

FACULTY Spotlight



Bethany Wilinski

Department of Teacher Education

Bethany Wilinski joined Michigan State University (MSU) in January 2015 as an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education, where she teaches courses on diversity and inequality in schooling, comparative education, and qualitative research methods. She has a doctorate in educational policy studies as well as curriculum and instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a master's degree in international educational development from Columbia University's Teachers College. Dr. Wilinski's research focus is early childhood education policy in Tanzania and the U.S.

For the past ten years, Dr. Wilinski has been working on education projects in Tanzania. Working as a primary school teacher in Bukoba for two years sparked her interest in Tanzanian education. While pursuing her master's degree, Dr. Wilinski worked as part of a team that developed and implemented the award-winning teacher training workshop Teaching in Action, which focuses on supporting Tanzanian teachers in the use of participatory teaching methods.

Dr. Wilinski brings her experience as a teacher, teacher trainer, and curriculum developer in Tanzania to her current role as education sector lead for the Tanzania Partnership Program. In collaboration with colleagues at MSU and in Tanzania, she is developing education interventions for children in rural Tanzania that focus on improving girls' access to education, developing teacher capacity, and increasing access to preschool.

Currently, Dr. Wilinski's research project in Tanzania is a longitudinal study of pre-primary teacher training. Like many nations around the globe, Tanzania is currently working to expand access to pre-primary school and improve the quality of its pre-primary teaching force. This study follows a cohort of students training to be pre-primary teachers

through their three-year diploma course and out into the field in order to understand the relationship between students' experiences as teachers-in-training and what happens after they join the teaching force. In addition to this international work, Dr. Wilinski is conducting a study of parent engagement policy in Michigan's public pre-kindergarten program and writing a book based on her dissertation research, tentatively titled "When PreK Comes to School: Teachers Negotiate the Politics of PreK."



Amber L. Pearson

Department of Geography

Amber Pearson is a health geographer with a focus on social justice and understanding the unexpected tenacity, adaptability, and resilience of the underprivileged. She has diverse regional interests, from poor to wealthy countries.

In 2014, Dr. Pearson joined MSU's Department of Geography and the Environmental Science and Public Policy Program as part of MSU's Global Water Initiative. She moved to Michigan after working for five years as a researcher in New Zealand. There, she was a postdoctoral researcher in the GeoHealth Laboratory in Christchurch, where she researched aspects of the built, physical, and social environments of communities that bolster health in the face of adversity—or community resilience. Ironically, during this time, she also experienced the major Christchurch earthquakes of 2011—in fact, there were over 10,000 quakes with a magnitude of 3.0 or higher during that time—and she was able to explore the realities of community resilience firsthand. Following her postdoctoral fellowship, she took a research scientist position at the Otago Medical School in Wellington, evaluating the cost effectiveness

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of health policy interventions, with the goal of reducing health inequalities, notably between Māori (indigenous New Zealanders) and non-Māori.

Much of her New Zealand research focuses on health inequalities, yet Dr. Pearson has also had an explicit focus on water-health-resilience issues for the past 15 years, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. In the hopes of detecting common environmental exposures, she researched activity spaces of Buruli ulcer patients in Ghana while working on her master of science degree. During her master of public health and doctoral studies, she evaluated the water quality of newly emerging water sources in Uganda. These water sources emerged as a result of land privatization and forced settlement of nomadic pastoralists. In her research, she used a novel method for assessing fecal contamination to test whether it might be practical for determining relative quality. Equally important to the poor quality of the drinking water, Dr. Pearson found that the communities also suffered from inadequate water supply. She therefore turned her attention to the complex coping strategies and the dynamic

social systems through which access to water was allocated over time. Likewise, she explored the resilience of these Ugandan communities in negotiating access to adequate water during times of scarcity. The results of this work indicate that even in communities with very poor environmental conditions, social networks and community relationships are essential for coping with scarcity and maintaining health.

Since joining MSU, she has started two new projects. In the summer of 2015, she conducted participatory mapping to help in water resource planning efforts in a Maasai community in the Arusha region of Tanzania. She will also be working in Ticul, the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, where the karstic underground makes sanitation difficult and makes drinking water highly vulnerable to contamination. As a result, Ticul has very high diarrheal disease incidence. Dr. Pearson will be working to assess exposure, in the hopes of preventing future disease. These water quality and quantity projects will also explicitly consider potential exacerbations related to increasing land temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, major storm events, and the adaptability and resilience of those affected.



Peilei Fan School of Planning, Design and Construction

Dr. Peilei Fan is an associate professor of urban and regional planning. She joined the School of Planning, Design and Construction at Michigan State University (MSU) in 2007. She also holds a joint research appointment at the Center for Global Change and Earth Observations and is an adjunct faculty member of the Department of Geography. She has a doctorate in economic development and a master of science in electrical engineering and computer science, both from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Before she joined MSU, Dr. Fan worked as a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Postdoctoral Fellow at the United Nations University in Tokyo. She has also served as a consultant/economist for the United Nations University–World Institute for Development Economics Research and the Asia Development Bank on innovation and economic development in emerging countries (China and India in particular) and urbanization in Asia.

Dr. Fan's research focuses on international development and planning, specifically urbanization, economic development, and environmental changes in Asian countries and cities; she has published over 30 peer-reviewed journal articles in these areas. She is particularly interested in the urbanization process, the socioeconomic driving forces, and the evolutions of coupled human and natural systems. In addition, she serves as an associate editor for three international academic journals. Dr. Fan's research projects: "Urbanization and Sustainability Under Global Change and Transitional Economies: Synthesis from Southeast, East, and North Asia (SENA)," "China's Urbanization and Its Sustainability Under Future Climate Change," and "Chinese Way of Innovation" have been funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Science Foundation.