

# URSI MATTERS

Educating the next generation of urban leaders.

## What is the Urban & Regional Studies Institute?

The Urban and Regional Studies Institute is an interdisciplinary degree program oriented toward examining and understanding the broad range of problems and challenges associated with the nation's cities and regional areas.

Where are we? The institute is based at Minnesota State University, Mankato but our graduates are everywhere!

What do we do? Urban and Regional Planning and Local Government Management. The undergraduate Urban Studies major is excellent preparation for graduate and professional work in the professional fields of planning and local government management.

## DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

*Dr. Beth Wielde Heidelberg, Professor, Urban and Regional Studies Institute  
MA., Urban Planning Class of '99*



Think on your university experience. You probably went to a classroom, conversed with your classmates about an upcoming assignment, when the next test would be, or the weird thing the professor is wearing (oh, wait, was that only MY students?). Now imagine going on Spring Break – and being told that you can't come back to campus. Losing that time connecting with fellow students and being able talk directly to your professor. It just...stopped.

URSI students have been online, or in some strange half-empty classroom version of online for almost a year now. The bonding they would normally do in small gatherings has changed to trying to figure out who is talking on a small, Brady-Bunch style screen view. Some students haven't even met their professors in person, although I must say, we are all getting to know each other's camera-stealing pets very well, which is actually quite a bright spot in this whole thing. But our students' resilience and flexibility has been astounding. They have made it work, showing their ability to quickly adapt to change.

Faculty, too, have been extraordinarily challenged by the pandemic. We had to convert traditional in-person classes to an online format. Curriculum, schedules, and administrative goals and responsibilities all had to be met and adjusted. Our annual conferences and events moved online with mixed success – it might be easier to go to a conference session but it is much harder to build and maintain a network and community with others in our field.

URSI is accomplishing great things. Our merger with the Department of Government provided the opportunity for us to define and promote our programs more clearly. Dr. Asomani-Boateng and Dr. Fricano have conducted original research and published articles in peer reviewed journals. Dr. Porter has completed field work in Nepal and has published her findings (but had to miss her research presentation in Venice Italy because of the pandemic). Dr. Granberg-Rademacher and Dr. Parsneau were awarded the Douglas Moore lectureship, a prestigious honor at the University level. And me? I've gotten some research done, created "Choose Your Own Adventure" sessions in two courses, and started the outline for a book about dark tourism. Concurrently, I've learned that I should never, ever teach online home school to young children (specifically my own). URSI students are much more pleasant to work with, and I never have to threaten to withhold their dessert if they don't pay attention.

Through all the changes, we are URSI, a feisty, plucky band of academics determined to train urban planners and local government administrators who are ready to take on the world. We don't build buildings or businesses – we help you build the CITIES and COMMUNITIES where those buildings and businesses can thrive. Until we meet again – in person,

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## DR. RUSSELL FRICANO NAMED URSI DIRECTOR.

**Dr. Russell Fricano** was recently named Director of the Urban and Regional Studies Institute. He holds a Ph.D. in Planning from the University of Southern California and a Masters of City and Regional Planning from the University of Texas at Arlington. Dr. Fricano also served 20 years as a planner with Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning with experience in general plan development, community planning, zoning administration, and environmental review.

This year also marks Dr. Fricano's 12th year as urban planning professor. Starting at Alabama A&M University in 2009, he joined URSI in 2013. His current teaching responsibilities include Long Range and Strategic Planning, Urban Analysis, Community Leadership, Urban Transportation, Urban Design and Urban Program Evaluation. Dr. Fricano also authors peer-reviewed publications and makes conference presentations in the fields of environmental planning and policy, sustainable development, and community food systems.

