**Research Opportunity in Johannesburg, South Africa**

**for a CUNY Graduate Student in Social Science or Social Work**

**Applications Due: March 15, 2019**

**Opportunity:** Travel funds, housing, and partial board for an advanced graduate student interested in conducting research in an inner-city neighborhood in Johannesburg, South Africa for six or more months during 2019/2020. This research opportunity is ideal for students interested in studying the promise and problems of an African metropolis with possible topics including: comparative urban studies, immigration, social service delivery, public health, housing and homelessness, urban ecology, informal sector entrepreneurialism, post-apartheid transition, and race and racism.

**Terms:** The CUNY Office of Research (COR) has partnered with MES Mould Empower Serve (MES), a social service organization based in Johannesburg, South Africa. COR will provide funding of $3,000 - $5,000 to cover air travel, travel insurance, and incidental expenses. MES will provide housing and partial board for six or more months to enable a student to conduct a study focused on the inner-city neighborhood of Hillbrow.

**Application procedure:** Due to time constraints, prospective candidates should send an email as soon as possible to the program directors, Ron Nerio (ron.nerio@cuny.edu) and Effie MacLachlan (effie.maclachlan@cuny.edu) briefly explaining their research interests. The program directors will provide further details and application guidelines. Applicants will be required to submit a 1,200-word statement of interest and tentative research plan signed by the student and the student’s research adviser.

Completed application packages must be received by the CUNY Office of Research by 5:00 pm, March 15, 2019. The selected student will be notified by April 15 and should be prepared to commence research in Johannesburg on or near June 1, 2019.

**Work Product:** The student will be asked to produce periodic research reports for MES and COR. The final work product submitted in 2020 should be in the form of a completed research paper, submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal, or a draft of a dissertation or chapter.

---

Hillbrow is located near the center of Johannesburg and is one of the most densely-populated neighborhoods in the southern hemisphere. Though facing many challenges, from overcrowding to high rates of poverty and crime, its centrality to transportation routes makes it a highly desirable living space for new migrants to South Africa as well as for South African university students and aspiring workers. Hillbrow is especially notable as an immigrant space, with somewhere between 40%-60% of its current residents born outside of South Africa (particularly from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Congo, and Malawi). MES provides numerous services in the community, including emergency shelter, pre-kindergarten programs, mobile medical units, youth development and skills training. Their website with more information is at [www.mes.org.za](http://www.mes.org.za).

MES is interested in housing a graduate student researcher as part of its ongoing efforts to gain in-depth knowledge about the lives and needs of people in the community. The agency also works closely with Madulammmoho, which provides transitional housing, and neighbors the Outreach Project, which runs a counseling center and the Hillbrow Theatre Project.
A student selected for this opportunity would have considerable latitude in designing his/her research project, provided the focus is on Hillbrow and its surrounding neighborhoods: Berea, Braamfontein, and Doornfontein. MES has provided the following suggestions for research topics, but the student is not limited to one of the following:

- **Homelessness and its various levels.** Homeless individuals and families in Hillbrow may secure temporary housing in shelters, such as those run by MES, or they may qualify for long-term social housing. What has not been sufficiently studied is the gap between “nothing” and “social housing.” Though local government often stresses the importance of “transitional housing” for those who leave temporary shelters, there is often nothing available for them to transition to. A researcher may wish to examine the types of facilities available, the services provided, and the comparative difficulties applicants face in securing short, medium, or long-term housing. A study may also be interested in conducting a comparative study of Pretoria’s more comprehensive homelessness programs with Johannesburg’s less-developed programs in order to understand the feasibility of expanding such programs in and around Hillbrow.

- **Hijacked buildings.** One of Hillbrow’s foremost challenges is the ubiquity of hijacked buildings. This term includes a broad range of structures, from those that have been seized and operated by criminal syndicates, to (more commonly) those abandoned by previous owners and occupied by tenants without official leases. Given South Africa’s history of forced removals, the Constitution limits the circumstances under which evictions may occur. The City of Johannesburg confronts a dilemma: is it more just to permit informal occupants to remain where they have found shelter, or is it inhumane to leave such tenants in unsafe buildings where they face unhygienic conditions along with the threat of violence and sexual predation? No formal property management also implies a loss of council taxes to the City whilst still having to render services. Careful research is needed to understand conditions and prospects facing the occupants of “hijacked” structures.

- **Xenophobia.** The targeting of foreigners, and foreign-owned businesses, is less common in Hillbrow than in townships such as Alexandra, Soweto, or Orange Farm, but immigrants in the inner-city continue to worry about their safety. Research is necessary to understand how foreign-born residents adapt to and build community in an urban climate that is often less than welcoming. Being a general election year politicians are raising the temperature of the locals vs illegal foreigners tensions.

- **Models of entrepreneurialism.** With an official unemployment rate of 27%, Johannesburg residents often have little option but to start their own businesses. Many recent arrivals do start their own small enterprises, but native-born South Africans have fewer models of entrepreneurialism to follow. A researcher may wish to concentrate on the opportunities and obstacles facing would-be small business owners.

- **Urban ecology/waste mitigation.** Johannesburg produces massive amounts of urban waste and much of it is dumped back into the waterways or disposed of under unsustainable conditions. Pretoria, meanwhile, has initiated a number of successful programs to reduce waste, including a program to buy back metals, plastics and paper from pedestrian waste collectors. MES would be interested in a green-related study that targets any category of waste management and reduction – especially as municipal laws increasingly compel the
reduction of waste disposed to landfill. In Johannesburg waste is generally not yet sorted at source.

- **Food Security and Food Shortages.** South Africa’s economy has experienced a multi-year contraction and seems almost certain to face more years of negative or slow growth. Land expropriation without compensation is increasing the likelihood of decreased investment in the planting of crops risking food shortages. Economists and agricultural experts have pointed to a growing possibility of food and water shortages in the short to medium term. Research is necessary to understand the extent of the food and water distribution challenges and to prepare for adequate provision of food and water to residents of inner-city Johannesburg. Possible projects include, but are not limited to, urban agriculture and rooftop gardens.

MES is prepared to receive a student in 2019. COR prefers that the student be prepared to begin their study by June 1st. The student should understand that conditions in Hillbrow can be challenging. The student’s decision to live in Hillbrow with MES staff is at his or her own risk – especially after dark; however, by living with MES staff and by mostly using transportation provided by MES, when necessary for local trips during the week, the risk of living in this often difficult inner-city environment is substantially reduced.