Professional Development Grant 2019 (Feb Cycle)

Final Report

A. Title Page

Attending the Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting 2019

April 3-7, 2019

Washington DC

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B. Restatement of the professional enhancement opportunity

Presentation: Evaluating SNAP food retailer access by an improved 2SFCA method

Abstract: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the "food stamp" program, is a federal program to strengthen national food security across the US. In the process of authorizing SNAP food retailers, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prioritizes stores located in low-income low-access (LI-LA) census tracts, known as the "food deserts." The LI-LA measures are unable to demarcate accessibility patterns and identify the regional difference on a smaller scale (e.g., block groups). To address the issue, the paper aims to measure the accessibility of SNAP-authorized food retailers using an improved two-step floating catchment area (2SFCA) method on the block group scale. The paper solicits both SNAP recipients and SNAP retailer data to characterize the inequality of access for the low-income population who is covered by the SNAP program. The 2SFCA-based food accessibility indexes are compared with the LI-LA food access measures by the USDA, serving as evidence to justify the proposed measure for small-area estimation. As a result, the research will help stakeholders to identify low-income communities with poor access to SNAP retailers and understand effective efforts for identifying gaps in the SNAP program in terms of store participation and benefit redemption.

Conference: Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting 2019. Washington, DC.

Dates: April 3-7, 2019

Conference Website: http://www.aag.org/cs/annualmeeting

C. Brief review of the professional enhancement opportunity

The presentation at the conference stems from my recent research on the geographic access to SNAP (also known as "food stamp") authorized food retailers. This question has raised a broad interest and feedback from both the geography and public health communities. This year, my research on SNAP food access in the state of Arkansas has been accepted for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) held in Washington DC April 3 – 7, 2019. Serving as a board member for the AAG Geographies of Food and Agriculture Specialty Group (GFASG), I am also required to attend the panel discussion, evaluate student paper awards, and propose strategic plans for future group development.

D. Summary of findings and experiences

Presenting at the conference benefited my personal career development and also served to extend the scholarship of ATU. More importantly, the trip allowed me to communicate with several board members of the AAG GFASG. With the support of the grant, I was able to network with professionals in the field.

E. Conclusions and recommendations

This research extended from the presentation was recently published in a peer-review journal, as below.

Chen, X. (2019). Enhancing the two-step floating catchment area model for community food access mapping: Case of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. *The Professional Geographer, In Press.*