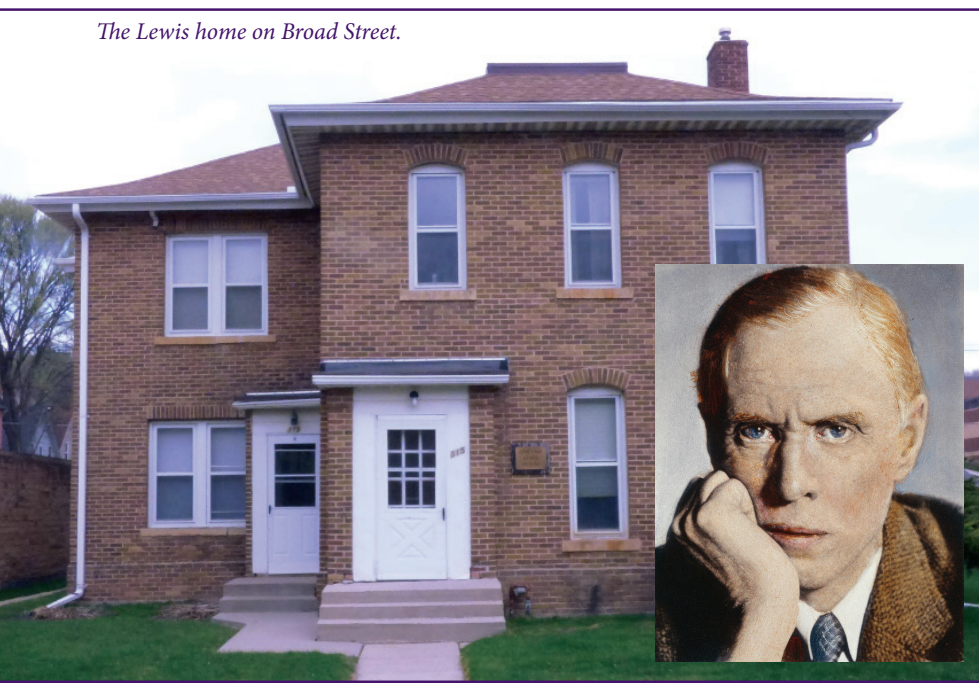
*Professionals are persons who put the interests of their organization above their own. – Fricano*

A native of Buffalo, New York, Dr. Fricano is grateful that his studies and career have taken him to different parts of the country, offering him a broad perspective of planning issues. He especially enjoys Minnesota as a state that is proactive in planning and local and regional governance. Dr. Fricano feels that URSI's strengths are primarily in applied learning, community service and dedicated alumni. He would like to see the Urban Planning and Public Administration and Community Management Programs continue to grow and adapt to changing needs in the professional and academic markets.



*Dr. Russell Fricano*

*The Lewis home on Broad Street.*



*Lewis was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature for his satirical works on American complacency and parochialism during the Roaring Twenties.*

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

Minnesota has a prominent literary heritage that passes through Mankato. This includes early 20th century novelist Sinclair Lewis. Lewis was the first American to win the Nobel Prize in literature for his satirical works on American complacency and parochialism during the Roaring Twenties. His writings were so influential that critic H.L. Menken referred to him as "Voltaire".

While residing in an early 20th century style brick home at 315 Broad Street, Lewis wrote the novel *Main Street*, which established his reputation as a great author. Published in 1920, *Main Street* reflected on Lewis' early life in the village of Sauk Centre, Minnesota. The success of *Main Street* continued in

subsequent works: *Babbitt* (1922): loss of individuality and principles of an American businessman; *Arrowsmith* (1925): the institutional dominance and greed of the American medical profession, and *Elmer Gantry* (1927): on religious hypocrisy.

I owe my discovery of the Lewis residence to the Mankato Historical and Architectural tour. See the article in this issue, "The Mankato Historical and Architectural Tour: The Legacy of Professor Jan Cherrington".



*What happens when tragedy becomes the thing that draws visitors to your community?*

## DARK TOURISM

In 1692, twenty five citizens of Salem, Massachusetts were executed based on ‘spectral evidence.’ In 1959, a small plane carrying Buddy Holly, J.P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson, and Ritchie Valens crashed into a field near Clear Lake, Iowa. In 1974, a family was killed by the eldest son. Months later, a couple moves in – and abruptly moves out, with wild tales of demons, bleeding walls, and supernatural abuse. All of these places have a connection – they draw visitors from far and wide. These places have become a magnet for American dark tourism, and have become so connected to the community where it happened, that the city’s name is synonymous with the tragic events. Salem. Clear Lake and the Surf Ballroom.

And Amityville. The community is left with the status as a dark tourism community.

