

**Ashby Dialogue Report – Affordable Housing**  
**May 18, 2017**

**Dialogue Faculty Participants:**  
**Ruth H. DeHoog, Dept. of Political Science, Coordinator**  
**Stephen Sills, Dept. of Sociology**  
**Sulima Sultana, Dept. of Geography**  
**Spring 2017**

The Ashby Dialogue on Affordable Housing was designed for graduate and undergraduate students to connect current issues in U.S. housing policy to local conversations in Greensboro that promoted affordable, safe, and quality housing for low-income populations. Combining interdisciplinary approaches in the social sciences, the Dialogue offered students opportunities to be involved in community discussions, research and learning. The Dialogue afforded several opportunities to learn not only about housing issues, but importantly, to see the impact of housing issues on people—through film, books, and local speakers. **The focal question of the Dialogue was, what is the current state of affordable housing and how can we improve housing for low-income people and neighborhoods?**

Faculty from three social science departments sponsored a series of focused discussions and events on affordable and low-income housing: Dr. Ruth DeHoog (Political Science), Stephen Sills (Sociology), and Dr. Selima Sultana (Geography). The Center for Housing and Community Studies also was involved as a convener and provided useful support for the Dialogue. Faculty recruited graduate and undergraduate students from the following departments:

Geography – several undergraduate and graduate students  
Interior Architecture –3 MA students  
Political Science – 12 MPA students  
Public Health – 2 MPH students  
Sociology – 2 undergraduates

One key element of the Dialogue was the role of three spring semester courses to draw students to the Dialogue events. Professor DeHoog taught PSC 560 Housing Problems, Policy, and Programs, which involved written assignments, site visits, reflections, and research papers. Dr. Stephen Sills taught an undergraduate research methods class (PSC 301) and an Internship in Sociology course in the spring, which allowed interested students to intern in housing organizations and/or research housing conditions for their course projects. Professor Selima Sultana’s course on Geography of Livable Cities (GEO 522) related to the affordable housing issue through its use of data and research on cities. This combination of readings and research assignments created background materials for discussion about current issues and practical solutions.

This Dialogue and courses engaged both undergraduate and graduate students, some who already had an interest in affordable housing, while others were in one of the relevant courses. Students were encouraged to attend the Dialogue discussions along with their classes and go beyond the Dialogue format to conduct applied research projects for their courses, which in turn contributed to the ongoing discussions. The core group was 20 students.

## **EVENTS:**

### **1) Housing Hangouts, sponsored by UNCG's Center for Housing and Community Studies – Friday, Feb. 3 and Friday, March 3 (12-2 pm)**

Almost all the students and faculty attended the first one, and several attended the second event, which was optional. (See attached flyers) Each Hangout was well-attended by community activists and agency representatives.

**Feb. Housing Hangout** - Several local speakers in local government discussed the history of affordable housing policy and programs, as well as neighborhood development in Greensboro. These community experts represented the City of Greensboro, the Greensboro Housing Authority, the Greensboro Housing Coalition, and the Cottage Grove Collaborative. This event provided an opportunity for questions about past policies and programs, and gave students a clearer understanding of the way in which national policies and trends were implemented in the local context.

**March Housing Hangout** – Four presentations on local services and coordination were given by homeless agency representatives. These speakers provided the context for understanding how the nonprofit agencies in this community are instrumental in service provision for homeless individuals. A most compelling presentation by IRC's Michelle Kennedy about the individual stories of homeless men served by her agency fleshed out the human aspect of homelessness, while Shanna Reece from the Servant Center gave a positive summary of the significant progress in housing all homeless veterans. The importance of federal support was given by the executive director of Mary's House, a domestic violence shelter, which has lost its federal grant this year due to changing HUD priorities.

### **2) Feature Film Showing, *The Big Short*. See attached flyer.**

This award-winning film explains the complicated financial dealings that led to the housing and foreclosure crisis through the stories of several key people who uncovered the fraud and abuse in housing bonds. The film also showed real people who took advantage of various financial methods for their own profit, and the resulting crisis once the financial instruments were exposed.

Following the film, Jeff Thigpen, the Guilford County Register of Deeds and UNCG alum, discussed in more depth the various lawsuits that came out of the housing financing debacle, as well as his own efforts to pursue a legal strategy against the major banks that misused the documentation required for mortgages and land purchases. He discussed the fallout of the foreclosure crisis and how it produced some major efforts, some successful, to reform the financial instruments used in lending practices. Several community members and other students attended this film screening and contributed to the discussion.

**3) Greensboro Housing Summit – Sponsored by Greensboro Housing Coalition – Wednesday, March 29 (8:30-3 pm) See attached booklet.**

This all-day event was attended by 2 faculty and 13 students. Students were given free registrations, which allowed them to view a new housing video, attend the panel presentations, network with community activists, participate in focused table discussions on fair housing, and listen to the keynote speaker, Vernice Miller-Travis. Students mingled with community members and had many conversations at their lunch tables about how their experiences and research related to housing needs. This event underlined the importance of community connections and collaborations in facing the local shortages in affordable, safe, and healthy homes.

**4) Public Service Leadership Speaker – Vernice Miller-Travis, Skeo Solutions, on Wed., March 29 (7-9 pm) See attached flyer**

Dr. Miller-Travis exemplified a successful leader in addressing community problems, specifically housing and environmental justice issues, both as an activist and now as a consultant with a national reputation. Her address to the students was inspiring, in that she talked about key experiences in her early career that shaped her leadership skills and values. She challenged students to make a difference in crossing racial divides, starting in their own communities. Citing her work with minority communities in Warren County and Raleigh, NC in particular illustrated how she crossed barriers and promoted productive discussions about race and the importance of place. Dr. Miller-Travis spent about an hour of this time answering students' questions about her history, community engagement strategies, and housing issues.

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**Student Comments:**

"The Ashby Dialogue events showed us how the concepts we were learning about in our housing class play out in real life. They provided a historical perspective about housing issues, and at the same time, helped us understand how relevant these issues currently are in our own community. These events made the problems we studied seem more immediate, and more critical in developing housing solutions."

"I really enjoyed the guest speakers, especially Dr. Vernice Miller. I appreciated the broad disciplines represented by other students and our speakers. The discussions were really great! I learned about affordable housing options from many different aspects. Amazing opportunity!"

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