RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

2018
The UM-Flint EDA University Center for Community and Economic Development was established in 2016 to coordinate, inform, and contribute to economic development efforts throughout the 7-county I-69 Thumb Region (Genesee, Huron, Lapeer, St. Clair, Sanilac, Shiawassee, and Tuscola counties). The Center focuses on cultivating innovation and advancing high-growth entrepreneurship to build and sustain a diversified economy.

The EDA University Center receives direction and guidance from:
- Stakeholders who rely on its services and research
- A Regional Advisory Board, consisting of a representative cross-section of the I-69 Thumb Region counties.

FOCUS AREAS:

Economic Development
- Annual 7-county business climate survey
- Economic research to support the work of economic development partners
- I-69 Thumb Region Economic Development Asset Mapping Platform
- Regional economic data dashboard

Community Development
- Dedicated fund to support faculty/student teams in applied research projects
- Community meetings and focus groups
- Dissemination of information to help strengthen local communities
- Technical assistance for nonprofits

Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Interactive website to connect entrepreneurs and existing business owners with service providers and funding opportunities
- Business counseling, workshops, mentoring, bootcamps through UM-Flint’s Innovation Incubator [IN]
- Alignment of regional trends and strategies
The Provost’s Applied Research Fund at the University of Michigan-Flint EDA University Center for Community and Economic Development was launched in the spring of 2017 to support faculty research in the 7-county I-69 Thumb Region.

The fund was able to support five faculty-student research projects covering topics on entrepreneurship, housing for our region’s aging population, pop-up retail, immigrant support services, and eco-tourism. The work of the five faculty members representing five academic departments, and eight graduate and undergraduate students from seven academic majors, was innovative and interdisciplinary. Each project showcases the talent of our faculty and students and their engaged commitment to local partners and dedication to improving the region. We are grateful for your support and pleased to share the results with you. Full project reports are available upon request from the UM-Flint EDA University Center for Community and Economic Development.

For more information on applied research funding and UM-Flint’s EDA University Center for Community & Economic Development, please contact Paula Nas at pnas@umflint.edu or visit our website at umflint.edu/edacenter.
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE SHIAWASSEE RIVER TRAIL COALITION

Faculty
Dr. Daniel Hummel, Assistant Professor of Public Administration, Colleges of Arts and Sciences

Student
Zahera Farhan, Public Health Graduate Student, Masters of Public Health

Project
Dr. Hummel, along with graduate research assistant, Zahera Farhan, supported the Shiawassee River Water Trail Coalition in the creation of a strategic plan. The Coalition is comprised of multiple nonprofits, local governments, and volunteers who have worked to designate the Shiawassee River as National Water Trail. The Coalition saw the need for a strategic plan to build upon their foundation, improve decision-making, and increase their effectiveness.

Dr. Hummel worked with Coalition members to establish a planning committee that met regularly to set objectives for the strategic plan. One of the main efforts of Dr. Hummel and Ms. Farhan was to survey members of the Coalition.

The results showed areas where the most consensus was among the Coalition. The recommended actions were presented to the Coalition, who will be using parts of the report in planning their work over the next year.

The Shiawassee River Trail Coalition has received State of Michigan designation as a water trail and hopes to have the trail designated as a National Water Trail, along with park features geared to attract more tourists and residents to the area for an economic boost. The groundwork laid by Dr. Hummel and Ms. Farhan will guide the Coalition in completing their strategic plan and managing the newly designated State water trail.

Final Product

Strategic Planning Guidance for the Shiawassee River Water Trail Coalition
CREATION OF AN ADULT AS A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAM NAVIGATION RESOURCE

Faculty
Dr. Emily Feuerherm, Assistant Professor of English, College of Arts and Sciences

Student
Jo Fleischer, English major, College of Arts and Sciences

Project
Dr. Feuerherm has done a great deal of research surrounding the needs of the local immigrant populations and how we might be able to fill some of those gaps. Continuing with her earlier research, she has created a resource guide that maps out the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in the Flint region. Highlighting the needs of immigrants is a key part of her work. Together with her student research assistant, Jo Fleischer, Dr. Feuerherm has used focus group outcomes in order to identify which needs are of higher importance.

