist practices, like complete streets, were incorporated. To cap-off the proposal, our campus master plan featured a new student center and added connectivity throughout the campus.

Collaborating remotely was a challenge at first. After a couple of days of texting, calling, e-mailing and “Zooming,” we were able to establish a path to completion and work out how to collaborate effectively. Dr. Frankel proved to be an amazing component in this aspect. He wasted no time coming to terms with the new normal, establishing lucid communication through email, call, and Zoom. In the final days before our presentation, we met with Dr. Frankel via Zoom five times, as he challenged us to improve our project to near perfection. Just as he guided us in the earlier NAIOP competition and in our studio class, Dr. Frankel once again helped us apply our education and achieve success.

In the end, we received honorable mention, placing in the top three of seven schools. This was Ball State’s first time competing in this competition. We were up against the likes of Indiana University, University of Illinois, and Notre Dame. While we did not receive the accolades of first place, we did tackle these uncertain times with confidence, representing our university in a winning capacity for the second time in a single academic year.
SPRING BREAK AT THE BORDER

Students traveled to El Paso in March after spending eight weeks studying border issues and immigration.

BY ERICK PORTILLO, BUPD 2021

What I learned from my spring break trip to El Paso is the importance of having a sense of community and having a place in which community members can meet when it comes to the progress of a neighborhood. During my time at Ball State, I have learned that Urban Planning is much more than the practice of consulting and adapting laws and regulations that improve the quality and functionality of a city. That is, that Urban Planning also revolves around the creation and support of a community. My educators have given us the opportunity to work with communities and have given us a firsthand look at how meeting with the public is vital for a successful or well-favored plan.

The collaborations we witnessed opened my eyes to the importance of working with organizations, particularly churches, when it comes to having the ability to perform immediate action to help the community. The planning process may be held up by bureaucratic systems which may take a while to resolve while churches can receive immediate input from the community and act on those needs within a reasonable amount of time. I hope to implement a balance of both towards my professional practice as I want to help communities with a grassroots approach.
CHARRETTE GRAPHICS ONLINE?

BY LOHREN DEEG, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

History And Beginnings

The term “charrette,” from the French for “little cart” has been adopted by design-based planning professionals in the last 50 years as a way to build consensus with regard to a community’s future, growing from the Rural and Urban Design Assistance Team project launched by the American Institute of Architects in 1967 and continuing with the recent Sustainable Design Assistance Team initiative (SDAT). The department has a long tradition of using the charrette process as a public service to a state-wide constituency and as an immersive learning opportunity for students.

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At right: I use the overlay-and-trace steps outlined in Jim Leggitt’s Drawing Shortcuts: Developing Quick Drawing Skills Using Today’s Technology and solicit student participation for revisions as the drawing’s layers are made, modeling Stanley King’s “Co-Design” process of public participation to craft the final image.

STUDENTS PERSEVERE

BY KIYA MULLINS, MURP 2020

When I heard charrette graphics would be online, I was extremely nervous. Online classes have never been my thing. In the past, I have only gotten through them because of the amount of time I’ve spent struggling to understand instead of the actual work I’ve gotten through. I took charrette graphics because I wanted to improve in a skill I am not particularly good at, so now here I was trying to do it in a way that I never really learned from.

But as I started to watch the videos and work on the drawings, my nervousness started to go away. When I couldn’t keep up with Prof. Deeg, I’d just stop the video or re-watch a segment. Throughout the transition, Prof. Deeg was understanding of the crazy situation, which also brought me comfort. I knew I could contact him if I needed help. In the end, this semester did not go as I had hoped in the slightest, but this class online was a pleasant experience that gave me the ability to work at my own pace and according to my own schedule.
Conversations With Alumni

The course has generated some long-term correspondence with alumni and practitioners on the subject of hand drawing and its continued relevance in the design process as technological tools, hardware, and software continue to evolve. The role of sketching in the early stages of the design process, as well as in design development and construction administration, reveal an opportunity for the charrette process and thinking to be relevant.

