

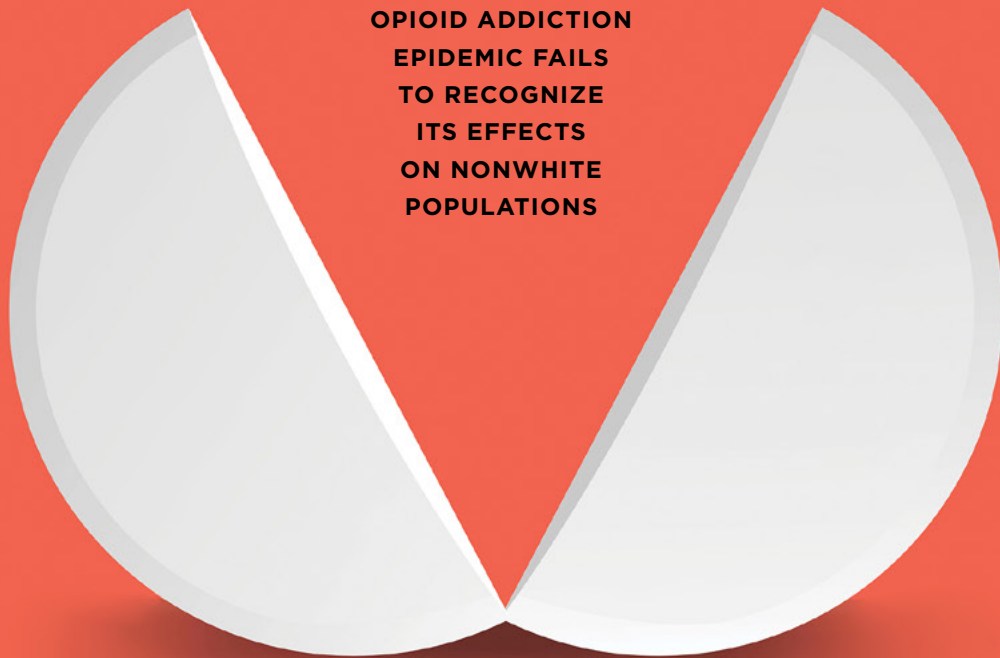
Brandeis

Heller

{ A MAGAZINE FOR THE
HELLER SCHOOL FOR
SOCIAL POLICY AND
MANAGEMENT }

BRIDGING THE DISPARITIES GAP IN THE OPIOID CRISIS

THE PREVAILING
NARRATIVE
AROUND THE
OPIOID ADDICTION
EPIDEMIC FAILS
TO RECOGNIZE
ITS EFFECTS
ON NONWHITE
POPULATIONS



WINTER 2019

SHADI SHEIKHSARAF, MA SID/COEX'17, WITH INTERNALLY DISPLACED IRAQI CHILDREN IN ERBIL, IRAQ. LEARN MORE ABOUT HER WORK WITH THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) ON PAGE 36.



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Heller

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FROM THE DEAN }

TO THE HELLER COMMUNITY,

As we reach the halfway point of our 60th anniversary school year, I'm excited to share how Heller students, alumni, researchers and faculty exemplify our anniversary theme of "Closing the Disparity Gap" in their work every day.

Our theme recognizes the growing problem of inequity within and across societies around the world. For some, the most pressing disparities exist in the economic realm, including workplace earnings, access to economic opportunity and accumulating wealth. For others, their biggest challenges arise in unequal access to child care, quality education, health care and social supports. These combine with inequitable treatment by race, gender, ethnicity, immigration status and disability to widen gaps even further.

That's why we are recommitting ourselves to understanding these disparities, probing their roots and nature, and evaluating options to address them through a variety of interventions. Heller's motto, "Knowledge advancing social justice," emphasizes our ongoing responsibility to grapple with emerging social policy challenges. Even as we recognize the strides we've made, the real spirit of our 60th anniversary and the next chapter is about addressing pressing societal problems at local, national and international levels.

We eschew simple answers or "silver bullet" solutions. Instead, the Heller community devises evidence-based responses from multiple disciplines in teaching, research and public engagement. Here are just a few examples:

WORKPLACE

Through a series of joint lectures with the Brandeis economics department, a new course by Robert Kuttner, where I've guest lectured, and a Conversation with the Dean, we have explored critical labor disparities. We have discussed new interventions to address the challenges facing working families, including both limited earnings and the inability to deal with unexpected financial emergencies. We have also examined the impacts of minimum wage policies on earnings, employment and economic opportunity for different groups. In the spring, we will engage academics, as well as business leaders, worker advocacy institutions and government officials, in exploring racial and gender disparities in the workplace.

OPIOID CRISIS

Disparities play a role in the ravages of the opioid crisis. A remarkable convening this fall in western Massachusetts hosted by the Massachusetts Health Policy Forum brought together over 350 stakeholders to understand the specific challenges faced by small and rural communities and innovative ways to tackle the crisis. And with the arrival this January of Heller Professor Traci Green, a distinguished scholar and leader in the field of opioid addiction and its roots in the community, we look forward to leading the way in exploring new approaches to healing the devastating impacts of opioids on communities. See page 4.

PEACEBUILDING

Disparities and the social conflicts around the world have often been dealt with through top-down approaches. Associate Professor Pamina Firchow, who joined Heller this year, takes a bottom-up approach by using new survey and research techniques to surface the voices of those most directly affected by conflict. That approach, which has attracted the attention of international institutions and funders alike, provides new insights and traction to act on those problems. Learn more about Firchow's work on pages 24-29.

These new scholars, courses and research initiatives, as well as our energetic and creative new cohort of students, will continue the legacy of Heller into its next decade.

Although closing the disparity gap is a tall order, I feel confident that our community — including all of you — can make significant progress toward our goal at this critical time.

Sincerely,



David Weil, Dean and Professor

P.S. I invite you to join us for our culminating 60th anniversary celebration on June 5-6. Please see the inside back cover for details.



CONVERSATION WITH THE DEAN HIGHLIGHTS INNOVATIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE WORKERS' LIVES

BY KAREN SHIH

“Charity is not justice,” according to Carmen Rojas, CEO and founder of The Workers Lab, which invests in innovative solutions to better conditions for working people across the United States. “I wanted to build an organization to give people money to try things.”

Rojas came to Heller on September 19 for the first Conversation with the Dean of the school’s 60th anniversary year. She and Dean David Weil discussed ways to improve the lives of U.S. workers, and she offered a critique of traditional philanthropy, described the innovative methods of The Workers Lab, and shared her own background and journey.

The daughter of immigrants from Nicaragua and Venezuela, Rojas contrasted her parents’ opportunities with the ones immigrants have today. She described how her mother started an entry-level job cleaning offices for Bank of America, and after just three months was able to get a no-interest loan. That type of opportunity was what gave Rojas the chance to go to college, then earn a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. But that’s virtually impossible today, she said.

That’s why Rojas created The Workers Lab in 2014, after working in both local government and nonprofit organizations. She saw the weakening of unions and growth of incubators in the tech world, and thought she could combine organizing principles with the nimbleness of entrepreneurship to create a better future for American workers.

“The imagination muscle has atrophied,” she said. “Philanthropy is often so encumbered and risk-averse. ... It’s never as ambitious or audacious as it should be.”



CARMEN ROJAS

Rojas criticized traditional philanthropy for its conservatism and reluctance to take chances, saying that it consolidated power and wealth in the hands of bankers and other privileged groups when it should be distributing resources to those in need.

