Fall 2022
Engaged Learning
Student Projects
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Note: These are executive summaries of the student projects. For the complete reports, please contact the center or program for more information.
Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Ford School’s Engaged Learning Student Projects Catalog. This document represents a collaborative effort of many of the Ford School’s research centers and programs. We seek to highlight some of the impactful work our students are conducting with external partners. You’ll see that the diversity of these projects and partners is truly amazing. However, it is by no means comprehensive, as new engaged learning opportunities are emerging in every corner of the School, every day. Stay tuned to learn about more projects in future issues.

Enjoy!

Elisabeth R. Gerber
Jack L. Walker, Jr. Professor of Public Policy
Director, Program in Practical Policy Engagement
The Ford School is an engaged learning and teaching community. Interactions with people and organizations outside of U-M actively working on and changing public policy helps prepare our students to become leaders in service of the public good.

The Ford School is deeply integrated with a wide range of policy communities cultivated by our faculty and our strong and engaged alumni network that provide opportunities for students to engage with real-world policy issues in the classroom and through research, activities, and workshops. We offer a wide range of opportunities that allow students to use what they've learned in the classroom through hands-on, practical policy experiences.

**Ford School Research Centers**

The Ford School is home to or co-sponsor of a growing number of active, multi-disciplinary research centers and initiatives leveraging the knowledge and expertise across the University of Michigan. They serve as a resource for policymakers and practitioners, academics, students, the media, and the public. They offer numerous engaged learning opportunities for students. And they identify and solve complex challenges facing our communities.
Center on Finance, Law & Policy

The Center on Finance, Law & Policy at the University of Michigan is an interdisciplinary research center which draws together faculty and students from more than a dozen of Michigan’s nineteen schools and colleges to work on a broad range of research projects focused on creating a financial system that works for everyone.

Detroit Neighborhood Entrepreneurs Project

The Center’s Detroit Neighborhood Entrepreneurs Project (DNEP) is a program that brings together small businesses with University of Michigan students, faculty and staff to solve business owners’ legal, financial, marketing, operational, and design challenges. Students promote economic and community development in Detroit by providing holistic, interdisciplinary strategic consulting services and technical support to neighborhood-based small businesses. Students can get involved by taking a DNEP class, applying for one of the Center’s DNEP accounting consultant or community tech worker jobs, or becoming a DNEP +Impact Studio for Local Business summer intern.
Executive Summary

Coming out of COVID and with a tough labor market leaving many small businesses understaffed, many Detroit minority-owned businesses said they needed additional capacity to be able to regain their footing. Five Ford School students worked full-time for 8 weeks in interdisciplinary teams with students from Stamps, Ross, and Information to help business owners implement changes to their businesses. University of Michigan interns: Interviewed business owners and customers and then wrote new content for business’ websites and newsletters as part of a larger rebranding or brand cohesion effort; researched, costed out, and tested different packaging options to help businesses launch new product lines; analyzed sales data and developed strategies to concentrate business’ marketing efforts on their most profitable customers; and converted or fixed clients’ point of sale systems to better integrate with their e-commerce websites or accounting systems. Students learned about the history and culture of Detroit and some of the nuances of working in community development, picked up some new consulting skills, and made some new friends and mentors.
“Community Tech Worker Project”
Community Partner: Jefferson East, Inc.
Project Advisors: Dr. Kristin Seefeldt (Ford School/School of Social Work),
Dr. Julie Hui (School of Information), Dr. Tawanna Dillahunt (School of Information)

Executive Summary

The Community Tech Worker program is a pilot research and direct service project organized by the Center on Finance, Law & Policy to help improve digital access and the digital capability of Detroit’s minority-owned businesses. Three U-M students and three Detroit natives from the Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood worked full-time through the summer to set up and recruit clients for free technology training and support. In the process of teaching business owners how to update their own websites, or how to create social media or edit videos, or set up scrolling advertisements in their business waiting areas, students gained new technology skills, learned valuable teaching and consulting skills, and made new friends, mentors and colleagues from many walks of life, whom they would not have met otherwise.
The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) conducts, supports and fosters applied academic research to inform local, state, and urban policy issues. One of the Center's key programs is the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), the nation's only ongoing census-style survey of every unit of general purpose local government across an entire state. Across all of its activities, the Center functions as an information resource for policymakers and practitioners, academics, students, the media, and the public.

