



## Princeton University students to debut documentaries exploring homelessness in Trenton

[Mike Davis/The Times](#) By [Mike Davis/The Times](#)

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[PRINCETON](#) — Urban Studies students at Princeton University will premiere “The Trenton Project” tonight, a series of short films that look at homelessness and housing issues in the city.

“They really had the opportunity to spend some time in the footsteps of people who are dealing with these issues on a regular basis, taking things that are often dry in an academic setting and seeing them up close,” said Purcell Carson, an urban studies teacher at the university who directed the project. “That’s something that documentary film really has the power to do.”

“The Trenton Project” is made up of 11 student-produced mini-documentaries, each about four to six minutes long.

A few students profiled Trenton citizens going through the Rapid Rehousing program at the Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness and the struggles they faced at every turn. Others interviewed officials at Greater Trenton Behavioral Health Care about housing options and issues for chronically homeless, mentally ill and substance abuse patients.

Students also looked at Rush Crossing and the former Miller Homes development and spoke to private developers and nonprofits about abandoned properties in the city, Carson said.

“They were able to rethink a lot of their first conceptions about homelessness and public housing through their films,” Carson said.

“Policymakers, community leaders and concerned citizens in New Jersey’s state capital are searching for new ways to sustain lives, build community and spark opportunity,” a synopsis for the film series states. “Trentonians themselves bring energy, insight and heart to the task, grappling every day with urban problems that have no easy solutions. They make homes in a city many say is unfixable.”

“My students came away with a sense that, yes, Trenton is a place that has a lot of problems, but it’s a place that has a lot of pride and eagerness to see what can happen in the future,” Carson said. “In some ways, we really have abandoned our cities, but the people who live there are working hard and thinking hard about how to affect change in our communities.”

The film project got its initial push by exploring how little information existed about the city, especially considering its stature as the state capital and how legislation, such as the Supreme Court decision that mandated affordable housing, has left its mark.

“We talked about how Trenton fits not only with other cities, but into the larger context of New Jersey,” Carson said. “A lot of solutions are harder to address in Trenton with fewer resources.”

The films will be shown tonight at 6 p.m. at Trenton Artworks.

For more information, visit [urbanstudies.princeton.edu](http://urbanstudies.princeton.edu).

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