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Political Science Professor Will Collaborate on Research Team to Study School Segregation and Integration

Winthrop University

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Political Science Professor Will Collaborate on Research Team to Study School Segregation and Integration

Quick Facts

- Smith, a nationally-known political science scholar of school desegregation policy, will work on the grant with sociology scholars from N.C. State University and the University of North Carolina Charlotte.
- The grant is titled: "School Segregation and Resegregation: Using Case Studies and Public Polls to Understand Citizen Attitudes."



Stephen Smith

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA - **Winthrop University Professor Stephen Smith** is part of a Carolinas faculty team recently awarded a combined **\$482,478 National Science Foundation grant** to study citizen attitudes concerning school segregation and integration.

Smith, a nationally-known political science scholar of school desegregation policy, will work on the grant with sociology scholars from **N.C. State University** and the **University of North Carolina Charlotte**. The grant is titled: "**School Segregation and Resegregation: Using Case Studies and Public Polls to Understand Citizen Attitudes.**"

The grant will explore why some school districts are able to sustain school desegregation while others are not. The research team - led by **Sociology Professor Toby Parcel of N.C. State** - observed that social scientists have studied the effects of school racial composition on student achievement, but rarely include studying how variations in public opinion influence school segregation, desegregation and resegregation.

Using **five case studies** and **public opinion polls**, the research team will study the relationship between citizen characteristics and their attitudes and values supporting school desegregation. This study increases the value of **five strategically chosen case studies** including those of **Wake County, North Carolina (Raleigh); Davidson County, Tennessee (Nashville); Jefferson County, Kentucky (Louisville); Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, and Rock Hill, South Carolina**, by fielding an opinion poll in each location with common questions across sites.

The polls are expected to reveal similarities and differences in adult attitudes that relate to differences in how long these districts have sustained desegregated schools. Smith said the study findings have implications for other school districts beyond the five studied here in terms of formulating policy that will better support socioeconomic balancing of students. Putting diverse students together promotes educational attainment and upward mobility in society, especially for at-risk students, Smith said. Desegregation, he added, also promotes better intergroup relations.

Smith said the study will use a common theoretical perspective and will field a largely common questionnaire via **Interactive Voice Response**, supplemented by cell phone samples, across the five school districts. The research will produce poll data on a minimum of 5,000 adult respondents. The team will then use the poll data to analyze both similarities and differences in values and attitudes

across the five sites.

Smith said the team will share its findings with the social science community within two years of the grant's completion, thus allowing other researchers to investigate these issues further. The results will provide a model for other social scientists to employ cost effective approaches to individual and comparative multi-method case studies to enhance the external validity of qualitative research.

Winthrop officials are excited about Smith's participation in the study. **Karen Kedrowski**, dean of Winthrop's College of Arts and Sciences, said this grant is believed to be the **first National Science Foundation grant in the social sciences** for a Winthrop faculty member. Winthrop's portion of the grant is \$56,997.

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw**, news and media services manager, at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at longshawj@winthrop.edu.

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