

URPSA's Grand River Student Connection Provides Internships for MSU Students

By Mengqiu (Liria) Wu, Research Assistant, wumengq2@msu.edu



In March 2013, MSU's Urban and Regional Planning Student Association (URPSA) received a grant from the Community Reinvestment Fund, established as part of the Mid-Michigan Program for Greater Sustainability. This grant was provided to the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Communities Program.

Michigan State University students living both on and around the MSU campus have direct ties to the Tri-County corridor, utilizing its public spaces and commercial areas in their daily lives. Yet, many are unaware of the corridor's rich history and deep ties to the community, and have little knowledge of current development or proposed plans for its future growth. In order to encourage more students to participate in the planning process, URPSA used the Community Reinvestment Fund to start a project titled: "URPSA's Grand River Student Connection," which engaged MSU students to increase their awareness and participation in local planning around the Grand River corridor, especially near the campus area.

This project's primary goal was to encourage MSU students to participate in a broad variety of volunteer opportunities, research, and other activities along the corridor to illustrate to students the importance of engagement in local planning. During the project period, URPSA has posted about 60 internship and volunteer opportunities on the MSU Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement website from various profit and non-profit organizations like: The Power We Consortium, Greater Lansing Food Bank, South Lansing Community Development Association, Michigan Coalition Against Homeless, etc. Seven students have been placed in those positions successfully. URPSA also developed an e-newsletter that advertised the internship and volunteer positions. This newsletter was posted on the URPSA Facebook page to enhance the visibility of those opportunities.

In order to develop strong ties amongst a variety of student organizations, URPSA hosted four meetings for this project and partnered with other student organizations, such as the MSU Council for Graduate Students and the Community Relations Coalition in East Lansing. On October 5, 2013, URPSA hosted a campus-wide event: Shaping a Greater Grand River conference at the MSU Union Building which attracted students, faculty, staff, and members from the surrounding community.

URPSA aims to provide professional and educational development for MSU's Urban Planning students. The Mid-Michigan Program for Greater Sustainability project, supported by the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, provided a unique opportunity for MSU students to get involved in the community planning process, and the broader concepts surrounding sustainability in the region.