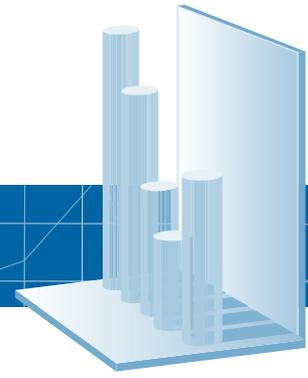




RESEARCH IN FOCUS

SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP IN HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



VOLUME 1/ISSUE 1

Highlighting Doctoral Research

Sherone Ivey, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for University Partnerships

Welcome to *Research in Focus*, a new biannual publication of HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP) that highlights the accomplishments of grantees in its doctoral research programs. We hope that you find the articles engaging and informative.



One of OUP's goals is to encourage and support scholarship in housing and community development. The grantees in its Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant and Early Doctoral Student Research Grant programs focus their dissertations and prepare research manuscripts in these areas. *Research in Focus* is an instrument through which we can publicize and celebrate their work.

The programs are funded through HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) and administered by OUP. PD&R uses in-house staff and contractors to conduct research on housing and community development issues and evaluate HUD programs to inform policy decisions. The doctoral programs are another avenue through which we research and evaluate these issues.

In this inaugural issue we chronicle the history of both programs, explain HUD's motivation for establishing them, list program requirements, describe how their work complements the mission of PD&R, and profile grantee research. We hope that this issue of *Research in Focus* informs your view of doctoral scholarship.

In addition, we hope that, through funding doctoral research, we develop scholars who will continue to work in areas of interest to HUD even after they have completed their dissertation. Future issues of *Research*

in Focus will profile these individuals and highlight the success of both doctoral programs in supporting scholarship in housing and community development.

Once again, welcome to *Research in Focus*. We congratulate OUP for developing a publication dedicated to celebrating its doctoral research programs.

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Supporting the Pursuit of an Advanced Degree

Two thousand four hundred and fifty hours. This is the average amount of time a doctoral student spends completing a 225-page dissertation. This number is the result of a study conducted by Davis and Parker of 650 dissertations, ranging in size from less than 100 to more than 600 pages, with a median of 225 pages. And according to Davis and Parker's calculations, if the student works on the 225-page dissertation for 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, 175 hours per month—the dissertation will be finished in 14 months.

Without question, doctoral research requires a student to make a substantial time investment to obtain the degree. And if a student is unable to maintain a full-time job while conducting and writing the results of the research, it also requires a financial sacrifice. But for those who successfully pursue a Ph.D., it is time and money well spent because it is an investment in a field in which they will most likely dedicate their career.

To support doctoral students in their scholarly pursuits, HUD created the Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (DDRG) program and the Early Doctoral Student Research Grant (EDSRG) program—and has provided financial assistance to more than 200 doctoral students. While HUD is committed to helping students achieve their educational goals, the creation of these programs also offers an advantage to HUD. Offering doctoral students financial support is

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an effective way to increase the number of housing and community development specialists.

About HUD's Doctoral Grant Programs

In 1994, OUP established the DDRG program to help doctoral students complete their research and dissertations. This program competitively awards one-time grants of up to \$25,000 for a period of 24 months to doctoral students currently enrolled in accredited institutions of higher education recognized by the Department of Education (ED).

The original goal of the DDRG program was to encourage Ph.D. candidates to pursue HUD-related research, especially on topics of current interest to HUD. This philosophy continues to drive the program even today.

The DDRG program supports research on a wide range of issues, including:

- * Increasing homeownership opportunities.
- * Strengthening communities.
- * Ensuring equal opportunity in housing.
- * Embracing high standards of ethics, management, and accountability.
- * Promoting participation of faith-based and community organizations.
- * Improving the quality of life and economic vitality of communities.