CLOSUP works to foster effective communication between academic researchers, stakeholders, and the policymakers dealing with today's state, local, and urban policy problems. The center also facilitates student engagement with today's critical policy issues through its “CLOSUP in the Classroom” initiative, integrating Ford School students as policy analysts in the center's research activities, bringing the center's findings into the classroom, and supporting student internships with organizations focused on state and local policy.
Executive Summary

Modernizing Michigan Local Government Fiscal Transparency is a partnership between CLOSUP, the non-profit XBRL US, and pilot locations in Michigan. The first local partners and pilot locations include the City of Flint, Ogemaw County, and Pine River Township.

Currently, the most important local government financial data, found in Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports (ACFRs), are provided to the public and to the State in an outdated PDF format that severely limits their accessibility, comparability, and usefulness. Accessing these data requires transcribing hardcopy financial statements into other forms and databases by hand. This practice is labor-intensive and leads to delays, duplication of efforts, inaccuracies, and a lack of data consistency. These features stymy the sharing of understandings of what is happening on the ground in local units of government – leading to delays in responding to fiscal threats like those that put Flint, Detroit and Benton Harbor into emergency management.

The project designed and implemented a new open data standard, based on eXtensible Business Language Reporting (XBRL), which local governments can use to share their financial information with the public, the State, and other stakeholders. XBRL is an international open standard for financial data already widely used in the public and private sectors in the U.S. and other countries. XBRL formatted financial statements are both human-readable and machine-readable, so the underlying digital data can be easily searched, sorted, merged, compared, analyzed and put to use.
The Center for Racial Justice is a cross-disciplinary space that directly invests in initiatives designed to advance racial equity and cultivate a diverse community of changemakers. The center organizes speakers and event series, *Racial Foundations of Public Policy* and *Masterclass in Activism*, that foster intellectual engagement at the intersection of race and public policy. Additionally, they have several initiatives that support student programming and research aimed at advancing racial justice within public policy. Through these initiatives, they develop new tools and strategies in the pursuit of racial justice, resulting in better, evidence-based policy solutions and the cultivation of the next generation of high-impact leaders and thinkers.
“CRJ Student Researchers”
Community Partner: Center for Racial Justice
Project Advisors: Dr. Celeste Watkins-Hayes (Ford School), Dr. Dominique Adams-Santos (Ford School), Dr. Mara Ostfeld (Ford School)

Executive Summary

This semester, the Center for Racial Justice (CRJ) brought on seven graduate and undergraduate research assistants. Three of our research assistants, Rebecca Hagos, Sherise McKinney, and Zoe Pidgeon, support our inaugural CRJ Visiting Fellows to advance their catalyst projects. Our other research assistants, Erykah Benson, Totitionna Bushell, Young Chan Lim, and Jasmine Simington, are working alongside CRJ Research Director, Dr. Mara Ostfeld, to develop policy briefs on the political attitudes and perceptions of communities of color across Michigan. Erykah Benson and Jasmine Simington recently published their first policy brief on reparations and voter engagement in Detroit.
Program in Practical Policy Engagement

The Practical Policy Engagement Program is a university-wide resource housed at the Ford School where it can leverage existing expertise and interdisciplinary approaches to generate policy–relevant research, analysis and learning, as well as improvements in organizational practice. The Program engages in mutually beneficial interactions with organizations outside the University that are actively working on public policy. They hope to radically reshape the culture and purpose of a great public university, create profound policy change, and improve lives for people in the State of Michigan and beyond.

L-to-R: Kevin Lepak, Marathon Petroleum Process Safety Management Coordinator; students John McClure (MS ‘23, SEAS/STTP) and Andrew Roman (BA ‘23, Public Policy); and Nina Ignaczak, Planet Detroit founder and community partner, meet to discuss Marathon’s environment and community programming in Detroit.

Student Research Fellowships

P3E supports timely and relevant research that impacts public policy by placing undergraduate and graduate student research fellows with public, nonprofit, and philanthropic community partners. Students provide a valuable contribution to the partner organization and receive a meaningful learning experience.

Practical Community Learning Projects

Practical Community Learning Projects (PCLP) match undergraduate and graduate Ford School students and community partners for a semester-long, policy-based, independent study project for course credit. Projects provide opportunities for dialogue, research, and service through conducting program evaluations, policy research, grant writing, and other activities as jointly agreed upon with the community partners.
Executive Summary

The Dearborn Department of Public Health was formally launched in April 2022, becoming only the 2nd city in Michigan with a public health department, and the first to do so voluntarily. The Department was founded on the principle of Health in All Policies.

