

## Cover Sheet

**Title of Project:** Housing Inequality in Iowa City: Examining the Experiences of Community Members and University Students

**Proposed Start and End Dates:** June 18 to June 29 (2 weeks)

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### Abstract

In Iowa City, housing instability is an increasingly significant challenge for residents. The Johnson County Affordable Housing Coalition (JCAHC) works to increase access to affordable housing through community education and local policy advocacy. However, JCAHC would like to have stories of housing insecurity from students and community members in order to communicate the human impact of this complex social problem. We are conducting a collaborative, community-engaged, mixed-methods *Housing Inequality* study in collaboration with JCAHC in order to influence housing policy and address gaps in social science research on housing. We are conducting qualitative, in-depth interviews about how those who are experiencing housing insecurity navigate their circumstances as well as brief surveys to measure respondent's income, resources, housing quality, and physical and mental health. We will use a two-week period of collaboration at the Public Policy Center to conduct thematic analysis of qualitative data from of this project. The Summer Scholar-in-Residence will facilitate the labor-intensive, collective decision-making processes involved thematic analysis of in-depth interview transcripts from the *Housing Inequality* study. The deliverables of our Scholar-in-Residence will be a Policy Brief and a presentation to JCAHC of our results of qualitative analysis and advocacy recommendations. Ultimately, completing this analysis will help us move towards disseminating findings through a publishable paper for submission to the interdisciplinary journal, *Health & Place* and would pursue National Institutes of Health funding for additional data collection in order to address research questions that have been refined from the analysis proposed here. We expect to have recommendations related to policy advocacy strategies to address the similarities in how students and community members experience housing instability that contribute detrimentally to their physical and mental health and well-being.

### **What do you propose to do?**

The proposed project will facilitate the collaborative analysis and dissemination of results from a community engaged, mixed-methods *Housing Inequality* study. In summer 2017, we began conducting qualitative, in-depth interviews about how Iowa City residents experiencing housing insecurity navigate the housing market, think about their housing, and how their housing experiences have mattered in other aspects of their lives as well as brief surveys to measure respondent's income, resources, housing quality, and physical and mental health. During the 2-week Scholar-in-Residence, we will analyze qualitative data for themes, present findings to our community partner, the Johnson County Affordable Housing Coalition, and write a Policy Brief. We expect to describe strategies students and community members use to navigate the housing market and how experiencing housing insecurity contributes to their physical and mental health and well-being. The ultimate goals of this project are to write an article for an interdisciplinary journal and pursue additional funding to conduct more interviews.

### **Why is it important and policy-relevant?**

Our *Housing Inequality* study is imperative because, both locally and nationally, many individuals and families experience housing instability. Housing instability is having high costs of housing, difficulty meeting those costs, frequent moves, and even homelessness. Over one-third of U.S. households are cost burdened (i.e., housing costs are 30% or more of gross income (Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies 2016)). In Iowa City, housing instability is becoming an increasingly significant challenge—over half of renters in Iowa City are cost burdened. Our study is an important contribution to the literature because we compare experiences of students and community members in a small city—a setting where little housing research exists. Furthermore, our study is important for understanding the mechanisms of housing as a social determinant of physical and mental health and well-being.

The setting of our study is important because little research exists on the experiences of living in small cities like Iowa City. Rather, the majority of research on housing instability has focused on the country's largest metropolitan areas. Small cities are important to understand because they are increasingly unequal places. Between 2010 and 2014, the average poverty rate in small metropolitan areas climbed to 13.7%, approaching that of the country's largest metropolitan areas (15.1%; Kneebone and Holmes, 2006). As their poverty rates rise, smaller metropolitan areas face unique challenges including fewer social services and sparse public transportation. Low-income families may therefore have fewer resources in smaller cities than they would in large metropolitan areas. Thus, focusing on the Iowa City area will shed light on how residents of smaller metropolitan areas navigate housing instability. Furthermore, Iowa City is a small city with a large University. Most models of affordable housing in University-adjacent communities come from major cities where studentification (i.e., students driving up market rates) threatens a neighboring low-income neighborhood. However, in small cities with universities, demand for student rentals affects affordability in the entire city. Because existing research, theory, and policy solutions come from larger cities, our study is important for improving theory and modifying policy responses to housing instability in small cities.

Our project focuses on the experiences of students and community members. Analyzing these two groups allows us to examine discordances and commonalities in students and Iowa City residents experience and manage housing instability. The greatest annual expense for undergraduate students at the University of Iowa is room and board—it is 20% greater than

tuition. In one important study of students, researchers found that about 12% of 4-year students in Wisconsin were unable to pay their rent or mortgage on time (Brnton, Frank and Goldrick-Rab 2014). However, previous research on housing instability has not fully considered the experiences of college students. Our research will address this gap and reveal how university students deal with housing instability in a small city with high housing costs.