She held up The Workers Lab’s Innovation Fund as a way to better tackle the issues working people face today. Twice a year, the Innovation Fund awards \$150,000 to each of three organizations out of hundreds that pitch from around the world. Rather than micromanage how the funds are used, The Workers Lab offers mentorship, training and support, but leaves the decision-making up to the organizations, whether they want to use the money to pay for research or toilet paper — both essential needs, she said.

Dean Weil asked Rojas about the biggest issues facing American workers today.

“Working and still being poor,” she responded. She pointed to the fact that people work 40 to 80 hours a week but still live in poverty as a structural problem rather than the result of individual actions. “If we were all working toward people not being poor, that would solve a lot of other problems.”

At the end of her lunchtime talk at Heller, Rojas lauded her social justice hero, Brandeis alumna and political rights activist Angela Davis ’65, author of “Freedom Is a Constant Struggle,” which changed Rojas’ mind about the abolition of prisons.

Davis is “a protagonist in shaping the kind of future we want to see,” Rojas said.



TRACI GREEN

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EXPERT TRACI GREEN APPOINTED NEW DIRECTOR OF OPIOID POLICY RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

BY **BETHANY ROMANO, MBA'17**

The Heller School has appointed Traci Green to join the faculty as professor and director of the Opioid Policy Research Collaborative (OPRC) on January 1, 2020.

Green joins Heller from Boston University, where she was previously an associate professor of emergency medicine and deputy director of the Boston Medical Center Injury Prevention Center. In addition to her position at BU, Green held faculty positions at Brown University's schools of medicine and public health. Green has over 17 years of experience as a faculty member and epidemiologist focusing on the areas of drug use, addiction and overdose prevention.

"This is a pivotal time in the opioid crisis," says Green. "We need real science and informed policy now more than ever. I am delighted to be joining the faculty and leadership of the Heller School to shape the future of opioid policy research."

Green helped co-found prescribetoprevent.org and prevent-protect.org for access to the overdose antidote naloxone. She co-led the development of a strategic plan for the Rhode Island Governor's Overdose Prevention and Intervention Task Force and holds expert advisory roles for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. She served on the CDC's Guidelines on Prescription Opioids for Chronic Pain workgroup and the National Academies of Sciences committee studies on Pain Management and Regulatory Strategies to Address Prescription Opioid Abuse and on Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder.

Her research leverages novel approaches to public health surveillance and aims to expand access to evidence-based harm reduction and treatment for people using opioids. Her work is supported by the CDC, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, among others. Green holds a PhD in chronic disease epidemiology from Yale University and an MS in epidemiology and biostatistics from McGill University.

"When it comes to promoting policy solutions and interventions to reduce drug-related harms, Traci's research is at the vanguard," says Constance Horgan, director of the Institute for Behavioral Health and chair of the search committee. "Her extensive portfolio displays a truly interdisciplinary approach to opioids and overdose, which we believe is central to the OPRC's work and the Heller School's research mission."

The OPRC, founded in 2017, is a major subdivision of the Heller School's Institute for Behavioral Health at the Schneider Institutes for Health Policy. It advances policy research on interventions to address the opioid addiction epidemic and serves as a convener and collaborator for state and federal health officials, policymakers and private organizations. Green will be leading a team anchored by OPRC Medical Director Andrew Kolodny, and Senior Scientist Peter Kreiner.

"The Institute for Behavioral Health has conducted world-class research into opioid addiction and treatment for many years before it became a tragic national news story," says Heller Dean David Weil. "That in-house expertise, combined with Traci's leadership as a social scientist, will continue this important legacy and help identify new solutions to this epidemic. We are thrilled for her to join our community, and I am certain that she will bring bold new ideas to the Heller School."

DUAL DEGREES RISE IN POPULARITY AT HELLER

BY **KAREN SHIH**

For Roger Perez, MBA/MA SID'16, it was an easy decision to pursue dual degrees at Heller.

“Coming out of the Peace Corps, when I was looking for international development and business, Heller was one of the first schools that popped up — not many universities offer that,” he says. “The dual degrees gave me a good mix of quantitative and qualitative skills, and flexibility and adaptability in my career. I was able to hit the ground running.”

Having the tools and knowledge from both degrees is what led Perez to his work for the Nonprofit Finance Fund for several years, where he consulted for a variety of health, environment and arts organizations, before transitioning to his new role as a program officer at the Roy & Patricia Disney Family Foundation.

He's one of many at Heller who have chosen to maximize their experience by adding a second degree, including 30% of incoming students this fall.

There are 16 dual-degree options at Heller. Some of the most popular include pairing the Social Impact MBA with one of Heller's four other master's degrees. While some may apply to Heller as dual-degree students, others choose to apply for a second degree after they arrive. For example, some students add the MBA after participating in a series of social entrepreneurship pitch competitions Heller hosts throughout the school year. These are open to students from all programs, giving them a glimpse into the world of finance and management.

“Students pursue an MBA dual degree so that they can go deep in one area — which could be health care, global development, public policy or others — while also gaining the essential business skills that enable them to be highly successful in their chosen career after graduation,” says MBA Director Carole Carlson.



SOCIAL IMPACT MBA PROGRAM DIRECTOR CAROLE CARLSON (RIGHT) SPEAKS WITH JOEL PUGH, MBA'20.

Also popular is pairing the MA in Sustainable International Development (SID) with the MA in Conflict Resolution and Coexistence (COEX) or the MS in Global Health Policy and Management. The latter option has grown quickly since it was introduced a few years ago.

“The MA SID is an ideal program for a dual degree,” SID Director Joan Dassin '69 says. “Students gain an overview of the challenges at the frontier of global development and cutting-edge skills in project planning, implementation and evaluation, then add complementary expertise in other fields.”

Surayyo Ilnazarova, MS/MA SID'20, agrees. Though she came from Tajikistan initially to study global health, she realized that adding SID would give her the opportunity to improve health systems more comprehensively.

“Working with health organizations, we always collaborated with other stakeholders. For example, to combat diarrhea, we'd also work with a project on installing water and sanitation equipment,” she says. “When I return home with my knowledge and experience, I'll be able to think of health as part of a bigger umbrella that's connected and dependent on other aspects of development.”



RESCUING HISTORY

KING DAVIS, PhD'72, HARNESSSES HIS HELLER EDUCATION AND DECADES OF EXPERIENCE TO SAVE A VITAL TROVE OF HEALTH HISTORY

BY TONY MOORE



THE DOCUMENTS WERE ALL THERE. Mountains of them. Tens of thousands of photographs, records and reports detailing a critical chapter in the history of African American mental health. The files sat in the Central State Hospital in Petersburg, Virginia, originally established in 1870 as the Central State Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane. It was the first psychiatric hospital for recently freed slaves, and it had maintained stacks upon stacks of treatment records, operating policies, financial documents and more.

But there was one major problem.

The room holding all of these files lacked air conditioning. It was damp and moldy. Temperatures soared up to 130 degrees. Type was fading, pages deteriorating, images blurring. Even worse, the documents were slated to be destroyed to free up storage space. A vital treasure trove of history teetered on the verge of disappearing forever.

Enter King Davis, PhD'72, the Robert Lee Sutherland Endowed Chair in Mental Health and Social Policy at the University of Texas at Austin. An established leader in the field of behavioral health, Davis knew the importance of preserving these records better than most.

