

# NOPI Bulletin

The New Orleans Planning Initiative (NOPI) – A program of the Department of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University

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In February, Cornell students joined with residents for a rally in the Lower 9th Ward

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## A Message from the Coordinator

Ken Reardon, Chair of Cornell's Department of City and Regional Planning, introduced me to the possibility of coordinating the CRP New Orleans Planning Initiative with the assertion that what had happened and what will happen in New Orleans is the most significant civil rights story of our lifetimes since the 1960's civil rights movement. Several generations witnessed the destruction in New Orleans. Witnessed the response. Witnessed the efforts, the errors and the actions or inactions that seemed unimaginable. Not far beneath the surface and even explicitly in many media, the story of class and race structural oppression presented itself aggressively. The myth of race and class equity – of the end of the significance of race and class exploded before our eyes.

This has settled down some now. Other wars have drawn our attention. But the suffering remains. And the struggle to reclaim families and lives and rebuild New Orleans simmers and grows.

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## Engaged Scholarship: Coursework on New Orleans

Seven courses in the Department of City and Regional Planning are involved in the New Orleans Planning Initiative during the Spring 2006 semester. These include courses on urban design, land use regulations, and historic preservation. While their focus varies, all of the courses will provide valuable information and tools to assist ACORN's community-based planning and redevelopment efforts in the 9th Ward of New Orleans.

Three courses are solely focused on the 9th Ward of New Orleans: City Planning Design Studio (CRP 557), Measured Drawing (CRP 567), and Revisioning the 9th Ward: Ecology, Open Space, and Disaster Resistance in Post-Katrina New Orleans (CRP 675). Students in these courses had the opportunity to visit the city in February and undertake on-site research and give presentations to an ACORN-led steering committee in charge of developing the framework by which the community redevelopment plan will be constructed. This experience offered tangible lessons into both the opportunities and challenges planners face when involved with the rebuilding process.

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*Cornell students emptied & gutted houses during January and March service trips*

## Message from the Coordinator, Continued from Page 1

The Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University has made a significant commitment to work in the 9<sup>th</sup> ward in New Orleans. Very significant damage in the lower 9<sup>th</sup> and significant damage in the upper 9<sup>th</sup> remain. These are understatements. But it is also the case that though shaken, the people I have met in New Orleans and especially in the 9<sup>th</sup> ward are standing and fighting. There may be feelings of desperation – at least at times. But the feelings conveyed have nothing to do with despair. Determined courage and righteous indignation are much more manifest. The people of New Orleans, the people of the 9<sup>th</sup> ward live the warm passion of their city. You cannot miss it.

This must be a story of commitment. On the ground, thousands of people have returned to re-make their lives. They are drawn to a city resonant with myth and story. Where celebration plays out against the backdrop of struggle even to bury the dead and where the City as living being is rising up and taking note of itself. The people of New Orleans are coming home. They are coming back to every part of New Orleans. This includes the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward both upper and lower.

ACORN represents a large number of people in the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward. It is one of the largest community organizing entities in the world with over 30 offices in as many cities. It has spawned more than 40 community development and supportive services corporations. The CRP New Orleans Planning Initiative began when ACORN requested assistance from universities so that their efforts to organize community based development in New Orleans would be well supported by research and professional planning.

ACORN has worked with members, paid New Orleanian crews and volunteers to clean and gut more than 800 houses, beginning renovations on close to 200. ACORN members and staff have worked with students from many universities and schools. Cornell student teams are performing a central function. Eight Cornell classes have already directed their attention to meeting planning and community development needs in the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward. Three of those classes traveled to New Orleans in February to gather information in preparation for an ACORN led community planning process. On March 25<sup>th</sup> LSU and Cornell students worked with ACORN members and staff to run a community forum and assessment. A three tiered process has been put in place that will position ACORN to establish a community based planning framework for the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, more developed planning options for the Saint Claude neighborhood in the upper 9<sup>th</sup> and design options for several smaller tracts within the Saint Claude area. This will set the stage for demonstration development projects. ACORN is working with us and others to put a similar process in place for the lower 9<sup>th</sup>.

Working together, we have identified needs and are designing course work in tandem with volunteer work and internships that meet those needs. This is service learning in a setting of great historic consequence with important outcomes on the ground and for each of the students.

Our commitment must meet the commitment of New Orleanians. They are digging in, fighting for their lives, for their families, and for their historic home.

Please join us in our efforts to stand with them. Everything is at stake.

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Cornell volunteers will be working on restoring the St. Roch Market, where HPP faculty & students hope local residents will someday be able to buy and sell fresh foods



January service trip volunteers

## Student Volunteers Help In Rebuilding Effort

Since Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in late 2005, The New Orleans Planning Initiative has organized two volunteer trips to the New Orleans area, to encourage on-the-ground exposure to the scope of the disaster, and to allow Cornell students the opportunity to work with ACORN and its members.