The opportunity to quickly generate ideas within a creative team, rapidly communicate with clients or contractors, or build consensus with the public are three areas in which the learning objectives of the course continue to be practiced. Daniel Greenfield, a BUPD and MUD alumnus of Ball State, shared some insights on how the charrette process is used in his current employment at a global engineering firm. Greenfield said the members of his military base planning team can quickly generate concepts and alternatives before applying them in a CAD (computer aided design) platform. When speaking about a recent internal team charrette, he stated emphatically that: “The importance of drawing concepts by hand before reaching for a computer mouse cannot be stressed enough in the corporate world.”

When questioned on the subject if charrette style drawings and timelines expressed alternatives and options better or faster, Greenfield replied that the methods were: “...definitely faster to get all (of) your ideas out there. (A charrette) allows management to see your ideas and correct course without messing with the preciseness of CAD/computer. Also, it allows the designer to be more creative on the fly by not being restricted by computer software tools/processes. A drawing can't crash on you... however, you can crash on a drawing.”

The elective course in charrette style graphics in its current format is now in its tenth year. Over 200 undergraduate and graduate students of architecture, urban planning, urban design, historic preservation, landscape architecture, and interior design have enrolled in the course over this period. As new technologies for sketching and drawing emerge, and new forms of public participation arise, this course has evolved into the online offerings following Covid-19.

Demonstrations have been recorded and shared to YouTube, and in-class pin-ups have been replaced on platforms such as ConceptBoard by Siemens Inc. (below). I am confident that students and alumni of these professional disciplines who seek these skills will be ready for the challenges and needs of the professions and public that they represent, particularly in the highly collaborative and distance-ready situations that we are sure to see.
BY SARAH MURRAY, BUPD 2020

If someone told me my senior year would be ending with a pandemic, I would have never believed them. This pandemic has changed the last two months of my college career immensely with classes moving to online, graduation being cancelled, leaving all my friends two months earlier than planned, and job searching.

Job searching in particular is becoming more nerve racking because potential employers are holding back/delaying the hiring process for the safety of themselves and candidates. This is the right decision, but as a new graduate, I am not sure where I will be or if I will be employed when my diploma is finally dropped in the mail.

Although there are many upsets with this pandemic, there have been some positives that have come from it. I realized that I have made some of the best friends I could have imagined while at Ball State, especially in the Urban Planning Department. Although I have moved back home with my family, I still talk to my best friends. Another positive is that the world has seen a tremendous increase in air quality in cities with everyone only leaving home for essential items. It may seem like a lot of things are going downhill, but this pandemic has shown the importance of family, friends, and taking care of ourselves so we can all get through the difficult times.
Under the threat of Covid-19, Ball State closed, and all the classes have been transferred to online classes. As an international student, this has caused a big change for my life in the US as well as for the other international students. As a student from China, where the disease was first detected, I have access to the information from both China and America, so the situation seemed complicated to me.

In the first two months of 2020, which was the worst time for the epidemic in China, like many Chinese international students, I was worried about the Chinese situation and shared the nervous emotion with all the Chinese people. At the same time, I got a chance to know the harm of the disease, so when the virus started to spread in the US, I was more nervous than my classmates. I was hoping the school would take action to protect everyone on campus, but I also worried about how my life would be if the school closed.

In the middle of March when the situation became worse in the US, the university shut down. The situation in Indiana was not very bad; staying at home would be enough to protect people from the virus. However, for most international students one challenge from the virus was the access to the grocery because many of us do not have cars. Luckily, friends and faculty have generously assisted so I could avoid the bus.

As the virus spread, many international students chose to go back to their home countries. After comparing expenses, the risks of flying and the relatively safe life in Muncie, I chose to stay.

Online classes have given me freedom to manage my time, but they also reduced my chance to communicate with professors and my classmates. It has created some difficulties with group assignments that needed lots of communication. Some of the face-to-face classes became recorded video from professors. The advantages of this was that a student could make the speed of the class suit their understanding process, but it seems difficult for the online classes to achieve the quality that the normal class have because the in-person communication is not easily available. For this issue, it was helpful to ask questions by email.