“This was the first institution in the world for African Americans with mental illness problems,” says Davis, who recognized how crucial this data would be for both historians and present-day behavioral health researchers focused on marginalized populations. “It would be tragic to allow their records to be destroyed.”

So Davis got to work, launching an initiative to preserve all of the hospital's documents. But the challenges were daunting. Beyond the sheer scope of the project, Davis would have to strike a delicate balance between making the material accessible and upholding the privacy standards that come with any medical information. Not to mention, at the time, Davis was far from an archives expert.

He decided to assemble a team of professors, doctoral students, archivists, anthropologists and computer engineers, leading them on a decade-long effort to digitize the hospital's records. Fortunately, large-scale interdisciplinary rescue projects like this were exactly what Davis had been preparing for throughout his career.

“Aside from his brilliant scholarship, Dr. Davis is a phenomenal weaver of connections,” says Vanessa Jackson, a social worker, state hospital researcher and writer whose research on African American psychiatric history has benefited from Davis' efforts. “He has the ability to bring amazing thinkers together to work on solutions.”

Davis' early career took a major turn when he was a graduate student working in a California state psychiatric hospital in the 1960s and got the call to join the Army during the Vietnam War. Davis entered the service as a second lieutenant and became the chief of social work at the Walsen Army Hospital in Fort Dix, New Jersey, a first stop for many injured soldiers returning home from battle.

“I worked with hundreds of wounded soldiers and many grieved families who didn't anticipate that their son was going to come back napalmed or with his legs blown off,” he recalls. “It was really traumatic.”

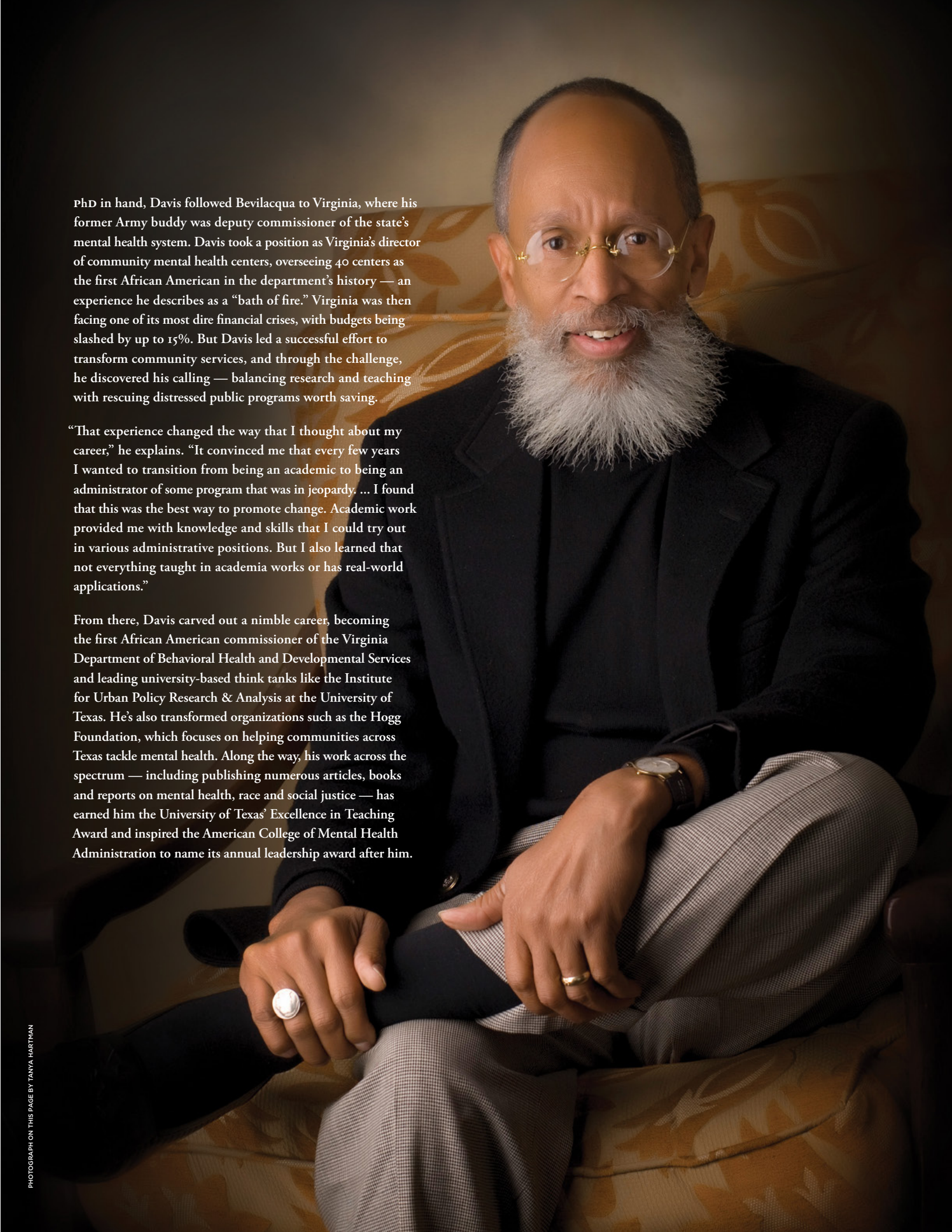
It was also highly educational. Just six weeks after finishing a master's degree in social work from Fresno State University, Davis was hired to manage a hospital social work wing of 30 staff members. “The Army taught me a lot about taking risks and being willing to learn on the job,” he says.

After four years in that role, Davis decided to follow the path of his commanding officer, Joseph Bevilacqua, PhD'67, who had earned a doctorate at Heller and urged Davis to do the same. “Because he had gone to Heller, he told me all about the environment — what it would mean, how it fit well with my knowledge base and my career, and could speak to the quality of my life,” Davis says.

At Heller, Davis studied African American fundraising, focusing his dissertation on the United Way's insufficient support for black organizations and alternatives that might better support African Americans.

“Heller more than lived up to my expectations,” Davis says. “Dean [Charles] Schottland was this extraordinary, bright, knowledgeable person. He gave me access to file cabinets filled with Social Security information — letters and policy documents — because he had been Social Security's chief administrator. He also introduced me to people at Harvard and MIT and people in the community that I could work with on my dissertation. It was amazing.”

IMAGE FROM OPENING SPREAD: NURSES TAKE A CLASS ON PATIENT CARE DURING THE 1950S AT CENTRAL STATE HOSPITAL.



PhD in hand, Davis followed Bevilacqua to Virginia, where his former Army buddy was deputy commissioner of the state's mental health system. Davis took a position as Virginia's director of community mental health centers, overseeing 40 centers as the first African American in the department's history — an experience he describes as a “bath of fire.” Virginia was then facing one of its most dire financial crises, with budgets being slashed by up to 15%. But Davis led a successful effort to transform community services, and through the challenge, he discovered his calling — balancing research and teaching with rescuing distressed public programs worth saving.

“That experience changed the way that I thought about my career,” he explains. “It convinced me that every few years I wanted to transition from being an academic to being an administrator of some program that was in jeopardy. ... I found that this was the best way to promote change. Academic work provided me with knowledge and skills that I could try out in various administrative positions. But I also learned that not everything taught in academia works or has real-world applications.”