Recognizing that doctoral students at all phases of the educational cycle are in need of financial support, OUP built on the success of the DDRG program and introduced the EDSRG program in 2001. This program helps doctoral students cultivate their research skills through the preparation of research manuscripts and encourages them to share their findings through presentations at scholarly conferences or in refereed publications. It awards one-time grants of up to \$15,000 to pre-dissertation doctoral students enrolled in an accredited institution of higher education recognized by ED. The EDSRG program offers financial support for research that informs Federal problemsolving and policymaking related to HUD's policy priorities, including:

- * Economic development in untapped markets.
- * Development of inner cities.
- * Issues in housing finance.
- * Regionalism and Smart Growth.

Through this comprehensive program of support for doctoral research, HUD seeks to establish a cadre of scholars who will dedicate much of their academic work to HUD-related research. These grants have made it possible to tap into serious scholarships and apply the results in ways that support HUD's mainstream programs.

Program Change Designed to Help More Doctoral Candidates

While doctoral students were showing a significant amount of interest in the programs, HUD hoped to attract doctoral students from a broader range of disciplines. After a review of the eligibility requirements for the EDSRG program, HUD broadened the criteria to allow more students to apply for funding. Previously, the eligible areas of academic concentration were very limited. Applicants had to have urban economics as their major field or as a concentration within a major in another field related to housing and urban development. That requirement has been revised and applicants need only have a major or concentration within a field related to housing and urban development.

Showcasing Quality Research

Because of the level of effort involved in obtaining a doctoral degree, HUD wanted to acknowledge its grantees' outstanding research efforts. To do this, HUD created a special edition of *Cityscape* (Vol. 7, No. 1) that focused on the quality of research and relevance to HUD's mission of several DDRG grantees.

"The doctoral programs have become an intrinsic part of OUP's program offerings," says Marcia Marker Feld, a former OUP director. "In creating the programs, I believe HUD saw that universities and cities symbiotically support each other, and supporting doctoral students in pursuing research in housing and urban development policy is a way to extend information about this field and disseminate it."

For more information about DDRG and EDSRG or to request an application kit, contact:

University Partnerships Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 6091
Rockville, MD 20849-6091
Telephone: (800) 245-2691
E-mail: oup@oup.org
Web site: www.oup.org

Assessing the Effectiveness of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)

Evidence suggests that owning a home is associated with many positive economic, psychological, and sociological outcomes—but saving for that hefty downpayment is no easy feat. To help low-income individuals and families accumulate funds, Dr. Michael Sherraden, of the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, introduced the concept of individual development accounts (IDAs). IDAs are matched savings accounts that can be used to purchase a first home or fund higher education or small business capitalization. IDA programs combine savings with financial education, asset-specific training, case management, and peer support to provide long-term education and support to help participants reach their goals.

While IDAs sound like a worthwhile concept, are they effective? What factors contribute to a participant's success or struggle with building assets? What can be done to overcome any saving obstacles? Who are likely to succeed with an IDA? These are some of the questions Dr. Michal Grinstein-Weiss hoped to answer through her doctoral research and present in her dissertation *IDAs for Housing Policy: Saving Outcomes and Racial Differences*.

A Look at the IDA Experience

As a doctoral student at Washington University, Dr. Grinstein-Weiss was introduced to IDAs by Dr. Sherraden—who also happened to be her advisor—and became interested in the concept.

“I decided to focus my research on the experiences of IDA participants saving for a home,” says Dr. Grinstein-Weiss, “since the majority of the participants in IDAs were saving for homes.”

She examined individual characteristics such as education level, marital status, and employment status, and program characteristics such as number of hours of financial education received, match rate for the savings, and the savings goals that can contribute to higher saving and are associated with better performances for IDA participants saving for a home. In addition, since a key indicator of racial inequality in the United States is the different rates in homeownership, Dr. Grinstein-Weiss' research also looked at the differences in performances between Caucasians and African Americans who are saving for a home.

Research Results

After conducting extensive research with IDA participants, Dr. Grinstein-Weiss' key findings showed:

- * Low-income participants in IDAs who are saving for a home have the ability and willingness to save when they are provided structured opportunities to accumulate assets.
- * Financial education is highly associated with savings outcomes.
- * A match rate of 3:1, rather than a match rate of 1:1, is associated with more frequent deposits.
- * Monthly savings targets are also highly associated with an increase in savings.
- * Direct deposit seems to facilitate increased savings.
- * While low-income Caucasians and African Americans are saving for a home, research findings indicate that the latter are saving smaller amounts.
- * Participants with special needs include those who live in rural areas and are single, African American, and unbanked (do not have a checking or savings account).

