

2019 Faculty Fellows

James Lawler, D.P.S., Professor, Disability Studies and Information Technology, Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems

"A Case Study for Enabling a Non-Profit Organization to Help Adult Artists with Cognitive Disabilities through a Multisensory Environment"

Professor Lawler's case study will assess the functionality of a technology that provides a multisensory environment for adult artists with cognitive disabilities at a local non-profit organization in the city. The organization supports people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in building full lives. The project will work closely with adult artists with cognitive disabilities, in particular individuals with sensory processing disorders, where a multisensory environment of a virtual reality system provides them with the opportunity to be increasingly independent of non-profit organizations in artistic expressions of their inherent skills, through promotions of their senses through the technology. Students will partner with the adult artists to evaluate the technology through the use of various applications of virtual reality. The evaluations of the technology are expected to be done in the perceptions of the adult artists, non-profit organizational staff, and the students working with them through Likert-like observational questions. The project will concurrently engage non-profit managerial staff so that they too may be helped by the increasing independence of the adult artists as they might become less reliant on the occupational therapists. This might allow as feasible the occupational therapists to be re-allocated to lower-functioning individuals with disabilities. The outcomes of the study are expected to empower disadvantaged individuals with disabilities and to be particularly impactful for the non-profit organization in identifying entrepreneurial methods of integrating this technology into its societal setting.

Tobias Pret, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Management and Management Sciences, Lubin School of Business

"Embeddedness in Context: The real-life experiences of social entrepreneurs in NYC"

Professor Pret's research aims to shed much needed light upon the real-life issues impacting social entrepreneurs by investigating how and why embeddedness in various social contexts affects social entrepreneurial practices. Professor Pret will recruit student research assistants to aid in the analysis of the large amounts of data that will result from this study, providing students with the opportunity to develop and strengthen their research skills as they observe social entrepreneurship in action. Set within the local NYC social entrepreneurship ecosystem, this exploratory study will investigate the experiences of nascent social entrepreneurs who are members of Impact Hub NYC. This membership-based community space connects social entrepreneurs, activists and drivers of social innovation to resources that can help catalyze their impact. Impact Hub NYC offers ready access to a diverse pool of research participants with an equally diverse set of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, its members

are immersed within multiple interrelated contexts which facilitates an exploration of the influence of contextual embeddedness on social entrepreneurial practices. Through his research, Professor Pret expects to clarify the roles, relationships, norms, and constraints inherent within this ecosystem, explicate how these interact and potentially conflict with those of other contexts in which social entrepreneurs are embedded, and illuminate the process through which these myriad elements inform and are challenged by social entrepreneurs' practices. As a result, this study will be able to advance understanding of the real-life issues facing social entrepreneurs and provide practical advice based on participants' lived experiences.

Gina Scutelnicu, Ph.D. *Assistant Professor, Public Administration, Dyson College of Arts and Sciences*

"Nonprofit corporations as alternative public service delivery mechanisms in New York"

Professor Scutelnicu's research will take a closer look at a common trend in American governance, collaborations among public and nonprofit institutions delivering public services that affect local communities. The state of New York enabled the creation of special purpose entities called local development corporations (LDCs) with the purpose of providing services in the area of economic and community development. LDCs are nonprofit corporations, created by local governments of general purpose such as counties, cities, towns and villages, with the aim of serving a public purpose. The assumption of the study is that the delivery of economic development services through LDCs leads to lower costs than if the service were supplied entirely by a local government of general-purpose such as a county, city, town or village. Drawing on public information and data and by employing a number of predictor variables such as asset specificity, monitoring revenues, and local market competitiveness this study aims at answering the following research question: "How does the LDC institutional choice influence the performance of economic development service delivery?" In collaboration with a Dyson graduate student, Professor Scutelnicu's research will also address two immediate issues facing nonprofits: how can nonprofits grow and generate change and how can nonprofits identify/establish new funding sources? This study also makes a significant contribution to the practice of public administration by demonstrating how collaboration between the public and non-profit sectors impact the delivery of public services in the area of economic development.

Anne Toomey, Ph.D. *Assistant Professor, Environmental Studies and Science, Dyson College of Arts and Sciences*

"Investigating the social ecological dynamics of urban waterfront governance in Coney Island, Brooklyn"

Professor Toomey's research, in partnership with the Billion Oyster Project, a waterfront based nonprofit organization working to restore the NY Harbor, and the New York Urban Field Station, is currently taking place along the Coney Island creek in Brooklyn. An important location, comprised of more than 5km of sandy beach and tidal estuary ecosystems, the Coney Island creek is also currently the site of an active combined sewer outfall. During rain events, this results in raw sewage and storm water bypassing treatment plants and overflowing directly into

the creek. This system can lead to the nutrient loading of waterways and coastal eutrophication, where low oxygen zones limit the abundance and distribution of marine species, and in addition can adversely affect the health of humans who consume fish and other aquatic life caught in these areas. Despite these circumstances, on any given day, hundreds of people can be found fishing, recreating, and bathing along Coney Island's waterfront. Professor Toomey's research seeks to identify the uses, values and meanings that local residents hold in relation to their waterfront areas, as well as the extent to which residents are aware of the ecological conditions of their waterways, particularly with regard to how water quality is impacted by sewage outfall. Moreover, her research also aims to better understand how these ecological and social factors influence the engagement of residents in civic stewardship and management of their waterfront spaces.