



URAI earns official Center status

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Center for Urban and Regional Analysis

On April 6 the Board of Trustees announced that the Center for Urban and Regional Analysis had been given final approval.

Story by Emily Caldwell, [onCampus](#) April 12, 2001

Ohio State is poised to leverage years of state financial support and the expertise of dozens of faculty members by establishing a Center for Urban and Regional Analysis (CURA) with potential to quickly garner additional external funding and gain national stature.

The University Board of Trustees on April 6 approved the creation of the center, which will foster interdisciplinary research on urban and regional issues at the city, state, regional, national and international level. The center also is intended to serve as a catalyst for the urban research community and to provide a clearinghouse for urban-related materials, data and publications.

Those developing the center proposal suggest it will position itself as a research-oriented “think tank” with the capability of adding a research focus in urban fields to existing and emerging projects, said Morton O’Kelly, professor of geography and project leader of the Urban and Regional Analysis Initiative, an interim organization charged with establishing the CURA.

Through the hiring of a permanent director and a variety of staff, the center will coordinate and promote interdisciplinary research that, to date, has been approached more often on an individual basis by faculty in numerous disciplines at Ohio State. The University boasts highly ranked programs in several fields associated with urban analysis, including geography, city and regional planning, sociology, economics, and public policy and management. Within those fields and others, ranging from the arts and humanities to law and nursing, Ohio State is known for its experts in areas ranging from community health and criminology to housing, transportation, urban sprawl and demographics.

Writers of the center proposal estimate that 100 faculty in many colleges are interested in urban and regional issues.

“Although Ohio State has significant collective strength in urban/regional

analysis, there has been no mechanism for these collective forces to be marshaled more efficiently in the interests of national, regional and local fundamental and policy-relevant research,” O’Kelly said.

The state of Ohio has distributed funds to eight universities for urban-related studies and programs for almost 20 years. Ohio State, distributing the funds to date to researchers via the Committee on Urban Affairs, is the last of those schools to create a center focusing on urban concerns. O’Kelly noted that many faculty who have received funding awarded by the Committee on Urban Affairs -- more than \$1 million in the past decade -- report that they have obtained external funding that, combined, far exceeds the original investment.

The center is currently housed in Derby Hall, with eventual plans to co-locate with other University units specializing in public policy research. Among its goals are plans to include a strong outreach component because of the urban quality-of-life element of the University’s outreach mission.

More specifically, the center seeks to nurture interdisciplinary groups of scholars working on urban issues by: identifying urban research interests of several important constituencies; informing researchers of grant opportunities as well as each others’ work; hosting colloquia and seminars, publishing newsletters and sponsoring conferences as a clearinghouse for urban-related materials; and running a lab to enhance research and outreach.

The center begins with funding support from the Office of Academic Affairs, state allocations and matching funds from University departments and units. Within three years, the center is expected to achieve fiscal stability by attracting ongoing external funding for applied and fundamental research.

O’Kelly and Hazel Morrow-Jones, associate professor of city and regional planning and associate project leader, consulted widely in developing the center proposal, which reflects several years of discussion about Ohio State’s potential to host such a center. The proposal received broad support from a number of academic leaders, and was approved by University Senate on March 10.