As I write this during finals week, it seems like we’ve all made the best of the situation. I am hopeful the worst of the virus has passed us by.
CAP FIRST YEAR ONLINE? NOT A PROBLEM FOR FIRST-TIME INSTRUCTOR

BY CATHERINE REYNOLDS, INSTRUCTOR, BUPD 2012, MURP 2020

My name is Catherine Reynolds and I was given the honorable position of an adjunct instructor for the Department of Urban Planning this Spring 2020 semester. Yes, this semester. The one where April decided to last for four years, instead of its regular thirty days.

Thank goodness for Christine Rhine (department coordinator), Scott Truex (department chair), and Taylor Metz (CAP first-year coordinator) for pulling together to make the Covid-19 crisis a relatively smooth transition and for checking in on our sanity status often. Working here was also aided by the architecture and landscape architecture departments. Natalie Yates (in LA) made Zoom easy to understand and has provided so much insight into other ways to use computers to bridge the teaching gap that I would have been lost without her.

The CAP first-year team is a tight-knit crew that made this semester go from being a scary roller coaster ride to a bonding experience via an impromptu technology boot camp. Teaching online instead of in person was a big adjustment. Studio courses, for instance, are four hours long and meet three times per week and make up the backbone of the curriculum. Site model photography, project boards, and presentations took some time to translate into an online medium, but we learned it could be done with some creativity and effort. Zoom is an intuitive medium that lends itself to screen sharing and presentation recordings, whether for a teacher instructing a class or a student sharing a project.

Participation points morphed from effort in class to signing up on a Google doc to check individual progress. The students were more motivated if there were participation points in it for them, so every meeting added one point towards their final score. A phone app called GroupMe lent itself to quick contact beyond email, and online discussion boards enabled posted responses to video lessons that students could pause and rewind. I have yet to join the ranks of TikTok or Snapchat, but I am grateful to have access to computers, phones, and decent internet bandwidth.

The good news is that my students’ communication and writing skills are getting better by the week in a digital age that might have otherwise never required them. Students are wielding their new skills to host their own meetings and to visit with friends and family. I was lucky to not “lose” any students during this transition, but quiet students have also gotten quieter. It was a strange first semester, but I have also signed up for BSU’s Remote Teaching Bootcamp to stay ahead of the curve for summer. Overall, my students and I are discovering what the “new normal” looks like.
I have been away from Ball State this academic year, enjoying a sabbatical which has made it possible to concentrate on writing a book on Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka. Mine will be the first book on Colombo but, more significantly, building on my previous books, it will approach the city from local people’s perspectives. So far only two books on cities have attempted this approach, and I will critically build on them and on the postcolonial urbanism paradigm that I took part in developing at the turn of this century.

During my discussion with Springer about publishing the book, I received a delightful response: The editor asked me to write a book every year for the next 10 years and promised to publish them. This was a great honor.

2019, a few leading scholars in historic preservation sought my input into their work. This came out as a conceptual chapter, “Historic Landscapes in Rapidly Transforming Asian Cities” in the Routledge Handbook on Historic Urban Landscapes in the Asia-Pacific. Most pleasing this year is the Royal Academy in Bhutan inviting me to help improve research in Bhutan’s universities. Bhutan is well known for its alternative to economic growth that we take as development. It adopted Happiness as Development which is currently popular across the world including in the United States. I was simply an ardent scholar of this paradigm. To further investigate, I visited Thimphu, the capital, in summer of 2014 and met the former prime minister who developed and popularized this idea originally prompted by the king.

I use this concept, along with development as freedom (Amartya Sen), the sufficiency (Thailand), and wellbeing (New Zealand) models in my work and in classes at Ball State. Inviting me to improve research, especially qualitative research, in Bhutan’s Royal Academy is the greatest honor so far. However, the project which was slated for April 2020 is stalled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the meantime, I am restructuring their academic journal and reviewing articles for it until the situation settles.
Hunan University in Changsha, China, wants to tap into my expertise in the theory and practice of People’s Spaces, my latest book. After inviting me to deliver a keynote speech in September, the university extended an invitation to teach a class in December-January. Also, Anant National University in Ahmedabad, India, invited me to teach a class on qualitative methods and social justice. While the class in China is still stalled due to Covid-19, the class in India is currently being conducted over the internet, from April 20, 2020. The impact of my research has gone beyond the scholarly world, reaching the practice field. Last year, two newspapers interviewed me about my views on national and community development in Sri Lanka, and my views were included in four videos. One short video is viewed by 14,000. I was also invited to speak to several activist groups.