Our study also explores the impact of housing instability on mental and physical health. Recent research suggests that different types of housing instability have differential impacts on mental and physical health (Downing 2016). For example, Philadelphia area residents undergoing foreclosure were more likely to experience depression or anxiety (Pollack and Lynch 2010) and are less likely to seek treatment (Pollack, Griffin and Lynch 2010). In Michigan, Burgard et al. (2012) found that people behind on rent or mortgage payments or experiencing foreclosure had poorer self-rated health and more anxiety attacks. Our study is important because research has not fully explored the mechanisms through which housing instability negatively affects physical and mental health. Furthermore, the ways in which experiences of housing, mental and physical health, and school success are interrelated for students will be an important contribution.

Furthermore, our study has involved partnership with the Johnson County Affordable Housing Coalition (JCAHC), which works to increase access to affordable housing for residents with low to moderate incomes. To advocate for affordable housing, JCAHC has been relying on available data that presents an aggregate view of the problem but fails to capture the human impact of this complex social problem. Importantly, we believe that understanding the similarities and differences between students and community members with help JCAHC more effectively educate the public and advocate for state, local, and University policy change that improves housing for both groups rather than pitting them against one another. Finally, results from our analysis can help JCAHC harness the power of stories for persuasion.

### **What earlier work has been done on the project?**

This project stems from our Place-Based Inclusion Working Group at the Obermann Center. The working group includes University researchers from several disciplines and affordable housing advocates. We have amassed quantitative data to document the extent of housing instability in this community and brought experts to share best practices. For instance, we brought Robin Bachin, University of Miami Assistant Provost for Civic and Community Engagement, to share her work connecting organizations, local government, and the university's research and teaching.

This study was designed and carried out by Jessica Welburn, Megan Gilster, and Barbara Baquero. We are a subgroup of the Place-Based Inclusion Working Group. We worked together on an application for the Office of Outreach and Engagement's (OOE) Community Impact Grant (Jessica Welburn, PI), which we were granted in the spring of 2017. Our study is mixed methods—we designed an in-depth interview and short survey to understand housing insecurity, economic well-being, health and mental health. We planned to collect data on 40 respondents-- 20 students and 20 community members. Criteria for inclusion for community members included incomes below \$35,000 a year and under the age of 50 and lived in Johnson County for at least 3 years. For students, we included first-generation undergraduate students in at least their 2<sup>nd</sup> year. We based inclusion criteria on risks for housing insecurity in the literature. OOE funds cover one Research Assistant (RA), participant incentives, and transcription costs.

Thus far, we have collected data, transcribed audio recordings, and begun qualitative interview coding. We have hired a doctoral student RA and trained two RAs (one doctoral student RA whose time Baquero is lending to the project) in data collection. Recruiting and data collection began in August 2017. Together, Welburn and the RAs have conducted 20 interviews with students and 6 interviews with community members. We will finish collecting data (from 14 more community members) in May 2018. Interviews are being transcribed as they are completed. We collaboratively created a codebook and Gilster, Welburn, and RAs are currently coding data. We will finish coding mid-June 2018.

### **What is the value of the face-to-face collaboration?**

Our project brings together two scholars with distinct disciplinary, substantive, and methodological contributions. Welburn is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and African American Studies whose research focuses on African Americans in the post-Civil Rights Era, including experiences with racism and discrimination, urban inequality, and social mobility. Her methodological expertise, in-depth interviewing, is central to the data collection and analysis for this project. Gilster is Assistant Professor of Social Work. Her research focuses on the social determinants of mental and physical health, neighborhoods, and community social organization. To date, we have successfully collaborated on grant writing, research design, and data collection. Our experience exploring various dimensions of social inequality and success collaborating coupled with the intensive face-to-face time provided via the Scholar-in-Residence program makes us well positioned to execute the proposed analysis.

Face-to-face collaboration through the Public Policy Center Summer Scholar-in-Residence would enable us to do the focused, intellectual work necessary to analyze our *Housing Inequality* in-depth interview data, present findings to JCAHC, and write a policy brief summarizing findings. We both have several other ongoing research projects. This intensive time will allow us to focus our energy on our *Housing Inequality* project. We know from experience working together in-person during our monthly working group meetings at the Obermann Center that we work efficiently and move the project along significantly when working together face-to-face. In particular, the PPC Summer Scholar-in-Residence will facilitate the collective decision-making processes involved in conducting qualitative analysis. Although Welburn and Gilster would complete the bulk of the work, we would use the two-week period to meet frequently with the entire team (RAs and Baquero) for triangulation and feedback on analysis.

### **What will be achieved by the end of the grant period?**

The work products that will result from our Summer Scholar-in-Residence are 1) a presentation to the JCAHC of findings and advocacy recommendations and 2) a Policy Brief summarizing findings. Our time will primarily be spent reviewing coded data in order to analyze the data for themes, discussing emerging themes, writing analytic memos, and writing findings.

The ultimate goals of the project are dissemination in an interdisciplinary journal and applying for funding for a larger housing inequality study. We plan to publish an article in an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal. We will aim to publish in the interdisciplinary journal, *Health & Place*, which seeks to link fields such as geography, public health, and medical sociology. Furthermore, we will seek additional funding from the National Institutes of Health to conduct further data collection. The purpose of this grant would be to understand new research questions that we expect will come from the qualitative analysis performed this summer.