

## Some Rural Studies Program Focus Areas

- **Food Insecurity and Hunger**  
OSU faculty and students attempt to understand why Oregon's hunger rate was the highest in the nation in the late 1990s and fell in the early 2000s by looking at the demographics of hunger, by analyzing personal, community and policy factors that could affect food insecurity, and by interviewing families in two rural communities.  
<http://ruralstudies.oregonstate.edu/Publications/RSP06-02.pdf>
- **Land Use**  
OSU faculty and students engage citizens and decision-makers in an analysis of how Oregon's current land use planning system affects agricultural landowners' ability to manage their land and water sustainability, identifying key issues, problems, and challenges related to land use planning and logistical needs and challenges.
- **Community Vitality**  
The Rural Studies Program seeks to help local government and community development organizations assess their local conditions by creating a website with an inventory and characterization of existing sources of information about rural community indicators - social, economic, and environmental. The website provides links to various resources for all 36 counties in Oregon. OSU and UO jointly offered a course, Community Indicators and Rural Sustainability, during Fall of 2006, examining community indicators that have been developed and used by urban and rural communities in the U.S., and developing indicators for an Oregon rural community.
- **Rural Housing and Youth**  
In research funded primarily by the National Institute of Health OSU faculty and students examine how growing up in a small town trailer park shapes the developmental pathways available to low-income rural children and youth, and the experiences of homeless youth in a rural county.
- **Experiential Field Courses**  
Students participate in a interdisciplinary field courses such as cross-cultural "action learning" on issues faced by Native American and Hispanic people in rural areas and courses exploring Oregon's rural, natural resource-dependent communities
- **Fall Symposium on Collaborative Governance**  
On October 1-2, 2007, OSU hosts a symposium on collaborative governance, involving nationally known scholars.

## Rural Studies Program Faculty

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Oregon State  
UNIVERSITY

## Rural Studies Program



*"Working with Oregon's rural communities to improve environmental, economic, social, and cultural well-being."*

<http://ruralstudies.oregonstate.edu/>

## Need

The people, places and natural resources of rural America play a vital role in the nation's economy and culture. Yet rural communities are facing unique challenges in their ability to address the forces that are transforming rural places in ways that threaten community viability and well-being. They are concerned with the loss of their futures, in the form of living wage jobs and educational opportunities for, and flight of, their young people (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2001; Pew Partnership, 2000). Rural Oregonians share these concerns: they are significantly more likely than urban Oregonians to list the economy, lack of jobs/unemployment, education, and health care as the most important issues facing the country (Steel, 2004).

- Rural Oregon's unemployment rate runs about 25% higher than urban Oregon's and rural Oregon's poverty rate is approximately 18% higher than urban Oregon's.
- The income gap between rural Oregon and the rest of the country has grown over the past three decades. In 1969, Rural Oregon's per capita income was 86% of the national average; in 2001 it was 75%.
- Technological improvements in the agriculture and wood products sectors and globalization of the economy increased the output per worker and competition and put downward pressure on prices, jobs, salaries, and profits.
- In 1969, both rural and urban counties received an average of 75% of their income from net earnings and 25% came from dividends, rents, and transfer payments (e.g. social security). In 2001, the average proportions of income derived from dividends, rents, and transfer payments was 49% for rural counties and 39% for urban counties.
- With recent patterns of migration and immigration, rural cultural landscapes are changing faster than their urban counterparts. Many rural communities are aging with the out-migration of youth and/or immigration of retirees. There is also increasing cultural diversity with growing numbers of international migrants.

Little is known about what works and what doesn't in improving the economic and social conditions in rural places, about how community actions or outside policy makers can strengthen the economic and social fabric in rural communities. We do know that the rural communities themselves must work as full partners to develop strategies for overcoming the disadvantages that come with lack of scale and geographic isolation.

## Response

The Rural Studies Program at Oregon State University has developed a statewide, multi-disciplinary program from five colleges and the Extension Service to develop a new and unique model of University engagement with rural communities. This model involves partners from other universities, governments, and the nonprofit sector in creating new educational opportunities, applied and fundamental research, and outreach that address the needs of rural communities.

This program has four objectives:

- Prepare a new generation of community leaders, professionals, and scholars with capacity to take on the kinds of complex, often messy situations that emerge as rural communities seek economic and social viability.
- Generate new knowledge about the challenges facing rural communities and what policies work best in rural places for achieving sustainability.
- Engage rural communities in learning about their strengths and opportunities and in developing place-specific strategies to support long-term development.
- Build broader public understanding about the contributions of, and constraints faced by, rural communities and about the impacts of federal and state policy on rural communities.

## Masters of Public Policy

OSU has created a Rural Policy concentration for rural professionals and students that will train the next generation of leaders to develop a base for ongoing development of sustainable rural communities in Oregon and elsewhere. It is one of the first programs of this nature to offer such a concentration in the United States.

This new concentration will provide a graduate education to prepare students for careers in rural development and policy in the public, private, non-profit, and international sectors. The program will provide students with new and innovative approaches to economic development in rural communities.

The MPP is an interdisciplinary degree offered by the Departments of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Economics, Political Science, and Sociology.

Students enrolled in the MPP program will be offered opportunities to participate in student internships in rural communities in Western States.

More information is available about the Masters in Public Policy program at: <http://oregonstate.edu/cla/mpp/>

## Community Outreach

Oregon State University will provide community leaders with research-based information about their local social and economic conditions and demographic trends that form the context within which they must make decisions, and about effective strategies for achieving various community development objectives. In collaboration with community leaders, extension faculty produce comprehensive rural community profiles that provide essential information on local economic, demographic, and land-use conditions and trends, as well as economic, social, and policy strategies.

Some recent projects include:

- Jefferson County's Economic Structure: An Input-Output Analysis
- Economic Impact Study for Detroit Lake and the Upper North Santiam Canyon
- Umatilla County's Economic Structure and the Economic Impacts of Wind Energy Development: An Input-Output Analysis
- Economic Effects of Fairs and Fairground Activities

\*All examples are available online.