From there, Davis carved out a nimble career, becoming the first African American commissioner of the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and leading university-based think tanks like the Institute for Urban Policy Research & Analysis at the University of Texas. He's also transformed organizations such as the Hogg Foundation, which focuses on helping communities across Texas tackle mental health. Along the way, his work across the spectrum — including publishing numerous articles, books and reports on mental health, race and social justice — has earned him the University of Texas' Excellence in Teaching Award and inspired the American College of Mental Health Administration to name its annual leadership award after him.

“I was wowed by his vision, tenacity and determination to preserve a resource most never knew existed,” says Earl Lewis, president emeritus of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

“Dr. Davis is always collaborative, willing to give of himself and always a font of new insights,” says William Lawson, professor emeritus of psychiatry at UT Austin’s Dell Medical School, who has worked with Davis for decades on issues related to African American mental health care. “Coming from rural Virginia myself, I struggled with the history and sometimes frank racism. King continuously made omelets out of broken eggs, giving mental health in Texas and Virginia a new dignity and perspective.”

So when Davis learned about the dire condition of those records at Central State Hospital, he went straight to work.

At the University of Texas, he connected with Unmil Karadkar and Patricia Galloway, two professors with digital archives expertise in the university’s School of Information. They helped him assemble the team to digitize the more than 800,000 documents that had been in jeopardy. They coded the new database so that family members can access private data on ancestors while researchers can access less sensitive, but equally valuable, data, like annual reports documenting length of stay, diagnoses and involuntary commitment rates.

This 10-year effort, known as the Central State Hospital Archives Project (CSHAP), earned Davis the American Psychiatric Association’s 2019 Benjamin Rush Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the history of psychiatry. More important, the digitization initiative has preserved and unlocked a crucial chapter in mental health history.

“I was wowed by his vision, tenacity and determination to preserve a resource most never knew existed,” says Earl Lewis, president emeritus of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which provided funding to complete the project. “Growing up in the Norfolk area of Virginia, I had firsthand knowledge of the facility. In the late 1960s, my maternal uncle had been a patient there. Furthermore, as a social historian, I knew how rare it was to gain access to the world of black mental illness. ... I think that King’s colleagues at the APA understand how rare it is to be able to peer into the past in such a way as to better understand the present.”

Today, files from the project shed light on predictable but troubling truths. Some patients, for instance, were admitted simply for being in a neighborhood where they were unwelcome, talking back to a police officer or being insubordinate to an employer. But the data also promise to help contemporary mental health professionals improve diagnoses and treatments for minorities.

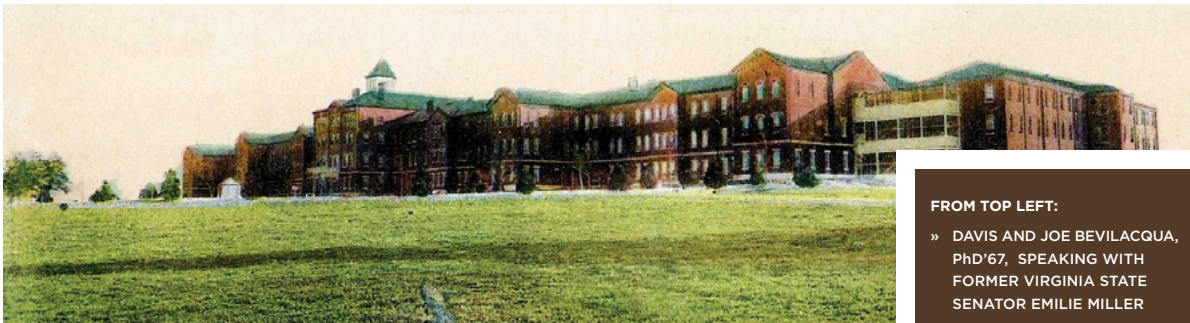
One key insight, for example, highlights how the disconnect between African American churches and psychiatric professionals can exacerbate mental health problems. CSHAP records indicate that African American populations have routinely delayed mental health care in part because they rely on pastors and other religious leaders for counseling.

“What’s missing is the connectedness between the black church and the formal mental health system,” says Davis. “We need to be able to find ways to bridge that.”

The project has also led Davis to advocate for a national policy for managing state historical psychiatric records and urge professional schools to focus more on the social and cultural context of mental health in the African American community. The findings clearly showed that since the 1800s, African Americans have been overdiagnosed and misdiagnosed with severe mental illness, but what’s even more notable is how the historical records aligned with more recent information.

“The most disturbing finding in our 10-year study is how similar our 19th-century data are to recent 2018 and 2019 meta-analyses,” says Davis, noting that much work still remains to be done to increase the understanding of mental health among African Americans.

Though receiving the Rush Award and delivering a lecture on CSHAP at the APA’s annual meeting in San Francisco may seem like the perfect capstone, Davis’ professional life continues to evolve. After a nearly five-decade career that intersected very little with digital archives work, his experience with CSHAP unlocked a new area of interest, leading him to join the School of Information as a research professor.



FROM TOP LEFT:

- » DAVIS AND JOE BEVILACQUA, PHD'67, SPEAKING WITH FORMER VIRGINIA STATE SENATOR EMILIE MILLER
- » EARL LEWIS, PRESIDENT EMERITUS OF THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION
- » DETAIL FROM A POSTCARD FROM THE CENTRAL STATE HOSPITAL, 1885
- » DAVIS WITH STAFF AT THE INSTITUTE FOR URBAN POLICY RESEARCH & ANALYSIS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS IN 2015
- » DAVIS ON HIS FIRST DAY AS COMMISSIONER OF THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

“Dr. Davis walks with power, humility, delight and profound curiosity, and he invites others to believe in our capacity to change society for the better,” says Jackson, who is one of many researchers who has benefited from Davis’ efforts. “His

work has the potential, if heeded, to help transform the field of psychiatry into a potent force for healing, grounded in an understanding of the oppression inherent in the field and the possibilities for doing better.”



A close-up photograph of a child's foot in a pink and white sneaker stepping onto a thick, light-colored rope bridge. The bridge is supported by wooden posts and is set against a background of a brick building and green trees. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day at a playground.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS ACROSS THE NATION

**THE CHILD OPPORTUNITY INDEX INSPIRES
POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS TO
IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE YOUNGEST
MEMBERS OF THEIR COMMUNITIES**

BY NOMI SOFER '91

ON A SUNNY DAY IN AUGUST, children shrieked with laughter as they chased each other across a gleaming new playground at Madison Avenue Park in Albany, New York, while their parents exercised on equipment nearby — a sight that would have been unfathomable just four years ago.

That's when Jonathan P. Jones, Albany's commissioner for recreation, youth and workforce services, first encountered the Child Opportunity Index (COI), created by Heller's Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy (ICYFP). The COI's finding that Albany was the worst place for black children to live among the 100 largest U.S. metropolitan areas was both shocking and galvanizing.

"That data was my awakening," Jones recalls. "I was relatively new in the role, and the data showed me what my main focus needed to be: thinking about how to create more equitable neighborhoods."

That's exactly what ICYFP Director Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, the Samuel F. and Rose B. Gingold Professor of Human Development and Social Policy, wants to hear.

"All children deserve to live in safe, healthy neighborhoods, but many U.S. children don't have access to these conditions," she says. "The Child Opportunity Index allows communities and policymakers to see where inequities exist and take steps to reduce disparities. We're thrilled that leaders in Albany saw the data and took action to invest in parks and playgrounds in neighborhoods where children who have the least access to opportunity live."