“Participants with special needs may face greater difficulties in terms of trying to save,” says Dr. Grinstein-Weiss. “Additional strategies may need to be adopted to help them save in IDAs. For example, program administrators may be able to concentrate more on the unbanked population and try to provide more support, staff, and financial counseling to facilitate stronger relationships between the unbanked and financial institutions,” says Dr. Grinstein-Weiss.

Putting the Results to Use

The results of Dr. Grinstein-Weiss' research may have several practical implications for policymakers, program administrators, and future research.

“My research suggests that program administrators may want to make financial education an initial program requirement and ensure the quality of this education, increase the match rate to 3:1, raise

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the limits on matchable deposits, or encourage participants to use direct deposit and provide them with the means to do so.”

Dr. Grinstein-Weiss suggests that additional strategies may need to be adopted to help more disadvantaged participants and to balance saving performances among Caucasians and African Americans. “If institutional structures associated with IDA programs have more positive effects on saving performance among African Americans than among Caucasians, IDA programs might be able to target African Americans differently in program design and implementation.”

Dr. Grinstein-Weiss states that research implications should be used with caution, given the scarce resources and the fact that detailed cost data on the different program characteristics in IDAs are not yet available.

The Value of IDAs

While there is always room for program enhancements, to date, IDAs have proven to be an effective method for helping low-income individuals and families build assets. The matched savings accounts have not only enabled low-income individuals and families to save millions of dollars in increased assets, but they have also contributed to community building and economic development. According to the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED), every 100,000 IDAs will produce:

- * 7,050 new businesses.
- * 6,000 new and 6,000 rehabilitated homes.



Dr. Michal Grinstein-Weiss and family after her graduation ceremony.

Sources of IDA-Matched Funds

IDAs nationwide are funded in several ways:

- * **Federal**
 - Assets for Independence
 - Workforce Investment Act
 - Office of Refugee Resettlement
 - Community Service Block Grant
- * **State**
 - TANF
 - General revenue
 - Community Development Block Grant
 - Tax credits
- * **City**
 - General revenue
 - Housing trust funds
- * **Private**
 - Foundations
 - Corporations (i.e., Entergy Corporation)
 - Financial Institutions
 - Individuals

- * \$287,000,000 in savings in community financial institutions.
- * \$188,000,000 in increased assets owned by low-income families.
- * 11,667 families off welfare.
- * 32,000 additional high school and college graduates.

“Developing an understanding of the patterns of saving for a home in IDAs is an important step toward the development of public policy that can result in progress toward promoting homeownership among low-income households and narrowing the racial gap in homeownership,” says Dr. Grinstein-Weiss.

A Timeline for Success

The year is 2001. Michal Grinstein-Weiss is a second-year doctoral student at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, working on the American Dream Demonstration (ADD) project. The first large-scale test of individual development accounts (IDAs), the ADD project fascinates Grinstein-Weiss, and she decides to focus her research on the experiences of IDA participants saving to purchase a home. But doctoral research is expensive, and Grinstein-Weiss needs to find additional funding if she hopes to continue her research. She learns about HUD's doctoral research programs and sees her opportunity to secure those funds.

EDSRG: Offering More Than Money

Grinstein-Weiss submits an application and is awarded an EDSRG in July 2001. For her, the application for an EDSRG resulted in a financial boost that enabled her to continue her doctoral research. Moreover, as part of the application process, she was required to write a paper. That paper is now being published in a special edition of the *Journal of Income Distribution*, and has been the topic of four conference presentations given by Grinstein-Weiss.

DDRG: The Award is Twice as Nice

A year later, Grinstein-Weiss is in the third year of her doctoral program. After the 2002 DDRG Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) is announced, she begins working on her DDRG application. But when the grantees are announced, she is not a recipient.