Health in All Policies is a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas. The goal of Health in All Policies is to ensure that all decision-makers are informed about the health, equity, and sustainability consequences of various policy options during the policy development process.

P3E student fellows supported a range of Dearborn Department of Public Health priorities in areas including environmental health, behavioral health, and department development. This included operationalizing an air quality communications plan to communicate air quality information and recommended actions to residents using existing municipal platforms, as well as contributing to a city-wide sustainability review and plan. It also included researching the impacts of lead service lines on Dearborn residents, collaborating across departments to ensure a health in all policies approach, and building culturally sensitive outreach materials for a diverse range of residents. Additionally, research was conducted on safe sleep best practices for young babies and their families, working to best communicate maternal and child health resources to Dearborn residents.
Executive Summary

The team of students worked on a project with the Superintendent's Office of the Detroit Public School and Community District (DPSCD). They recommended and drafted changes to the District's administrative policies, so they better supported the behavioral and physical health of students in the District. The project included a four-phase process: first, the students researched best practices and policies in other school districts in the U.S.; second, they interviewed DPSCD staff and education professionals about existing practices and the feasibility of potential administrative changes; third, they researched additional school districts based on insights from the interviews; and finally, they put together a final deliverable to propose policy changes to the DPSCD Superintendent, physical health team, and behavioral health team. Through this project, the team determined ways the Detroit schools can better provide physical and behavioral health services and support their students.
Executive Summary

The student worked with Engine Advocacy and Research to evaluate the impact of state-by-state privacy laws on startup technology companies. Currently, data privacy laws are on a state level, resulting in varying definitions of compliance. Through interviewing stakeholders of different startups, the student learned about the impact of the current data privacy laws landscape on barriers to scalability, compliance costs (legal, operational, technology, etc.), and any implications of these costs. The student's findings will ultimately help inform policymakers and ensure a conducive environment for startups to grow and thrive.
Executive Summary

The student worked with Fund MI Future to help compile local property tax votes in Michigan to help identify policy opportunities to tip the State’s fiscal landscape to be more supportive of poor and middle-income communities. The research focused on what margin millages and millage renewals from 2012-2022 passed or failed and for what the millage was raising revenue.
Executive Summary

Blight is a serious issue in the city of Detroit; in dealing with this issue, the mechanism of demolition poses a variety of issues relating to safety, sustainability, and funding due to the financial costs associated with demolition. To deal with blight more sustainably, deconstruction prior to complete demolition has been proposed. In response, the PCLP Spring 2022 fellows crafted several recommendations divided by immediate, intermediate, and future actions. The recommendations include methods to (1) address current demolition practices, (2) increase accountability for residents from city leadership, (3) update ordinances concerning the future of deconstruction, and (4) take future actions that will be necessary for these changes to be sustainable, both environmentally and policy-wise. After weeks of research, the fellows concluded that these actions are the most financially and politically feasible. Further research is needed, yet these recommendations provide a starting point for the Green Task Force to advocate for environmental policy in Detroit.
Executive Summary

Two students partnered with District 6 City Council Member Gabriela Santiago-Romero to provide policy recommendations regarding the processes for dealing with dangerous buildings within Detroit. The students gathered and synthesized information about local demolition practices in Detroit. Through research and engagement meetings, they collected information about the dangerous building notification processes, resident rights throughout the process, city processes from determination to completion, and data regarding demolition processes in similarly-sized midwestern cities. Given the lack of cohesive and publicly available information currently available from Detroit’s Demolition and Buildings, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Departments (BSEED), the students investigated the City Ordinance and municipal code. The students presented their findings in Detroit City Council chambers to inform Council member Santiago-Romero of the demolition process and her legislative powers as an elected official.
“Flint Businesses Resource Toolkit”
Community Partner: UM-Flint
Project Advisor: DeAndré J. Calvert (Ford School)
Practical Community Learning Project

Executive Summary

Students collaborated with the City of Flint’s Economic Development Department and UM-Flint Office of Economic Development staff to develop a guide for new and existing businesses to understand, act on, and sustainably operate in Flint. Students engaged with key city of Flint and UM-Flint Office of Economic Development staff to understand existing resources and resource gaps for businesses and commercial property owners. A list of resources and appropriate steps were assembled to guide entrepreneurs when locating a business in an existing neighborhood context, along with business-related resources like writing a business plan to access funding. The students created a guide summarizing key points and resources. During a meeting with UM-Flint partners, City of Flint economic development staff, and Flint City Councilwoman Tonya Burns, the students presented their finalized guide. The guide is for new and existing businesses to navigate Flint’s zoning laws, access financing, and operate long-term. It includes resources for each step and contact information for Flint-specific support.
Executive Summary