Developed in 2014 by ICYFP researchers in collaboration with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, the Child Opportunity Index has been widely used to initiate conversations about unequal access to opportunity and to spur actions to increase equity. From Albany, New York, to Pinellas County, Florida, to Boston, Massachusetts, policymakers, community organizers, nonprofit leaders and citizens are using the COI to improve the lives of the youngest members of their communities.

THE CHILD OPPORTUNITY INDEX

For children across the United States, opportunity might mean attending well-funded schools, participating in community sports, or having access to grocery stores and



restaurants with nutritious food. But knowing which children live in neighborhoods with — or without — those conditions wasn't possible before the ICYFP team created the Child Opportunity Index.

"The COI is an invaluable resource for anyone who needs up-to-date information on the quality of neighborhoods children grow up in," says Clemens Noelke, ICYFP's research director. "It can be used to map the needs and resources of communities with a focus on children, to design and target interventions, to highlight racial and ethnic inequities in access to neighborhood opportunity, and to track changes in neighborhood opportunity over time." Today, the COI is



OPENING SPREAD: A GIRL CLIMBS ON A STRUCTURE AT A RENOVATED PLAYGROUND IN ALBANY, NEW YORK. THIS IS ONE OF 13 ALBANY PLAYGROUNDS THAT HAVE BEEN REVITALIZED OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS.

THIS PAGE: BOYS VOLUNTEER AT A FOOD PANTRY THAT WORKS WITH THE JUVENILE WELFARE BOARD TO OFFER NUTRITIOUS FOOD FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN PINELLAS COUNTY.

school achievement measures, the COI includes indicators from three domains: education, health and environment, and socioeconomic conditions.

The COI reveals vast inequities in access to opportunity for black and Hispanic children. Nationally, about 50% of children in the United States are now members of racial or ethnic minorities, and that percentage is higher in many major cities. These children live in neighborhoods that lack the conditions all children need for healthy development. By revealing these inequities, the COI can be a catalyst for action.

Demand for the COI took ICYFP researchers by surprise, and users' requests for enhancements to the tool prompted the Heller team to develop the Child Opportunity Index 2.0, which will be released in January 2020. COI 2.0 includes new data and features that make it an even more powerful tool for tracking and tackling inequity.

The updated COI allows comparisons between metro areas across the United States. Previously, users could compare neighborhoods in a metro area like Boston or Albany, but couldn't compare Boston to Albany.

“For the first time, there is a single, consistent metric of child opportunity for every neighborhood in the United States,” says Acevedo-Garcia. “This means that we can get a complete picture of where opportunity is highest — and lowest. COI 2.0 allows us to see and talk about inequities in neighborhood opportunity in a way that wasn't possible before. Those conversations can spark positive change in our communities.”

available online at diversitydatakids.org, providing a rich, detailed portrait of the neighborhoods where U.S. children live.

The COI aggregates indicators of the conditions children need to live healthy lives and to grow into productive adults, including access to quality child care and schools; proximity to healthy food outlets; availability of parks, recreation opportunities and safe housing; as well as the socioeconomic conditions of adults in their neighborhoods. The COI also measures exposure to adverse conditions like air pollution, excessive heat and toxic waste sites. Unlike many data sources that measure a single factor that shapes children's lives, such as the poverty rate, or a group of closely related factors, like

DIGGING INTO DISPARITIES IN FLORIDA

Pinellas County is a long, narrow stretch of Florida's Gulf Coast, with a million residents spread among million-dollar beachfront homes and trailer parks. Disparities in income levels translate into unequal access to neighborhood opportunity for children, but these disparities are easily concealed by data collected and mapped at the ZIP code level.

That's a challenge for an organization like the Juvenile Welfare Board (JWB), established in 1945 to address the needs of children and families in Pinellas County.

Starr Silver, JWB's strategic research manager, explains: “Take ZIP code 34695 — the Safety Harbor area. This ZIP code is comprised of four census tracts, and each tract has a different

opportunity level, ranging from low to very high. If you simply look at average income at the ZIP code level, you don't see those pockets of need."

That's why JWB turned to the Child Opportunity Index, which reports data at the census tract, or neighborhood, level. JWB combined its own rich data with the COI to help focus resource allocation and program development across the county and provide a mechanism for tracking change over time. Shared with the county's network of eight neighborhood family centers, the COI allows local community leaders to identify needs specific to the census tracts in their service area and customize their services to match the needs of the children and families they serve.

"In one community, food insecurity may be a bigger challenge than leaders realized; in another, we might see that the percentage of single mothers in the community is much greater than the county average, or we'll find that the portion of young children enrolled in preschool is much lower than the county average," Silver explains. "When local leaders have data that's specific to the census tracts they serve, they can be more strategic in providing services, reducing barriers and raising funds."

For Denise Groesbeck, who served as strategic research manager during the years that JWB decided to create a customized version of the COI, the fact that it's a composite is central to its value as a tool for increasing equity. "Family and neighborhood conditions have a compounding effect. The more adverse or beneficial conditions children experience, the lesser or greater opportunity they have for successful development," she says. "That's the beauty of the COI. It doesn't show just one indicator. It produces a picture of the many factors that combine to create opportunity. That's also what makes the COI a trusted data source for us."

BUILDING TRUST IN BOSTON

That need for trustworthy data that a community can mobilize around is at the heart of the Vital Village Network (VVN), which uses the Child Opportunity Index as the foundation for its community-based Data Dashboard, serving the Dorchester, Roxbury and Mattapan neighborhoods of Boston. Established by Boston Medical Center pediatrician and community leader Renée Boynton-Jarrett, the dashboard brings together data about the health and well-being of children and families from

multiple sources in order to align family support services and resources with need, track progress on benchmarks for child well-being, and empower community members to use data to create change.

For example, VVN's Community Data Workgroup spurred the development of a food access app, which is being used by community members to locate sources of affordable, healthy food, ranging from food pantries to farmers markets. The app allows residents to share information about the quality and variety of food at various outlets, encouraging neighbors to seek out the freshest, most nutritious food and removing the stigma of using food pantries.

But getting to this point was a complicated journey that required buy-in from communities long wary of the "one-dimensional story data tells," says Boynton-Jarrett. Single measures such as school achievement or crime levels that paint a community as "failing" or "dangerous" overlook community strengths and residents' resilience, and can seem to blame the community for its challenges.

Because the COI is a relative measure, "it's not looking at communities as individual places that happen to be performing well or poorly," Boynton-Jarrett says. "The COI captures that these differences between communities are not random. It allows us to see that these differences are the result of a series of processes around where people can get access to housing, what types of resources were poured into neighborhoods with more opportunity, and which historical processes — redlining, illegal dumping — operate in concert so these neighborhoods arrived at where they were in relation to other communities."

Her goal is to mobilize community members to use data from the COI and other sources to engage with policymakers, advocate for themselves and help develop programming to address community needs. To date, VVN has developed a task force to encourage male engagement in the lives of children, a program to advocate for and support breastfeeding for all mothers, and comprehensive trauma-informed prenatal services, among others.

KEEPING KIDS ACTIVE IN ALBANY

A playground might not seem like the most important indicator of equity, but play is critical to children's healthy

PHOTOS THIS PAGE: A FAMILY VISITS A LOCAL FARMER'S MARKET NEAR BOSTON.

development and success in school. For the city of Albany, it was clear after they looked at data from the Child Opportunity Index: Too many of Albany's black children didn't have access to well-kept, stimulating places to play.