She contacts the Office of University Partnerships to request a copy of reviewers' comments, which is HUD's standard practice so that applicants can revise the application for future submittals. She begins revising her proposal, intent on reapplying the following year. But when the 2003 NOFA is released, she encounters an obstacle.

"The NOFA was announced later than usual that year, and my husband and I already had tickets to visit our families in Israel," she says. "We were new parents and wanted to go home to introduce them to the baby. But I knew that I couldn't go home and still have enough time to complete and submit my DDRG application. I had a difficult decision to make."

Grinstein-Weiss postponed her trip and focused on completing her grant application. She was more familiar with the process now and used specific reviewers' comments to strengthen her application—with good results. Grinstein-Weiss was awarded a DDRG.

"In the end, going through the application process twice was important because I revised my dissertation proposal and my research plans tremendously based on the useful comments I received from the reviewers," says Grinstein-Weiss. "Also, after receiving the grant, I was invited to give a talk on my research to individuals at HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research. They provided me with more feedback and helpful suggestions on how to revise my paper and better present my research."

Providing Money, Marketability, and Motivation

The grants awarded to Grinstein-Weiss did more than provide her with much-needed financial support. They increased her marketability in the job market and helped her better define her research goals.

"The grants provided me with financial resources to get additional help, such as consulting with a statistician to do more sophisticated analyses, hiring a research assistant, buying additional books and

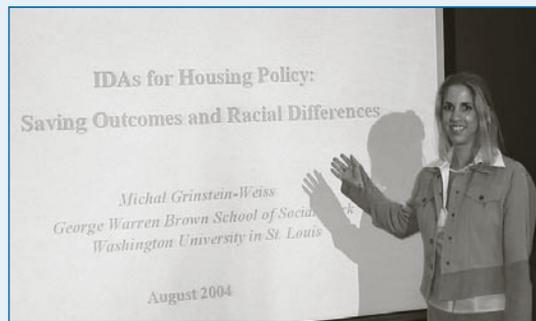
software, and freeing up my time so I could better devote myself to pursuing my research agenda," says Grinstein-Weiss. "They were also a motivational boost and increased my excitement about future work."

In addition, the grants demonstrated to future employers Grinstein-Weiss' ability to generate grant money, making her a more attractive job candidate. She says her involvement with HUD and the ability to work on publications in addition to her dissertation broadened her vision and helped her better define her goals and research agenda on housing for a future career.

"Being recognized by HUD demonstrated that my research is important and other people also recognized that it is meaningful," she says.

Advice for Applicants

"My first advice to anyone interested in housing-related research is to apply to HUD's doctoral research programs," says Grinstein-Weiss. "Whatever the outcome, you will learn from the process and benefit from the experience. In my case, not getting the award the first time was a good thing because I received such detailed feedback that my dissertation proposal was so much stronger."



Dr. Grinstein-Weiss defends her dissertation.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of University Partnerships
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Grinstein-Weiss also advises applicants to read the NOFA carefully, take it seriously, start early enough so that time is available for the creation of several drafts that can be shared with other colleagues and your advisor for feedback, and write your application in a way that explicitly shows how it directly addresses HUD's goals and mission.

Introducing Dr. Grinstein-Weiss

Fast forward to 2004. Michal Grinstein-Weiss successfully defends her dissertation, *IDAs for Housing Policy: Saving Outcomes and Racial Differences*, and becomes 1 of only 20,000 women to receive a Ph.D. nationwide that year. Today, Dr. Grinstein-Weiss is an assistant professor at the School of Social Work, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. She credits HUD's doctoral research program grants for providing the financial support, resources, and motivation she needed to reach her academic goals.



Dr. Grinstein-Weiss in her office at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP) provides grants to institutions of higher education to assist them and their partners with the implementation of a broad range of community development activities including neighborhood revitalization, housing, and economic development. It also provides grants to doctoral candidates to develop and conduct applied research on policy-relevant housing and urban development issues. This newsletter, *Research in Focus*, highlights the accomplishments of grantees in OUP's Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant and Early Doctoral Student Research Grant programs. It includes a variety of articles on past and current grantee dissertations and research.