URSI professor Beth Wiede Heidelberg’s research specialty focuses on how dark tourism impacts the communities and local governments that host them, and how local governments of these communities cope with being know specifically for the tragic events that happened there. How they deal with the fact that their primary attraction, the thing that generates the most (and in some cases, the only) substantial tourism is based on someone else’s grief. It’s not something these communities can use in their marketing or branding. And unlike large cities that have tragedy in their history, these communities may not have a wide array of tourism draw at the national or international level. The dark tourist point of interest is kind of it for them.

Heidelberg has investigated how cities like Salem and Clear Lake have taken the tragedy and used it for education – in Salem, education about tolerance and diversity, and Clear Lake, about the musician’s musical legacy (Buddy Holly and the Crickets, after all, influenced the work of the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and other musical luminaries) and music history. Amityville’s lesson is still emerging, but it hasn’t embraced its role in popular culture, so it is difficult to say what lessons it will portray to the world, but Heidelberg’s work may help them move away from trying to run from their role in dark tourism, to taking control of the community narrative.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN NEPAL

**Miriam Porter** was on sabbatical during the 2019-2020 academic year. While on sabbatical she provided consultation service for the British University in Dubai and pursued her research in Nepal.

In November of 2019, Dr. Porter was asked by the British University of Dubai to serve on a doctoral review committee as an outside consultant. She stated that her colleagues on the committee were stellar professionals whom she enjoyed working with. She described Dubai as a cosmopolitan city with remarkable architecture and state-of-the-art infrastructure and technology.

Dr. Porter spent February of 2020 in Nepal with former graduate student, Situ Chitrakar researching disaster management in Nepal. She described Nepal as a beautiful country with the Himalayan Mountains as the backdrop and gracious people. Funding for this project was made possible by the International



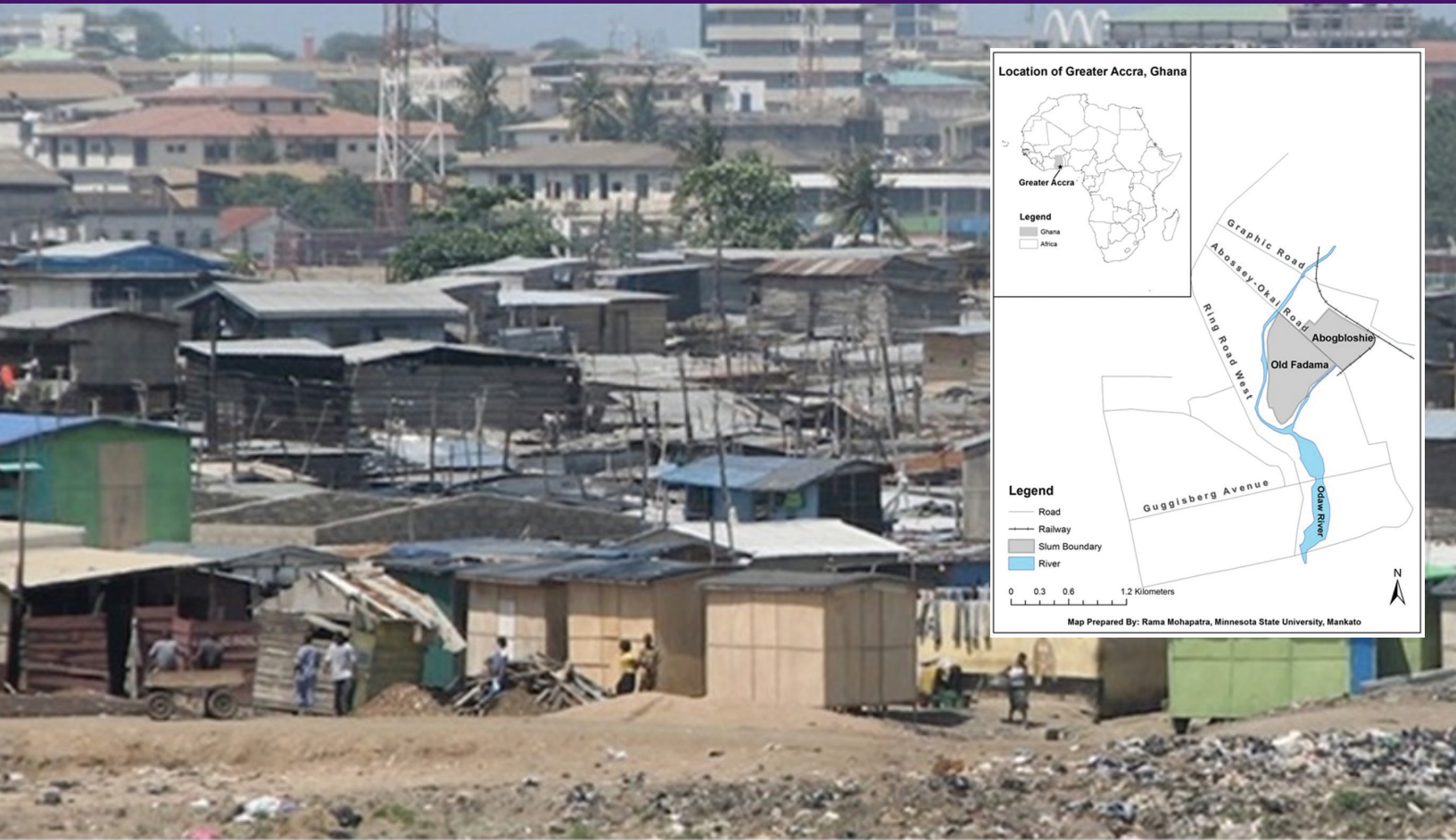
*Miriam Porter consulting at British University in Dubai*