That spurred Jones, who is the youngest commissioner for recreation, youth and workforce services in the city's history and the first African American in the role, to bring the findings to the attention of Mayor Kathy Sheehan. They developed a five-year capital improvement plan to revitalize Albany's highest-used and most in-need parks to increase equity and access to these resources for all of the city's children, especially black children, who had historically been left behind.

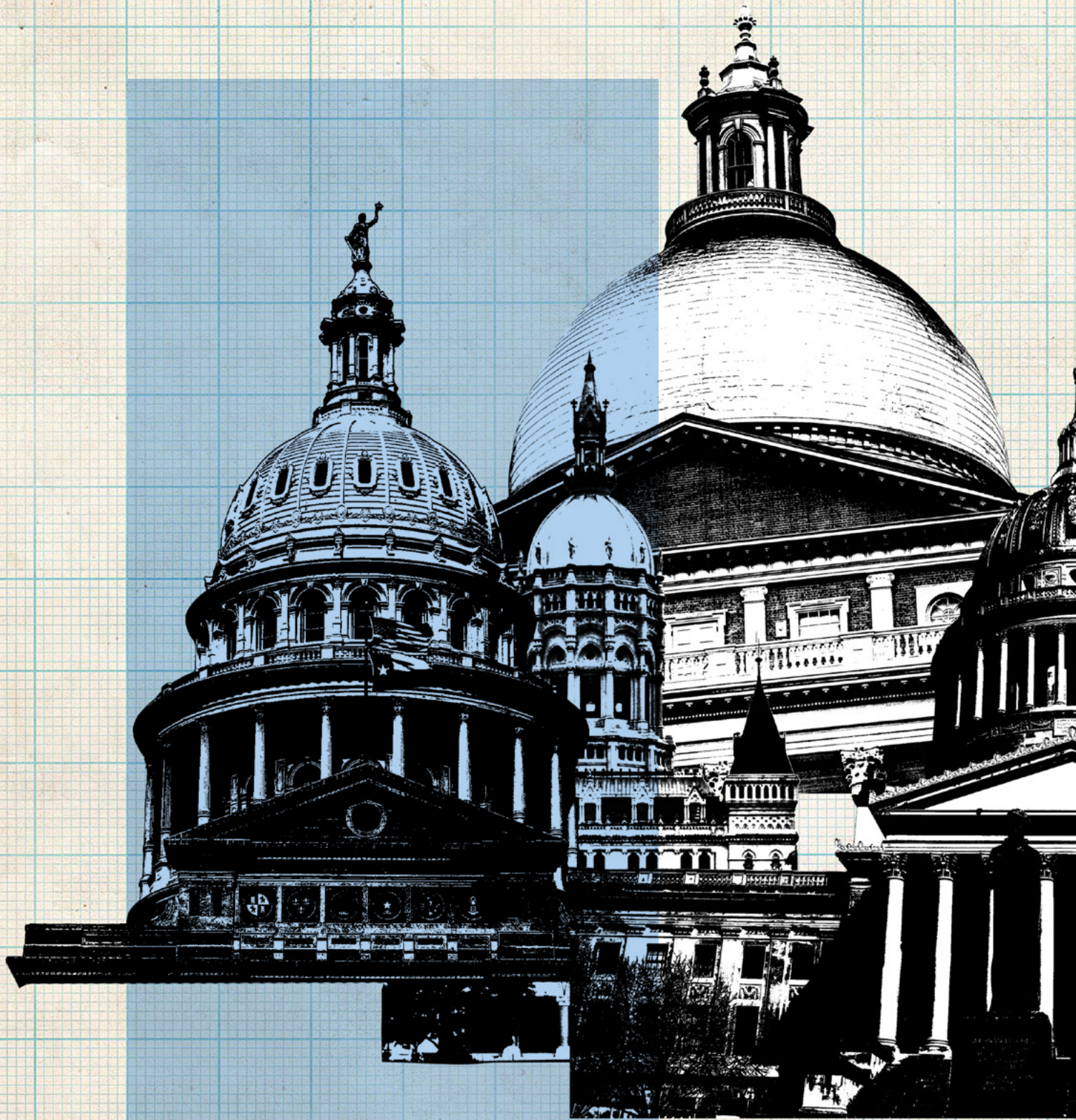
Now, four years into implementing the \$2 million plan, Jones and his team have revitalized 13 parks and playgrounds, creating safe, interesting and accessible spaces across the city. All of the renovated playgrounds are compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act, and six playgrounds include fitness equipment designed for adults, allowing parents to exercise while their children play.

"One of my favorite things about the fitness equipment is that it brings dads into the park," Jones says. "Kids and their parents are spending a lot more time in the revitalized parks. They used to stay for just a few minutes; now, because there's something for parents to do and the equipment is designed to be both physically and cognitively challenging for kids, they're staying for a couple of hours at a stretch."

Convincing decision-makers to allocate resources to parks and playgrounds wasn't easy, but the COI helped make the case with its detailed data — as it's done across the country for communities committed to combating inequities.

Mayor Sheehan says, "The Child Opportunity Index really showed us, in stark numbers, what a lot of us already knew: that, particularly in this area, our poverty is concentrated in small neighborhoods, and that those concentrations of poverty that have happened over decades have resulted in neighborhoods that are the have-nots. That story of the haves and the have-nots was there in black and white. Nobody could argue about it anymore, or ignore it."







THE POWER OF LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE

HELLER ALUMNI SHARE WHY THEY'VE CHOSEN
CAREERS IN CITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENT
ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

BY KAREN SHIH

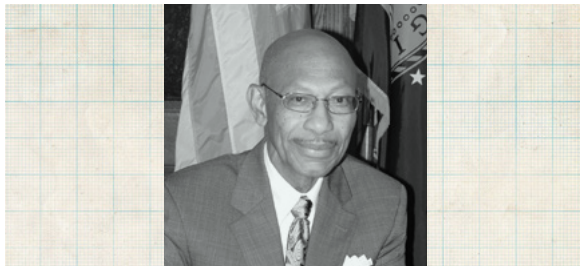
“If you want to make lasting change in the lives of people across the board — middle-income people, working-class people, immigrants — the local level is really where the action is,” says Otis Johnson, PhD’80, former mayor of Savannah, Georgia. “In D.C., policy is made, but the trenches are where the work gets done.”

That’s a common refrain these days, as partisan politics cause gridlock at the highest level of U.S. government. Tom Perez, chair of the Democratic National Committee, told Heller Dean David Weil during a visit to Brandeis in April about his own roots as a member of the Montgomery County

Council in Maryland, and urged Heller students to consider a career in local government.

“Service at a local level is remarkably impactful. Why? Because you can’t print money. You have to solve problems,” Perez said.

Turns out, there are already a number of Heller alumni serving in local government, in both appointed and elected positions. Whether they’re championing affordable housing in Savannah, making sure potholes get filled and fielding resident complaints in Massachusetts, or tackling the realities of climate change in Honolulu, they’re all finding a way to make their mark on their communities.



A LIFETIME OF PUBLIC SERVICE

OTIS JOHNSON, PhD '80

Former Mayor, Savannah, Georgia

For half a century, Otis Johnson, PhD '80, has been committed to public service in his home state of Georgia. He's been a community organizer and a professor at a public university, led an at-risk youth program and served on the school board — all of which led to his role as mayor of Savannah from 2004 to 2012.