In January of 2006, 17 students and three faculty members traveled to New Orleans for two weeks and contributed to ACORN's disaster rebuilding program. The volunteers spent their days providing free house-gutting services to residents of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, New Orleans East, and Gentilly neighborhoods. In addition, a number of students assisted ACORN with the re-evaluation of homes slated for demolition by the city ("red-flagged"), as part of ACORN's ongoing "No Bulldozing" campaign.

From February 22-26, 24 students and three faculty members visited the St. Claude area of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward and carried out direct research in support of ongoing workshop courses at Cornell. This research included Historic Preservation surveys of the St. Roch Market, design analysis of St. Claude Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods, and surveys of features like parks, green space, public facilities, schools, and residential/commercial space.

During the upcoming Spring Break, NOPI and HPP have collaborated in organizing a service trip to the region, which will include over 30 students, 4 faculty members, and a number of HPP alumni.

For information on volunteering with ACORN and NOPI, please contact Andrew Rumbach (ajr56@cornell.edu).

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## Internship Opportunities for Summer 2006

This summer, eight internships will be made available for students to work at ACORN Housing. ACORN Housing is a national non-profit organization that focuses on supporting homeownership for low- and moderate-income households. The majority of their efforts focus on distressed areas of minority and recent immigrant populations.

ACORN Housing has been actively involved with assisting the housing needs of those who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. In addition, ACORN Housing is actively involved with neighborhood residents in the community planning process along with home restoration and rebuilding.

Internship positions for this summer include: land assembly, neighborhood planning, architectural and development, and financing.

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*“...Students become engaged scholars who learn about important topics in planning and public policy, as well as support important redevelopment work...”*



*Cornell students visiting New Orleans have stayed in a FEMA tent city*

## Engaged Scholarship: Coursework on New Orleans

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The output produced by the students in these three courses is specifically geared towards assisting the rebuilding effort. For instance, in Jeff Chusid's Measured Drawing course, historic preservation students will produce drawings and photographic documentation of the St. Roch Market. This documentation will assist in the plans to use the historic market as a farmer's market and community center for the neighborhood.

In the other four classes: Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (CRP 508), Introduction to Public Policy Analysis and Management (CRP 545), Land Use Regulations (CRP 553), and Quantitative Techniques for Policy Analysis (CRP 621) an

example from New Orleans will be used to teach some of the content of the course and/or students can select New Orleans for their individual project. For example, a group of students in Rolf Pendall's Land Use Regulations course will examine how land use plans and regulations are used in New Orleans to prevent damage from natural disasters.

Through their involvement with post-Katrina New Orleans, students become engaged scholars who learn about import topics in planning and public policy, as well as support important rebuilding and redevelopment work in New Orleans.

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*Students and faculty gather together to plan the day's workload during the January service trip to New Orleans*

## Fall 2005 Reading Course Informs Students

The devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina shook the United States in many ways. Environmental justice, race/class struggles, and a strong sense of distrust towards government agencies were some of the issues raised by this tragic disaster. These and other inter-related issues made it very difficult to understand and help resolve the situation in New Orleans and the Gulf Region. As a response to this complicated phenomenon, a group of planning students stood up for an attempt to disentangle these issues and to obtain a deeper understanding of the City of New Orleans. This student initiative resulted in a collective reading course directed by Professor Ken Reardon in the latter half of the fall 2005 semester. This reading course, *CRP 679.04 Seminar on Rebuilding New Orleans*, focused on 5 relevant topics (environment, race/class, politics, economics, and illustrative case studies), and spent a week discussing each topic. During the course, students

conducted independent library research, searched for reading materials on their own, and constructed a preliminary bibliography that gives a brief understanding on the City of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina. In addition, students collectively constructed a briefing document on New Orleans, specifically focused on the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, along with an annotated resource guide. All these materials will be downloadable from the New Orleans Planning Initiative website.

A great number of the students who participated in this fall course are also taking related courses during this spring semester. We hope this ongoing effort by the students will continue and have a positive impact on the revitalization efforts of New Orleans and the Gulf region.



9<sup>th</sup> Ward, New Orleans

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*“Environmental justice, race/class struggles, and a strong sense of distrust towards government agencies were some of the issues raised by this tragic disaster.”*

## **New Orleans Planning Initiative (NOPI)**

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### **We're on the Web!**

See us at:  
<http://crp.cornell.edu/outreach/nopi>

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## **What is NOPI?**

The New Orleans Planning Initiative (NOPI) is a collaborative partnership between the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). NOPI provides academic research and resources to assist ACORN's community-based planning and redevelopment efforts in the 9th Ward of New Orleans. Through engaged scholarship, NOPI seeks to enhance the participation of 9th ward community members in the redevelopment process, and provide resources that will assist in the creation of a comprehensive, community-based redevelopment plan.



*Students donned protective clothing in order to work in mold-infested homes*