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Research team draws 'portrait' of America

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Professor of Sociology John Logan and the Russell Sage Foundation have teamed up to create the US2010 project, a research initiative that aims to study demographic changes in the United States in the past decade using information from the 2010 census and the American Community Survey.

Logan's part of the US2010 project, titled "Separate and Unequal," studies trends in segregation. Logan said his study — one of 14 under the US2010 project — has found that desegregation of blacks and whites has come to a standstill. In the case of Asians and whites, segregation has substantially increased since 2000. Segregation between Hispanics and whites has also increased, though not as significantly. "Segregation is not fixing itself," Logan said.

Logan is using data at the neighborhood level, which will show where different groups of people are living, he said. His work also focuses on inequalities among racial groups, immigration and the advantages and disadvantages of where people choose to live.

The US2010 project was partly inspired by Logan's research on the 2000 Census. Three years ago, he said he had the idea to expand on that project for the 2010 Census. His goals for the 2010 project were to analyze information and be able to provide data as quickly as possible to the public, thereby "shaping the public discussion of the issues," Logan said.

Logan approached his former student from the University of Albany, Brian Stults, now an assistant professor at Florida State University, with the idea of organizing a project that would paint a portrait of the United States in 2010, Logan said. They obtained a grant from the Russell Sage Foundation, which has a history of supporting social science research.

With new information being released regularly, the research team — which began its research last January after an advisory committee was set up to oversee the project's organization — is working quickly to analyze the data and make its findings available online, Logan said. Every month, researchers will release "census briefs" — short, early reports from each project. Logan said he hopes that by 2013, the researchers will be able to publish a final set of reports detailing all their data, findings and analysis.

Because the findings of US2010 will be available to the public, each project will have different impacts on many areas of public policy and individual interests, Logan said. Certain projects, such as one that studies the effects of the recession on joblessness, will have significant effects on federal and state policies, he said. Other projects, such as Logan's own on racial segregation,

may influence advocacy groups focusing on specific community issues and "help guide them in understanding what the important issues are," Stults said.

A number of characteristics set this project apart from others, Logan said.

The project — which emphasizes "getting results out fairly quickly and in the public eye," he said — involves collaboration among many researchers, a characteristic that has created a slight challenge for the organizers because many of the researchers are used to working independently, Stults said.

This semester, Logan is bringing the project to undergraduates through a sociology course called SOC 0871V: "Update on American Society: Social Trends in the Last Decade," which will draw heavily upon materials and research from the US2010 project. Students will deal with one topic from the project each week, Logan said. Logan also said he plans to have the students create their own projects that will track specific trends in national statistics.

"It's a whole lot of fun to actually find something yourself — that's what sociology really is," Logan said.