County/ City Management Association(ICMA) Tranter-Leong Fellowship and Minnesota State University Faculty Research Grant. Since returning their research has been published and presented to the ICMA International Committee.

Disaster Management Research Project in Nepal with URSI Alumnae Situ Chitrakar

Dr. Porter returned within a few days of the world being shut down due to the pandemic. She again has embraced a new world of remote teaching and Zoom interactions.





## WHY HAS THE SQUATTER SETTLEMENT OF OLD FADAMA PROSPERED?

### VIEWING URBAN INFORMALITY FROM A SUSTAINABILITY PROSPECTIVE

In the city of Accra, Ghana, municipal officials traditionally addressed squatter settlements through demolition and evictions. In spite of these evictions, Old Fadama, an illegal squatter settlement in Accra has flourished. Why has this settlement prospered? **Raymond Asomani-Boateng** and **Russell Fricano** explored this issue within the context of sustainable principles. Sustainable principles include the components of environment, equity, and economy.

From an environmental perspective, Old Fadama is blighted and potentially hazardous. The settlement is marked with shoddy construction, susceptibility to flooding and fire hazard and pollution of the adjacent Korle lagoon.

However, economic and equity perspectives tell us a different story. Old Fadama has provided economic opportunities to its residents. Recycling, food markets and other forms of commercial development and services have been successful enterprises and offer a livelihood to Old Fadama residents. Its location in the urban core of ACCRA is conducive to establishing business networks and provides transportation access. Old Fadama enterprises also generates tax revenue to the city.

Old Fadama also features intricate social networks. When tribes migrated, they settled together, keeping social net-

works intact. As a consequence, an ad hoc form of leadership and governance emerged which maximized citizen participation. Research findings by the United Nations and other sources consider participatory processes as the most effective method of addressing the problems faced by slum residents

Recent attempts by the Accra Municipal Government to relocate economic activities away from the urban core have not been successful to date. The limitation of formal approaches in addressing Old Fadama and the spontaneous emergence of informal citizen participation and microenterprises demonstrates the importance of adapting urban policy to urban informality. Rather than imposing formal and technical approaches to a culture and economy of informality, the role of local government and global organizations is to facilitate urban informality in ways that are conducive to public health and safety, economic development, and citizen participation. This is crucial as Old Fadama residents rely on informality for their livelihood.

<sup>1</sup>Sub-Saharan Africa is comprised of the countries of Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

*The squatter settlement of Old Fadama in Accra, Ghana*



## ELECTION RESEARCH

### POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH ON THE 2020 ELECTION AND CONFERENCES DURING THE PANDEMIC

#### Dr. Kevin Parsneau

Department of Government  
Minnesota State University

Students see professors in the classroom, but they are often unaware of how much professors' jobs include researching and contributing to the collective knowledge in their fields. It might surprise students that professors' training is primarily in research rather than teaching, although researching is part of delivering cutting edge knowledge in the classroom.