"In order to make change, you can protest and demonstrate and all that. But you need someone to actually change the policy or law or practice," he says. He first served in the city council for five years in the 1980s, then became mayor in 2004.

As a two-term mayor, he led initiatives on poverty reduction and healthy living, including diabetes and heart disease prevention and smoking bans. He also oversaw significant infrastructure improvement, such as creating bike lanes and working with the federal government to buy out houses in flood plains.

In addition, "gentrification is a problem here and all over," Johnson says, as retirees and students flock to the city and drive up housing prices. "One way to combat it is with mixed-income developments in neighborhoods where you can have subsidized rentals but also have market-rate rentals. We need to make sure our low-wage workers who work downtown can still live downtown."

As just the second African American mayor in a majority-black city, Johnson was acutely aware of the imbalance of power throughout Savannah's leadership — a remnant of the Jim Crow era.

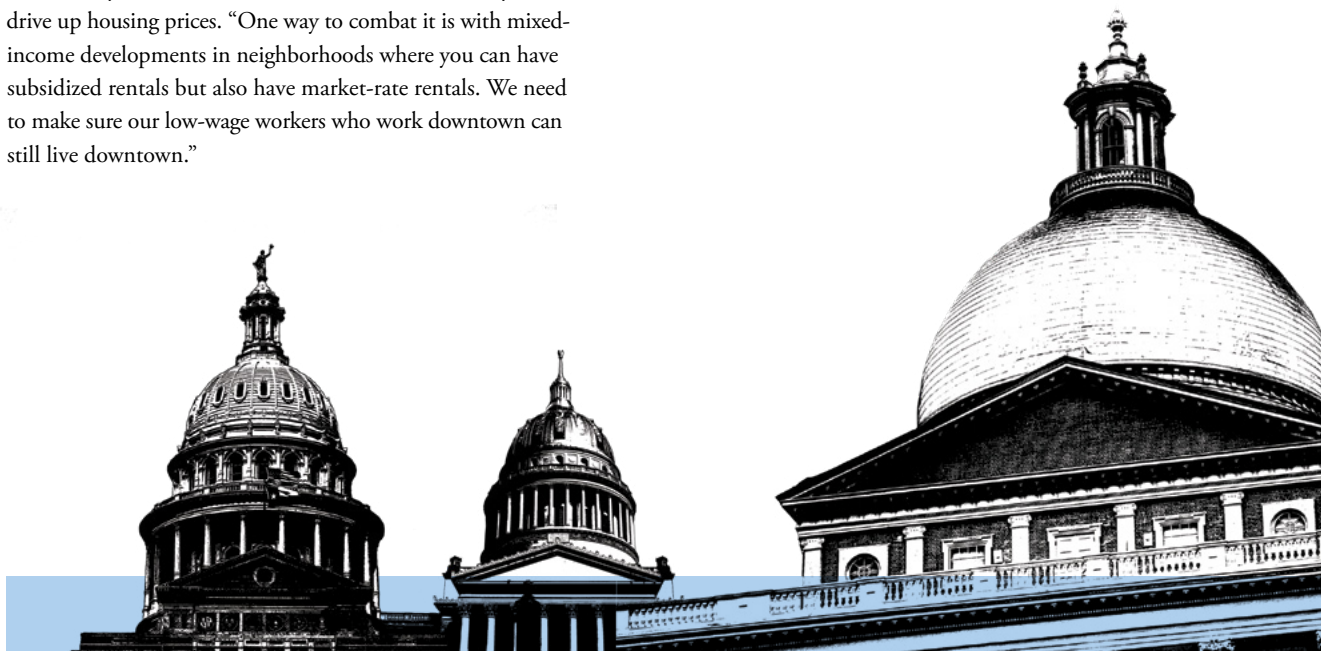
"We had to be real firm on making sure these boards and commissions look like the people who live in this city," he says. "It's still an ongoing challenge."

Though Johnson is proud of these accomplishments, he claims none of them as his own. He built coalitions of support, a skill he attributes to his time at Heller.

Growing up during the civil rights movement in the segregated South, he became determined to understand and change the inequities that plagued the country. He chose Heller for his PhD because it had "the pillars of social policy work" on its faculty, including his adviser, Roland Warren, a pioneer in the study of community, and Professor Emeritus David Gil, Johnson's "North Star" in the analysis of social systems and inequality.

"It was a tremendous experience. The day I got accepted was one of the happiest days of my life," he says. "In addition to the intellectual experience, there was also the multicultural experience with people from all over the world," which taught him how to bring people from different backgrounds together.

Heller, Johnson says, prepares its graduates to build coalitions and be good policymakers anywhere they choose to go. "We need people at all levels who are committed to social justice, to equality."





LEADING BY LISTENING

KELLY AXTELL, MBA'05

Deputy Town Manager, Lexington, Massachusetts

If you walk into Lexington's town office building with a problem you need resolved, Kelly Axtell, MBA'05, is the person you'll see.

"People come because they feel like they haven't been heard," says Deputy Town Manager Axtell, whether they're one of Lexington's 33,000 residents or a member of the 500-person staff that keeps the town running. "There are some things I'm unable to change for them, but I work hard to treat people fairly and take the time to listen."

Axtell was recently promoted from assistant to deputy town manager, overseeing five departments: fire, IT, human services, the library and human resources, as well as the town clerk. In her previous role, one key responsibility was to organize town meetings and present major initiatives for voter consideration.

"The citizens here are unbelievably engaged, so they'll get into the nitty-gritty details," she says.

It can be a challenge. For example, a recent proposal to partner with the regional school system on overseeing athletic fields was scuttled after six months of work due to resident concerns. But she takes each setback as a learning opportunity.

It's that drive for improvement that spurred Axtell on the path to town leadership. Her first career was in senior services. In 2003, she chose to pursue her MBA at Heller, which had an elder and disability concentration at the time. After graduating, she took a job as the assistant director of senior services in Lexington, where she soon found a wave of leaders about to retire. That opened up a number of roles, including one for an assistant town manager.

"I didn't think someone like me could do it," she says, given her lack of experience. But after attending a conference for municipal leaders, she realized that the management skills she'd gained through the MBA, particularly from the Team Consulting Project, could make her a good fit. "I'm lucky to be in a town that wants to help its staff grow and promotes from within."

Today, she's paying that forward by developing a 12-week "Employee Academy" professional development program. It's designed to build up middle managers and connect them across departments to increase town efficiency.

It might sound exhausting to juggle the constant influx of people coming through her door with the long-term work on town policies, but Axtell thrives on it.

"I'm just one person, but if I can guide the town and help people make informed decisions, it's very gratifying," she says. "You can see the benefits for years."



"CONTRIBUTING TO A COMMUNITY"

GREG JOHNSON, MPP'14

Town Administrator, Maynard, Massachusetts

"How do I feel good about what I do each day?" That was the question that drove Greg Johnson, MPP'14, to pursue a career in local public service.

He had just finished six years in the Marine Corps, where he'd gained management experience as an officer and was looking for a new career path. "I liked the idea of contributing to a community and helping people's daily lives and making sure they felt good about where they lived," he says.