Two students provided Flint Councilwoman Tonya Burns with data and information on housing incentive programs and mortgage down payment assistance. The Flint housing market has some of the most affordable housing in the country, however, despite this, housing insecurity in Flint continues to be a pressing issue. There are multiple causes of this issue ranging from low incomes and job security, to thousands of blighted houses in the community, and the effects of redlining are still being felt to this day. Many residents of Flint cannot afford to buy houses, yet Flint has ample housing stock. To help make housing more affordable to residents, students suggested the City of Flint should create a program that gives down payment assistance in the form of forgivable loans. Creating this program would not only be helpful for the current residents, but it would show that Flint is a city with many opportunities for economic growth, which could help attract others to move there. This would create a more engaged and invested community. Students spoke during the weekly Flint City Council meeting summarizing their research. In addition, the students presented a one-pager detailing home rehabilitation and education resources to the Councilmember.
Executive Summary

Planet Detroit is a weekly online newsletter whose mission is to raise awareness about Metro Detroit's environmental and public health challenges and potential solutions, hold powerful entities accountable, and empower readers to take action in their communities. Planet Detroit is working to build a resource hub for Detroit residents and relevant stakeholders to be able to understand the assets, gaps, and needs in the local information on public health and environmental data. To assist with this project, the students worked to identify and collect relevant local data relating to risk and exposure to environmental hazards. The primary focus areas included data relevant to heat, lead, flood, and air quality in Detroit, Michigan. Data was collected online, primarily through government sources, and then synthesized by students into a working document for relevant stakeholders to better engage with the available data. Meant to help communicate the importance of this data and how it can be used towards action, these deliverables will help Planet Detroit to identify what data is available to residents and where the gaps currently are.
Science, Technology, and Public Policy Program

The Science, Technology, and Public Policy (STPP) program is devoted to interdisciplinary research and teaching on the politics and processes of science and technology policymaking. STPP seeks to improve understanding, analysis, and intervention in science and technology policymaking from two perspectives: first, from the perspective of science and technology for policy, examining how science and technology are used to develop and affect public policies in a wide range of domains such as national security, public health, economic competitiveness, and environmental sustainability; and second, from the perspective of policy for science and technology, examining how policies are developed to promote beneficial scientific and technological development at the international, national, state, and local levels, such as the allocation of research funding and regulation of new research and technologies.

Student Research Corps

Students are valued collaborators in STPP’s work. The Student Research Corps responds to the needs of community partners, integrating community voices into public policy conversations about science and technology. They listen and learn from communities, then provide tools to engage in technical and policy advocacy. The students learn about the partners’ concerns related to a specific technology or policy, research answers to their questions, and produce policy briefs and other written materials that meet their partners’ needs.
“Community Partnerships Initiative”
Community Partners: City of Detroit Office of Digital Inclusion and Equity, Detroit Disability Power, Detroit Justice Center, Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration, We the People Action Fund, We the People of Detroit
Project Advisors: Dr. Molly Kleinman (Ford School), Kristin Burgard (Ford School)

Executive Summary

STPP has developed the Community Partnerships Initiative to partner with community organizations across southeast Michigan, with a focus in Detroit. These partnerships help the organizations bring their voices and expertise to public policy discussions related to science and technology, which are increasingly having an impact at the local level, particularly on historically disadvantaged communities of color. These populations rarely influence the development and governance of science and technology. STPP aims to change this by working with community organizations to understand their needs and concerns, then identifying how to help them make these concerns heard among decision makers in policy, technology, and science.

Student researchers work with the partners by doing research, and writing policy briefs and reports. The projects students have worked on include: bringing internet service to areas of Detroit that are under or unconnected; accessible voting machines, equal employment opportunities and online hiring systems, and inclusion in government planning for climate change and related weather emergencies and disasters; researching the harms of, and alternatives to, individual risk assessment tools being used in pretrial release determinations; raising concerns about acoustic gunshot detection systems; working to better understand the technical aspects of electrical grids throughout Michigan to advocate for fair electric rates around the state; and exploring the use of decentralized wastewater treatment and the current state of decentralized technologies and identifying additional policy paths.
Strategic Public Policy Consulting Course (PUBPOL 578)

(L-R) Christopher Falcone (MPP ’14), Jessica Teng (MPP ’14), Erin Sullivan (MPP ’14), and Matthew Papadapoluos (MPP/MA ’13) appeared in front of the House Commerce Committee to testify on House Bill (HB) 4996 which would allow equity crowdfunding in Michigan.