With that in mind, I would like to discuss research that I am doing with Dr. Scott Granberg-Rademacker on senatorial campaigns' Twitter use in 2020. Social media gives candidates a free means to directly communicate with supporters and has transformed campaign strategies. They no longer rely on only expensive commercials or news outlets to deliver their messages, urge supporters to vote, fundraise or attack their opponents.

One challenge facing political scientists studying campaigns is that the rigorous process of peer review makes it difficult to publish timely research on recent events. The process of sending research to editors and reviewers and then accounting for their critiques to make sure research follows best

practices normally takes three or six years to get published in a journal.

We presented our research at the New Hampshire Institute of Politics conference that is held every two years after national elections in March. We never miss this conference because it is the earliest to examine the previous election, and it encourages scholars to work fast to present as soon as possible. We did not fly to Manchester because it was on Zoom like many events this year, but we presented our research, discussed and reviewed other research.

We used a program to scrape about 44,000 campaign tweets, and used a dictionary of key terms and an artificial neural network to code, interpret and categorize each tweet. We found that underdog and competitive candidates used Twitter more than likely winners to both substitute for traditional campaign organizations and to attack their opponents. They ramped up the free opportunities to turnout voters during the pandemic and to criticize their opponents.

In that sense, social media contributes to the negativity and divisiveness of contemporary campaigns. We also uncovered an increase in "nationalization" of Senate races. In other words, rather than making the race about the qualities of the candidates themselves, campaigns used Twitter to make the races about national leaders and parties.

Nationalization is not inherently negative and could be used to positively promote a candidate, with tweets such as "I'll help Trump create jobs" or "I'll work with Biden to build back better." However, it was much more often used for yet another form of attack, such as "My opponent marched lockstep with Trump" or "My opponent will help Schumer and Pelosi pass their socialist agenda." We have dubbed this increase in combining negativity and national figures as a "boogeymen" effect.

Negativity and nationalization are not new, but we are now able to compare 2020 data to previous elections, and they were particularly prominent in the 2020. Social media encourages extreme negativity to mobilize supporters out of fear rather than positive enthusiasm. We suspect that these findings are because social media followers consist of the most fervent supporters, and fear is an effective motivator.

Despite the limits of Zoom, we received great feedback from prominent experts on campaigns and social media, and we watched other experts present their research. It was fascinating and informative to see some of the research that should be showing up in scholarly journals and books in the near future.

# THE MANKATO HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL TOUR:

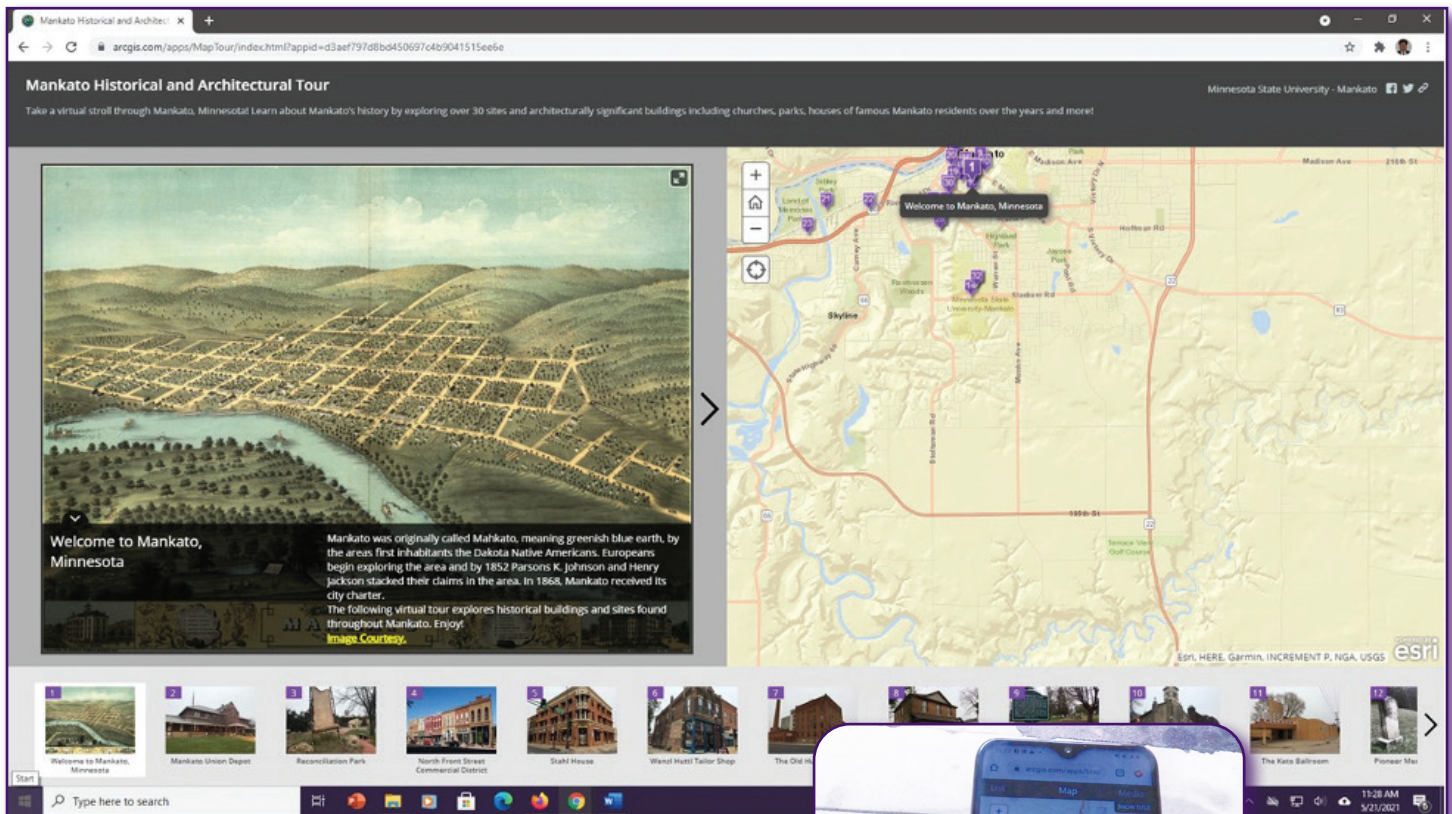
## THE LEGACY OF PROFESSOR JAN CHERRINGTON