As for me, I am stuck in curfew in Sri Lanka; it has kept me indoors for five weeks now. I realized how badly the daily wage earners and low-income people are affected. This can kill more people than the disaster itself and no one will even report. I was able to help a little an effort to provide some dry foods to the poor people in Colombo who are not helped by the government or the NGOs. Otherwise, I am using this time to research and write the book about Colombo.
Shopping centers in the U.S. are gasping for air. Not all of them are in distress, but there are enough of them struggling to warrant concern. Urban planners have a role to play in their resuscitation. First, let’s diagnose the cause of the ailment and then proffer a cure.

Shopping malls were struggling before Covid-19 and will continue to do so even after the economy opens up. Several reasons have been advanced to explain the plight of shopping malls. Ecommerce is often cited as the progenitor. As online sales have grown, this has decreased the need for in-person shopping. Those goods that are most impacted by online sales are clothing, apparel, and accessories. The 2019 fourth quarter report of the US Department of Commerce showed that ecommerce sales represented 11.4 percent of total retail sales. This increased by 17 percent from the previous year and is projected to rise into the future, impacting the health of brick and mortar shops.

There has also been a change in the shopping preferences of consumers towards service and experience and away from what shopping malls provide, consumer goods. The Bureau of Economic Analysis, which provides data on personal consumption expenditure (PCE), reported that PCE in the fourth quarter of 2019 was $14.795 trillion. Two-thirds of this expenditure was on services such as health care. One-fifth was spent on non-durable goods such as food and clothing, and the rest went to durable goods. Since malls provide mainly durable and non-durable goods, this shift in personal consumption expenditure is bound to impact the health of malls.

Another reason for the predicament of shopping malls is simply that the U.S. has been over retailed. In other words, we have more retail space than is needed. In research I conducted on shopping malls, I found that while the U.S. has 9.8 square feet of gross

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leasable area (GLA) of shopping malls per capita the GLA/capita in the 28 European Union countries is 3.4, and for Greater Europe it is 2.9 GLA/capita. A retrenchment is the market’s response to the oversupply of retail space.

The polarization of income has also affected the health of shopping malls. In their publication, Hollowing Out: The Channels of Income Polarization in the United States, Ali Alichi and Rodrigo Mariscal pointed out that middle income households, that is those earning between 50 percent and 150 percent of the median income, has shrunk. In 1968 this income group represented 58 percent of the population but decreased to 48 percent of the population in 2016. Thus there are fewer households with disposable incomes to spend in malls. Unsurprisingly, the shopping malls that continue to do well are those in high income neighborhoods while dollar stores have also proliferated to cater to lower income households.

While not significant, there has also been a reurbanization of cities. The return to city centers is led by millennials and empty nesters. As older neighborhoods get gentrified, first ring suburban neighborhoods witness a decline in population. These were the same neighborhoods that had a building boom of shopping malls in the twentieth century and are now seeing a shrinking of their population.

Covid-19 is compounding the problems of shopping malls. When the economy re-opens, the psychology of risk aversion will lead shoppers to avoid crowded places and large gatherings, so businesses that depend on these attributes will be the last to bounce back. Main Street will see a quicker rebound than shopping malls as small businesses provide a quick in and out for customers. Construction work that is done in the open air, boutique restaurants with sidewalk cafes, and white-collar office work will be some of the businesses that will have a jumpstart because they are perceived to have less risk of infection. The public will initially be wary of patronizing places where crowds gather such as sports stadiums, music festivals, and yes, shopping malls. So the struggle of malls will linger until there is a vaccine for Covid-19.

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Meagan Tuttle, BUPD ’10, MURP ’11, was featured in the BSU online magazine this semester for her work leading Burlington, Vt., through the Covid-19 crisis. Read about it at magazine.bsu.edu
Urban planners will be needed to assist in making decisions in what will be an economic triage of shopping malls; which malls will survive and which should be let go because they are too far gone to be resuscitated. The one thing that is certain is that shopping malls cannot survive on the altar of retail alone, they must be multi-purpose destinations. In this respect, planners can assist in researching and identifying alternative uses for vacant spaces in shopping malls. American Dream, the largest shopping mall in the country, recently opened in New Jersey and provides a good example of this form of development, what has been termed the lifestyle center approach to repurposing shopping malls. Developed by Triple Five, the mall is designed to be a multi-purpose venue that includes retail, a theme and water park, an indoor ski slope, and an aquarium.

