

Geography Undergraduate Presents on Capitol Hill

Rebecca Woiteshek, a senior in geography at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, recently presented her senior thesis, "Dire Straits: Using Geographic Information Science (GIS) to Better Identify and Serve the Urban Poor" to members of Congress and their staffs at the annual "Posters on the Hill" event in Washington, D.C.

Sponsored by the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR), "Posters on the Hill" features sixty students from across the U.S. presenting their research following a competitive review of all projects submitted. This year's event was held on May 5 in the Rayburn House Office Building.

In her senior research project, Woiteshek used GIS to analyze demographic changes in the Watts neighborhood of urban Los Angeles over the past 10 years. Specifically, her research focused on ethnic changes within Watts as it transformed from a predominantly African-American neighborhood to one that is primarily Hispanic. In her presentation, she detailed Watts' demographic transformation and the resulting needs of a Spanish-speaking community isolated within an English-speaking culture.

Woiteshek began her involvement in Watts four years ago, when she volunteered with Faith in Christ Ministries (FICM), a local non-profit that has focused on helping Watts' predominantly African-American urban poor since the late 1960s. The leaders of FICM had seen a continuing decline of community participation in recent years and were struggling to complete their mission. According to Woiteshek, although it was obvious that Watts was changing, the magnitude and complexity of demographic changes taking place there could not be understood through visual observation or a thorough reading of census data alone. By employing GIS, Woiteshek was able to capture the dynamic changes taking place in Watts over time, including the specific ways demographic composition would change at very small spatial scales. Field work helped her confirm the nature of these changes and the unique problems that new immigrants to the area are encountering.

Woiteshek's research helped to confirm the fact that there were two distinct communities in Watts, and that the Hispanic community was in fact spatially isolated within a larger English-speaking culture. The leaders of FICM, which had traditionally worked with African-Americans, "wanted to be more relevant to their community" Woiteshek told the *AAG Newsletter*. Better understanding the complexity of the demographic changes taking place in Watts "allows them to switch gears," she said. "They're not changing

their mission statement, but this helps them better implement their mission statement."

Woiteshek was accompanied in Washington by her academic advisor, Julio Rivera, Chair of the Department of Geography at Carthage College.

Additional information about the Council on Undergraduate Research and the "Posters on the Hill" event is available at www.cur.org. ■



Woiteshek