Professor Emerita **Jan Cherrington** (known to her students as “Dr. J”) developed a Mankato walking tour for her students to learn about Mankato’s historical and architectural heritage. She required her students to take the tour and write an essay on their experience. Her tour covered over 30 sites which included homes of Mankato’s founders and distinguished citizens, parks, churches, institutional buildings, and commercial-industrial development.

Before Dr. J retired, URSI students **Situ Chitrakar**, **Kate Taylor** and **Jacob Dada** worked to create the next generation of her tour for their Urban Studies Studio project under instructors **Russell Fricano** and **Miriam Porter**. In the process, they researched sites in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and conducted field visits throughout Mankato. The studio team also worked extensively with **Bryan Hoffman** of IT Solutions to convert Dr. J’s walking tour into digital format on the university server. Their result was the online Mankato Historical and Architectural tour that has photographic and written descriptions of each site, including mapped location, date of construction, architectural style, interesting facts, and prominent inhabitants. You can access the tour on the internet on your desktop and also on your mobile device.

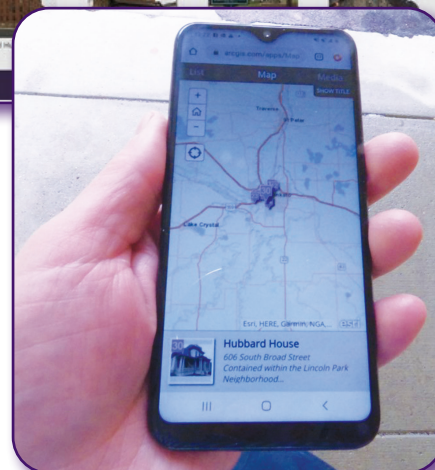


*Professor Jan Cherrington*



*The Walking Tour Home Page*

The Mankato Historical and Architectural and Walking tour is available at the following link: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapTour/index.html?appid=d3aef797d8bd450697c4b9041515ee6e> or by Googling “Mankato Historical and Architectural Tour”.



*The Walking Tour is also accessible on mobile devices.*

## GOOD NEWS

**Dr. Raymond Asomani-Boateng, Dr. Russell Fricano, and Benjamin Oppong** published “Accra’s Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie settlement. To what extent is this slum sustainable?” in *African Geographical Review*, 2020, Volume 39, Issue 4.