Shopping malls have traditionally been built as isolated fortresses surrounded by a sea of parking and detached from the environment in which they are located. This will need to change to increase pedestrian access to the malls and to capture the local residential market as part of the redevelopment strategy. This approach is being used by the city of Edina, Minn., to help revitalize the Southdale Mall. In addition to repurposing the old mall into a mixed-use destination of retail, luxury apartments, hotel, and restaurants, the city of Edina is also pursuing complementary development through a neighborhood redevelopment plan that will create high-density residential housing near the mall. It is also investing in pedestrian and bike infrastructure to support a live-work-play redevelopment theme for the neighborhood.

City planners will also be needed to provide design alternatives to enclosed malls, opening them up to allow entry to the shops from outside rather than through the enclosed courtyard. In some cases, the courtyard can be transformed into an open air plaza or common green space, providing a social gathering space that adds to the shopping experience. This will have the added effect of decreasing crowding in shopping malls and the fear of infection in crowded places when the economy opens up. Removal of the interior common area also decreases the cost for lighting, heating and cooling for developers, a much-needed cost savings in this time of austerity. The former East Brook Mall, now Centerpointe Mall, in Grand Rapids, Mich., exemplifies this approach to the revitalization of shopping malls.

In some cases, city planners may come to the realization that the cure may be worse than the illness, and some shopping malls have to be demolished despite their best efforts. To avoid burdening taxpayers with the cost of these demolitions, cities may have to start requiring developers to post long-term bonds as security for insuring the public investment in these malls and to pay for their eventual demolition when they outlive their shelf life.
Ball State urban planners have worked with community members to create an innovative mediation program to help renters and landlords negotiate difficulties in payments, housing repairs, and other issues. The program will launch this summer in Delaware County Courts and is one of four proposals in various stages of implementation to improve rental housing conditions.

John West, assistant professor of urban planning, has wrapped his graduate-level Qualitative Methods and Social Justice class around the concept of housing justice for three years, teaming up with renters, landlords, and experts at PathStone, Habitat for Humanity, the southside 8Twelve Coalition, and Avondale United Methodist Church.

In April his students presented four programs, including the renter-landlord mediation program, during a webinar attended by more than 40 city and county government officials, non-profit executives and real-estate professionals. It was a culmination of a semester’s work for them, but the ideas have been percolating through West’s work for three years.

The work is animated by deep connections with and the participation of residents who face eviction. Previous classes have met in a church basement with renters and landlords participating in class activities. Some renters live in rental housing with caved-in walls and no heat or have predatory landlords, West said.

Earnest and frustrated landlords who seek a level playing field—one in which they are not competing with slumlords—were also participants in the classes’ work.

“What I’ve learned from three years of working with the community and listening to renters’ stories, is that people don’t know their rights and they don’t know how to get help,” West said. “Our proposals would create a one-stop help center for renters, ensuring they get to the most appropriate providers quickly.”

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The four student-led, community-supported proposals included the tenant-landlord mediation program, a rental assistance hotline, a landlord grading system based on inspections, and an eight-county eviction prevention program.

Previous classes, with assistance from West’s frequent community partners, created a renter’s handbook that contains advice, form letters, code citation information, instructions and contact lists. It is organized by the kinds of problems a renter or landlord might face. The book has been edited by legal volunteers and was adopted by the housing assistance agency PathStone Corporation which hosts the content on its website.

“Ihrie edited the renter’s handbook for publication as part of a graduate assistantship that placed him at PathStone for two semesters.

Creating a court-based rental dispute mediation program results from the work of Ihrie and fellow student Emma Ocken. Collaborating with Emily Anderson, the Delaware County courts administrator, the students retrofitted the county’s existing divorce and paternity mediation program into something that would work for the landlord-tenant relationship. Anderson says the county’s judges are behind the program, and attorneys have signed up to work as mediators.

