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Cal State L.A. to fund Boyle Heights research project

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Posted: Thursday, August 30, 2012 11:20 am

By Wave Staff | **0 comments**

The Edmund G. "Pat" Brown Institute of Public Affairs at Cal State Los Angeles has awarded mini-grants for research on Boyle Heights to three Cal State faculty members.

The mini-grants come from the institute's Youth Enrichment Policy Project, which is funded by the California Endowment.

The grants will support applied research on issues and topics involving the Boyle Heights community. As part of two-year grant, the Pat Brown Institute also will provide youth leadership and civic engagement training program to high school students in Boyle Heights.

The students will train to become civic leaders and community advocates in a nine-month program and will use information and data gained from the Cal State L.A. research to inform their own community policy projects. The research projects will culminate with faculty presentations and a series of working papers that will be published next spring.

"High quality academic research makes an invaluable contribution to the development of good public policy," said Raphael Sonenshein, the executive director of the Pat Brown Institute. "[The institute] is fortunate to be located at a university with active scholars whose research can help advance [our] mission."

Nutrition professor Kathryn Hillstrom will be collecting data on the food environment in Boyle Heights, specifically the availability of healthy foods in supermarkets and corner markets.

"Los Angeles, like all large cities, has pockets where residents' rates of disease like obesity and diabetes are disproportionately high," Hillstrom said. "Boyle Heights is one of these communities and has been defined as a food desert. This study has the potential to add to the current literature an understanding of the 'food swamp/food desert' environment, including what foods are available, the quality of those foods and the price points which may affect food purchasing behavior."

Political science professor Ellen Shiau will explore the possible connections between the built environment, crime and fear, while also providing knowledge to the Boyle Heights community about spatial and temporal patterns of crime.

"My research project plans to map reported incidences of crime in Boyle Heights from 2005 to 2010 using [geographic information system] methods in order to identify spatial and temporal patterns of crime in the community," Shiau said. "The project builds on a collaboration with two USC researchers who are researching the experiences of young males in East Los Angeles neighborhoods. As one piece of their research, young males living in East Los Angeles were surveyed regarding places in their neighborhood where they felt afraid. The crime maps I will create hopefully will serve as a useful policy tool for Boyle Heights residents and advocates with an interest in public safety issues."

History professor Enrique Ochoa will be examining the food systems in the community and drawing on Mexican and
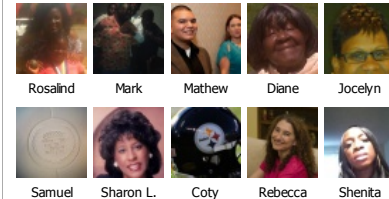
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Central American rural histories and cultures to reframe the issues of health.

The California Endowment is investing in Boyle Heights as part of its Building Healthy Communities program, which is focusing on 14 distinct communities in California where residents and organizations are committed to building healthy communities. Through the Pat Brown Institute, the endowment seeks ways to foster on-going partnership and collaborative opportunities between the university and the Boyle Heights community.

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