**Dr. Russell Fricano and Carla Davis** published, “How well is urban agriculture growing in the Southern United States? Trends and issues from the perspective of urban planners regulating urban agriculture” In the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 2020, Volume 9, Issue 2.

## DEGREES AWARDED

Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Studies.

Congratulations to **Peter L. Kivimaki, Chou L. Lee, Jeremy J. Namyst, Chris Russert, Randy A. Solorzano, Angie R. Stier** and **Zachary M. Wickman** for

## MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN PLANNING:

**Kayode B. Adiatu**: Capstone project, Employer of Choice – Helping Cities to complete for the future workforce; with **Jones Adu Mensah** and **Brent O’Neil** and in collaboration with the League of Minnesota Cities; supervised by **Dr. Raymond Asomani-Boateng** and **Mr. Frank Boyles**.

**Jones Adu Mensah**: Capstone project, Employer of Choice – Helping Cities to complete for the future workforce; with **Kayode B. Adiatu** and **Brent O’Neil** and in collaboration with the League of Minnesota Cities; capstone project supervised by **Dr. Raymond Asomani-Boateng** and **Mr. Frank Boyles**.

**Jones Adu Mensah** Thesis, First and Last Mile Dilemma - A Review of Planning Strategies in Selected Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the United States; supervised by **Dr. Raymond Asomani-Boateng** and **Dr. Russell J. Fricano**,

**Ryan S. Miller** History, Trends and Issues in Affordable Housing Policies; thesis supervised by **Dr. Beth Heidelberg**.

Also graduating **Flore Hounto**, Master in Public Administration and **Brendon Malecha** with a Master in Urban Planning.

## GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

**Jones Adu Mensah** – Jones has been a graduate assistant with the Department of Government for two years and graduated this spring with a Master of Arts in Urban Planning. He was accepted into the PhD program in Urban & Regional Planning at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor for fall of 2021.

**Felix Asante** – Felix will be continuing as a graduate assistant with the Department of Government for the 2021-2022 academic year. Felix is working on a Master of Arts in Urban Planning.

**Olivia Adomabea** will be joining the Department of Government in Fall 2021 as a graduate assistant. Olivia comes to us from Ghana and is admitted to the Master of Arts in Urban Planning program.

**Mariam Arowoshere** will be joining the Department of Government in Fall 2021 as a graduate assistant. Mariam comes to us from Nigeria and is admitted to the Master of Arts in Urban Planning program

## SCHOLARSHIPS –

Barrett Scholarship - \$3,500– **Ian Cochran**

URSI Leadership Graduate Scholarship – \$2,500 each - **Jennifer Adade & Thok Tutlam**

URSI Leadership Undergraduate Scholarship – \$2,500 - **Stevie Tompkins**

# MESSAGES TO URSI GRADUATES



**Russell Fricano**



**Beth Heidelberg**



**Miriam Porter**

Professionals are persons who put the interests of their organization above their own.

Failure is not fatal; success is not final.

Whenever you make a recommendation or decision in the public arena, ask yourself, "Who benefits?"

There is always another side to an argument or viewpoint. Look at both sides before you form an opinion or decide.

You are entitled to your own political views, but they may not always match those of the city council or constituents whom you serve. Serve everyone fairly.

Organize, don't memorize

There are always multiple viewpoints to any issue – and they are deeply felt. Acknowledge these viewpoints.

You will not make everyone happy. Make peace with that.

Have a personal life outside your professional life.

It's not a perfect world out there. But you don't have to do everything on your own. Build your professional network. Reach out to them for advice, because they may want to reach out to you one day.

We are always here for you. Stay in touch.

Ethics is the foundation of our careers. It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation but just one ethical lapse to destroy it.

We congratulate you on the years of learning which have cumulated in this milestone. But be ready to embrace the rest of your journey of life-long learning.

Be dedicated to your work, but remember, jobs come and go. Be more dedicated to your family and friends. They stay with you through thick and thin.

## DONATE TODAY!

The Urban and Regional Studies Institute (URSI) needs you! Tuition is not enough to ensure our future. Faculty, staff, and Leadership Council members are focused on increasing the number of majors and funding for enrichment opportunities that make URSI one of the leading programs in the state. Please consider donating to our program. Scan the QR code to take you right to our donation page.