The Ford School's Strategic Public Policy Consulting course (PubPol 578) is a semester-long Master’s level course that engages students in a supervised consulting project with a real-world client. Teams of 3-6 students work with a faculty coordinator and client representative to develop a project work plan, collect relevant materials and information, conduct research and analysis, prepare a written report, and present findings and recommendations to the client. Students are expected to produce professional-quality work at minimal cost to the client. In return, clients provide students with a valuable, engaging educational and professional experience.
“Phasing Out Subminimum Wage: Supporting State Transitions to Competitive Integrated Employment”
Community Partner: United States Government Accountability Office
Project Advisor: Dr. Kaitlin Raimi (Ford School)

Executive Summary

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 is a federal law that allows for the payment of subminimum wages to certain workers with disabilities. More recently, some employers are phasing out subminimum wages, and the effect on employment for people with disabilities is largely unknown. This project investigates the outcomes of employees with disabilities in states that are dispensing with subminimum wages.

The student researchers selected three case study states that are transitioning to competitive integrated employment (CIE). They examined the vehicles states are using to phase out subminimum wages, identifying local initiatives to facilitate the transition to CIE, and, where available, summarizing data on employment outcomes of workers with disabilities. This complex issue touches on a number of policy areas, including civil rights, labor economics, and social welfare. The team produced a tracker of vehicles all states are using to phase out subminimum wages and a presentation and report describing the extent to which selected study states have implemented CIE the transition to CIE.
“Assessing the Use of Psychometric Technology on the Dominican National Police”
Community Partner: Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program
Project Advisor: Dr. Kaitlin Raimi (Ford School)

Chia Weng Cheng
MPP ’24

Eleni Daughters
MPP ’23

Maria Alejandra Fuentes Diestra
MPP ’23

Margaret Walthall
MPP ’23

Executive Summary

The student team worked in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice’s International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) and the Dominican National Police (DNP). This project explored the implementation of the Psychometric Project to analyze how this web-based application affected the DNP’s recruitment and selection of police officers, and its sustainability within the DNP. The students focused on the project’s background, its implementation and results, followed by a set of lessons learned, good practices and recommendations. To be able to target these objectives, we used two kinds of research methods: summary document analysis, examining past documents that describe the implementation, and semi-structured interviews to relevant stakeholders. The research revealed two main factors that contribute to the organizational change at the DNP. First, technical efficiency has increased productivity at the DNP, lowering the time paper-based applications used to take. Second, the computational system decreased bias in the selection process, which reduces corruption within the DNP. Finally, the students also found that the sustainability of the program and its application in other countries in Latin America depends on available funding and political will.
The **Weiser Diplomacy Center** was established in 2018 at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy with a $10 million gift from University of Michigan alumni Ron and Eileen Weiser. We aim to serve as a leading hub for practical student training in foreign affairs and as a bridge for engagement with the foreign policy community. The Center brings leading diplomats and foreign policy experts to campus and offers practical training sessions and simulations. It sponsors a program for Weiser Diplomacy Fellows, supports student internships and other student-led initiatives pertaining to foreign affairs and engages students in research via Diplomacy Lab. The Center also convenes dialogues connecting experts at the Ford School and University of Michigan with the foreign policy community.
“Diplomacy Lab Projects”
Community Partner: U.S. Department of State
Project Advisors: Dr. Debatri Dhar (College of LS&A), Dr. Amy Beck-Harris (Ford School), Dr. Mitchell Dudley (LS&A Economics), Dr. Greta Uehling (LS&A Int’l and Comparative Studies)

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BA ’24,  
Public Policy

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Rene Rosas  
MPP ’23

Jacqueline Taylor  
MPP ’23

Magda Wojtara  
MS ’23,  
Human Genetics

This semester, the Weiser Center brought on 22 graduate students to work on four projects for the U.S. State Department. The projects: assessed inclusion, equity, and accessibility in the criminal legal systems of the Western Hemisphere; mapped Iceland’s arctic economy; determined whether local circumstances shape best rehabilitation and reintegration practices; and examined the typologies and impacts of online gender-based violence.