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ECU Associate Professor of Sociology Receives $191,514 NSF Grant
Research to Focus on Racial Status in Gatekeeper – Client Relations

GREENVILLE, N.C. (March 19, 2013) — East Carolina University Associate Professor of Sociology Dr. Mamadi Corra has received a prestigious National Science Foundation grant of $191,514 for research that will take place July 2013 through June 2015. The grant will support his project, “Inequality and Multiracial Gatekeeping.”

The NSF is the nation’s premier funding agency for basic, scientific research, and receiving an NSF grant is one of the most esteemed accomplishments in any researcher’s career. NSF grants allow individuals to conduct research that might otherwise not be possible, especially in times of budgetary constraints.

“I am delighted to receive the award, both for myself and my department, college and ECU,” said Corra. “The award will advance my work in a number of important ways.”

In addition, Corra said the grant will provide full support of four graduate research assistants over the course of the two-year study.

“By providing research training to ECU graduate students as such,” said Corra “the project will advance NSFs’s training initiatives, as well as ECU’s mission of being a leading regional research institution in North Carolina.”

The study Corra has proposed will investigate the impact of racial status on gatekeeper – client relations. Examples of gatekeepers include employment agents, car salesmen and real estate agents, because they provide information and services to clients, or potential customers.

“When clients are members of racial and/or ethnic minority groups, for example African American, employment agents may steer them to lower paid, less desirable jobs. Car salespersons may ask for and receive higher prices and real estate agents may show only segregated housing,” said Corra

Previous research by Corra conducted in 2002 demonstrated that fees of gatekeepers are determined by the value of the access granted to clients. According to Corra, this project will extend that analysis by asking whether, for a given access, the gatekeeper’s fee varies with the racial status of gatekeeper and client. Specific research questions include: Do Black gatekeepers gain smaller fees from Caucasian clients? What happens when Caucasian are gatekeepers? Do Black clients pay higher fees for the access they seek? And what is the impact of the race of the person to whom clients seek access?
Through the results of his study, Corra aims to show how racially grounded status differences affect access to commodities that people value, potentially shedding light on one of the systemic, structural ways in which discrimination persists.

“While the research focuses on the impact of race on gatekeeping, I believe that the results of this research will prove to be widely applicable across an array of social relations and structures,” said Corra. “The underlying theoretical process outlined is not limited to racial status. It should apply to any gatekeeping setting where any ‘status characteristic’ (identifiable attribute of individuals that carries with it cultural beliefs and/or evaluations of worthiness and competence) becomes salient. Gender, age, beauty and sexual orientation, for example, are all status characteristics, and when they become salient in a gatekeeper-client relationship, their effects should be the same as those predicted for racial status.”

Prior to coming to ECU, Corra received his Ph.D. degree in sociology in 2002 from the University of South Carolina at Columbia. He received his M.B.A. degree in business administration and his B.S. degree in sociology and business administration in 1995 and 1993, respectively, from Gardner-Webb University.

Corra came to ECU in 2003, and over the past 10 years he has taught many courses, including introduction to sociology, introduction to social inequality, principles of sociology, racial and cultural minorities, and social psychology. He has authored, or co-authored, more than two-dozen publications in his field, and he has been a frequent presenter at meetings of the American Sociological Association and the Southern Sociological Society.

In addition to his NSF grant, Corra was selected for the 2012 ECU Scholar-Teacher award and he was a nominee for the 2013 East Carolina University African American Awards of Excellence. He has been nominated for ECU’s Department of Sociology Annual Teacher of the Year Award for Lower Division Courses every year since 2004. In 2007, he was a recipient of a Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Research Award, and he was inducted into Omicron Delta Kappa, ECU’s National Leadership Honor Society.

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