Owning a house is a long-held cultural norm...the “American Dream.” However, renting an apartment also has advantages. Comprising more than one-third of the US population, there are now more renters than at any time in the past 50 years. However, even with the increase in apartment demand, there is still a stigma attached to this housing option.

The stigma toward multifamily rental housing has erupted into contentious debates at city planning meetings, as developers try to provide more affordable housing in areas where there is a shortage. Through NIMBYism and exclusionary zoning, homeowners and city leaders block apartment development in favor of neighborhoods of owner-occupied houses. However, in areas where rents already consume more than 30% of household income (and 50% in some locations), this simply drives rental prices even higher due to an imbalance of supply and demand.

Multifamily housing organizations try to raise awareness of the value of apartments and renting. They also use their advocacy platform to train apartment industry leaders to work with elected officials on public policy issues that impact the apartment industry. However, what is missing in the apartment industry’s advocacy campaign is education for apartment staff to have a better understanding of the “rent vs. buy” debate, and how to overcome the rental apartment stigma through apartment design, amenities, marketing techniques, leasing strategies, customer service, resident retention practices, staff behavior, and volunteer activities that may unknowingly contribute to the stigma.
The focus of this presentation is to share a Special Assigned Leave (sabbatical) experience designed to address rental apartment sigma and how to overcome it by educating apartment staff. These educational activities have the potential to change the perception of rental apartments, restore dignity to apartment residents and staff, and pave the way for additional development.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr. Carla Earhart is Professor of Residential Property Management (RPM) at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, USA. After earning graduate degrees in Housing from Oklahoma State University, she teaches courses in housing and property management in the Department of Applied Business Studies.

Much of Dr. Earhart’s teaching involves immersive learning, where RPM students complete real-world community-based projects. Recent projects have focused on Maplewood Mansion, a boutique apartment building used as an economic development partnership to attract more medical professionals to the city.

Dr. Earhart’s scholarly interests focus on attitudes and preferences toward housing options. She is especially interested in the influence of education, public policy, and the humanities on attitudes toward rental apartments. Her work has been presented at national and international conferences on housing, environmental design, family and consumer sciences, library science, sociology, hospitality, and business. Her work has been published in a variety of journals, books, magazines, and newspapers.

As a result of her work, Dr. Earhart has been recognized by the university and by a number of academic and professional organizations. She was awarded a regional Emmy nomination as executive producer, overseeing the student-produced documentary “Somewhere Called Home”.