The navigation tool allows adults seeking ESL support to search for the resources they need while taking into account their goals for why they want to learn English (e.g. academic, citizenship, career preparation), their current level of fluency (basic, intermediate, advanced), the location of the resource, and other considerations such as timing, cost, child care, transportation, etc. This is the first tool of its kind for Flint and should not only help those seeking ESL, but also help the service providers publicize their services more broadly. The U-M Flint GIS Center provided by mapping ESL Resources in an interactive map.

The work was presented by Dr. Feuerherm and Ms. Fleischer at the Michigan Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MITESOL) conference in October at Eastern Michigan University.

Final Products
Online navigation tool, brochure and poster
POP-UP SHOP GUIDEBOOK “COOKBOOK” AND USING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS) TO EXPLORE SITE SUITABILITY FOR POP-UP SHOPS

Faculty
Mr. Kurt Neiswender, Lecturer, Department of Geography, Planning, and Environment, College of Arts and Sciences

Students
Janice McCoy, Visual Arts Education, and Studio Art major, College of Arts and Sciences
Kristin Ball, Environmental Science and Sustainability major, College of Arts and Sciences

Project
With a degree in urban design and as a licensed architect, Mr. Neiswender followed up on his research from 2017, which focused on the design aspects of pop-up shop retail businesses. This year he worked with a research assistant to create a guidebook with step-by-step directions for creating a pop-up business, including the creation of the physical space and how to navigate the municipal zoning and permitting process.

For his second project, the research team documented locations in the 7-county I-69 Thumb Region that have existing zoning and ordinances that allow pop-up retail to exist and grow. Part of their project partnered with UM-Flint’s Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Center to visualize the data.

The GIS research and mapping revealed patterns through the overlaying demographics layers with business data for retail revenue per square foot revealed concentrations nearest to downtowns throughout the Michigan’s Prosperity Region 6. This presents an opportunity to develop more inclusive and forward looking zoning ordinance that includes space for pop-up retail.

Final Products
Pop-Up Retail Cookbook, EDA Region 6 Pop-Up Retail Location Feasibility Analysis Report
FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR THE CREATION OF AN ADULT RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITY IN FLINT

Faculty
Dr. Michael Witt, Lecturer of Business Law and Management, School of Management

Students
Amanda Armstrong, Accounting major, School of Management
Todd Fridline, Business major, School of Management
Chris Steffes, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology major, College of Arts and Sciences

Project
Dr. Witt’s project created market research and a usable business study for creating an elder care facility tailored to the Flint area. Throughout the process, the students learned about Flint and the impact this type of facility can have on generating local jobs, helping with blight elimination, adding to neighborhood stabilization and impacting the economy. This research also has the potential to help inform decision making in small rural communities in Michigan’s Prosperity Region 6.

The goal of the project was to examine the market for elder care facilities in Genesee County. The team members completed interviews with existing facilities and market research to accomplish this. The results of the project indicate that there are currently not enough facilities to meet the projections of the aging population in the coming years. The final project includes a business plan with economic and financial models that support this finding.

Final Products
Market Perspective, Homes for the Aged in Genesee County
CREATION OF MI START SMART BUSINESS RESOURCE WEBSITE

Faculty
Dr. Fadi Mohsen, Assistant Professor of Computer Science, College of Arts and Sciences

Student
Michael Sczepanski, Computer Science major, College of Arts and Sciences

Project
MIStartSmart, a digital navigation guide for entrepreneurs, serves the entire Michigan Prosperity Region 6 and is used by entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial technical assistance providers, local municipalities, and chambers of commerce, to connect entrepreneurs with the services they need to succeed. Dr. Mohsen worked closely with Mr. Sczepanski and our EDA University Center staff to code, program, and implement the MIStartSmart website. (http://mistartsmart.com/ )

A promotional video, with funding support from the I-69 Thumb Region, was created to showcase the convenience and accessibility of the tool. It can be viewed at mistartgate.com and on the I-69 Thumb Region website. Dr. Mohsen and Mr. Sczepanski made the project possible by taking a database of resources and transforming into an interactive, user-friendly platform that helps support entrepreneurship for the region.

Final Product
MIStartSmart web portal
mistartgate.com
i-69thumbregion.com