PathStone will provide the attorneys with training and information about local assistance for renters, especially critical now as the effects of Covid-19 are expected to ripple through the low-income housing community.

“Our partnership with BSU around rental advocacy has been incredibly productive,” said Annette Phillips, Indiana community development director at PathStone, "As an
affordable housing provider and a HUD housing counseling agency, unfortunately we see the eviction crisis from both sides. Renter issues are really tough and sometimes very complicated even when there are community partners who care and want to help. Having grad students working with us this semester increased our capacity to actually accomplish important strides toward eviction prevention.”

Like Phillips, Anderson is quick to praise the students’ contributions to the community. They are the ones who located a similar program in Ohio, studied its success rates, and brought the idea to the community.

“Jacob and Emma were the catalyst,” Anderson said. “Had Jacob not reached out to us, we would never have even known that (a county in Ohio) was doing this eviction mediation. We would never have thought to look into it.”

The program will begin this summer, aided by a $10,000 grant which Ihrie wrote on behalf of the organizations. Anything that can be handled through mediation will help the judges catch up on the backlog of cases accumulated during the Covid-19 epidemic.

Judge Kimberly Dowling is among champions of the program.

She said other judges around the state are comparing notes about how to set up eviction mediation programs, and she believes Delaware County’s will be the first in the Hoosier state.

“We’ve seen the impact evictions have on the community, on the state at large,” she said. “We all really want to see this kind of mediation program work.”

“If people are evicted from their homes, if they cannot stay where they are, it causes everything else in their lives to crumble,” she said. Eviction disrupts schooling and employment and causes stress. “If we can provide that stability for them, it will have a huge impact.”

It’s not just the tenants who will benefit, Dowling said, but also the landlords who can save time and money by keeping tenants they already have.

West is working to create a regional rental housing consortium with monthly meetings to help assure that all four of spring semester’s student proposals catch as much fire as the eviction mediation program has. He is also the founder and board president of the Muncie Land Bank, a non-profit organization that finds ways to acquire and reuse abandoned and blighted properties.

“My goal is to build institutions in East Central Indiana that address real and pressing needs,” he said.

The work is important in part because rental problems are endemic to Indiana and likely to get worse as a result of the recent pandemic; state-wide there is a great need for eviction-related services because Indiana cities have a higher number of evictions in comparison with much larger urban areas.
DR. YOO EARN TENURE

This spring brought the great news that Dr. Sanglim Yoo has been granted tenure and a promotion to associate professor. She has won multiple immersive learning grants for her work which involve our second-year students in research into brownfields and sustainability in Muncie, teaches our quantitative methods courses, and manages to publish regularly. A true superstar!

TWO STUDENTS EARN HONORS

Each year the department recognizes two students as our APA outstanding students of the year. Our 2020 honorees are Michael Terronez, BUPD 2020, and Meghan Jennings, MURP 2020. Grades, service, and leadership factor into the decision making, and the APA sends certificates to recognize the winners.

ALUMNA SHARES WORDS OF GRATITUDE FOR THIS TIME

BY KRISTYN SANCHEZ, MURP 2013

I could go on and on about the challenges I have faced over the past seven weeks while working from home full-time with a 15-month old, but especially the last few weeks (as I began to lose track of how long we have actually been in this) I have been working on reminding myself daily of things I am grateful for.

Everyone is facing new positives and negatives each day, whether they’re single and facing loneliness but getting lots of work done or working from home alongside their spouse with a house full of kids and taking on new work hours to accommodate everyone’s needs during the day.

I am grateful for the beautiful spring weather we have had so I can take my little one on a walk in the stroller or push him on a swing in our backyard while I am on Zoom calls (more often than not while on mute except when I am talking). I take advantage of his midday nap and work into the evening after he goes to bed to make sure everything is getting done. While it seems right now that we could be in this new normal for quite some time, I am trying to embrace the extra time at home together as a family.

For most of us, we were thrown into this new normal pretty quickly. And when we come out of it and likely learn yet another “new normal,” I hope everyone can look back on this time period and find happiness because it is definitely not easy.