“As a citizen and voter, you live in the same community as these local legislators ... so if you have issues you care about, whether it’s the budget or a bike path, that’s where you have leverage.” *Todd Swisher, MPP’16*

He chose the Heller MPP program and molded it to his own needs. He picked classes and a capstone project that would give him the tools and skills to succeed in local government, including an operations management MBA class and a housing and community development course at Tufts through the Boston Consortium.

After graduating, he worked on the Massachusetts governor’s budget team, but found it unsatisfying. “I wanted to see the impact of my policy recommendations firsthand rather than not knowing how my small part affected the big machine at the statehouse.”

He took a position as project/procurement specialist for the town manager in Westford, Massachusetts, and after two years got the top job in Maynard. As town administrator, Johnson’s role is to research policies and gather the opinions of the community to advise the five elected selectmen.

His biggest challenge hasn’t been a single particular initiative. It’s been building up goodwill in a tightknit community to develop the trust necessary to run a successful town hall.

“People know I’m not from around here. I’m not from Massachusetts. I don’t drop my ‘r’s,’ so I knew I’d have to put the work into becoming a trusted resource,” Johnson says. That’s why during his first year and a half, he’s constantly meeting people wherever he can, from the garden club, to the dog park, to the arts center. Today, he’s confident in offering advice even if he knows it’s not exactly what the selectmen and townspeople want to hear, because he’s built strong relationships.

“If people get to work on time, they feel their kids are safe, their water runs and there aren’t too many potholes. If they don’t think twice about the local government, we’re doing a good job.”



TAKING A LOCAL STAND ON CLIMATE CHANGE

TODD SWISHER, MPP’16

Former Legislative Analyst, City and County of Honolulu

When the federal government won’t act on pressing issues, it’s often up to the states to take up the mantle.

“Sustainability and environmental issues are critical in Hawaii because the islands are at high risk,” says Todd Swisher, MPP’16. “It’s another area where the federal government isn’t doing what we need to do on climate change. Honolulu is one of the cities that will abide by the Paris Agreement and try to make progress on small things, like getting the city to go to an all-renewable vehicle fleet, and changing the building code with efficiency in mind.”

That’s one reason Swisher chose to be a legislative analyst for the city and county of Honolulu after graduating from Heller and then following his wife to her home state of Hawaii. In his role, he drafted legislation for council members. Though he didn’t propose policies, his job was to make sure the policies were effective.

Navigating the intricacies of how local policies interact with state and federal policies is challenging. But Swisher says

Heller prepared him well for the extensive research he did on the taxing power of local authorities and the management of natural-hazard liabilities in cities across the United States, and figuring out how they could be applied to Honolulu.

“Hawaii is kind of an insular place. If you’re not from there, it’s hard to break into government,” says the Massachusetts native. “But the writing quality I got from the Heller program — writing memos and policy analyses — distinguished me from the other candidates for the job.”

For Swisher, going into local government was a bit of a family tradition. His father worked for the city of Framingham, Massachusetts, and always instilled in his son a need to serve the community. After a summer with AmeriCorps and a few years working in nonprofits, Swisher decided to go back to school to gain policy skills.

“I remember studying American government with Professor [Michael] Doonan and learning about federalism and how it’s a distinct feature of our government to have power distributed among different levels,” Swisher says. “At the federal level, you can accomplish a lot with one swing of the bat. But that hasn’t been possible lately, given the politics. As I learned about how policy was moving on the state and local levels, I started shifting my focus.”

Today, he’s back in Massachusetts working as a management analyst with the city of Boston’s Office of Budget Management. He urges everyone to get involved in local politics.

“As a citizen and voter, you live in the same community as these local legislators. They’re pretty accessible, so if you have issues you care about, whether it’s the budget or a bike path, that’s where you have leverage.”



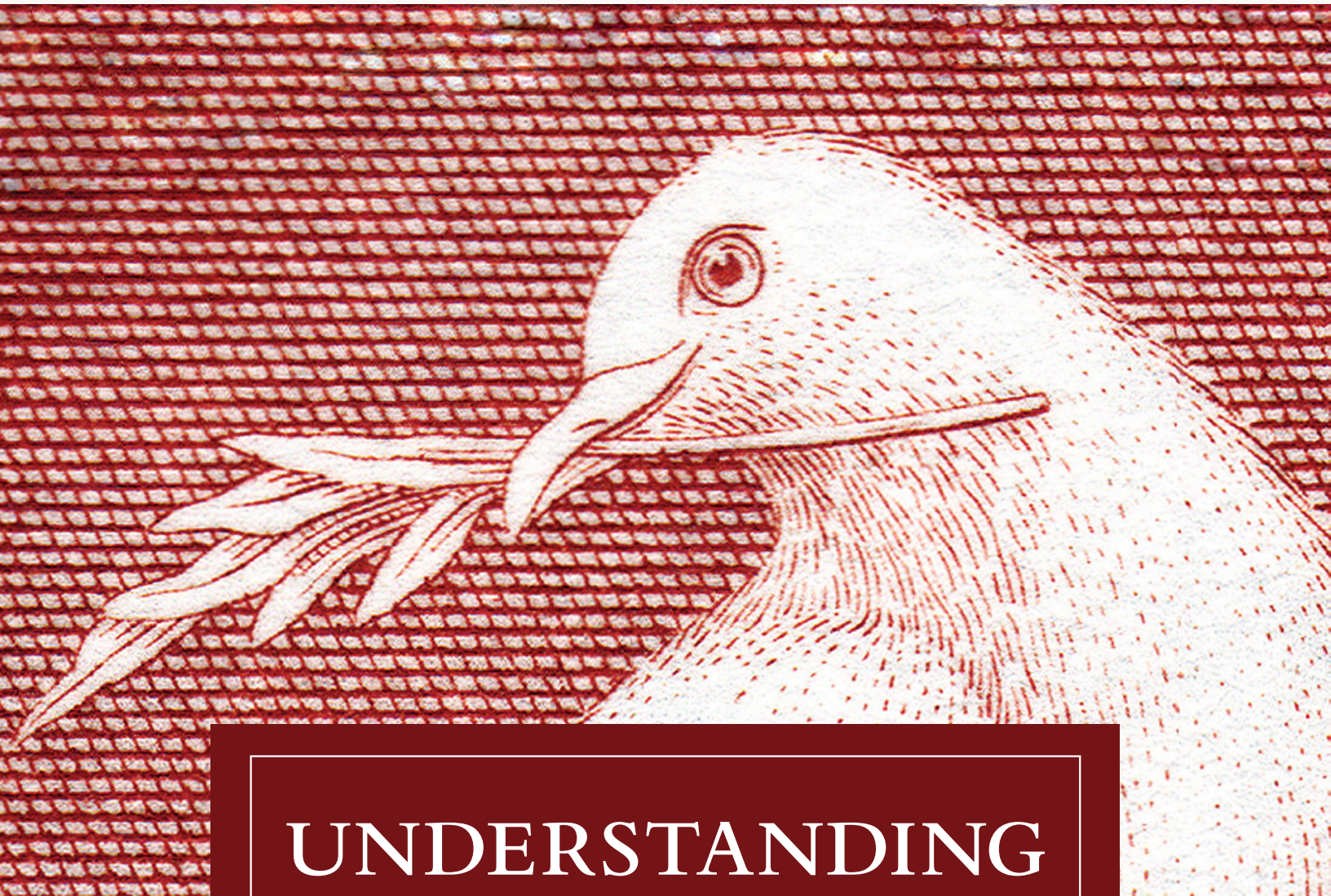
THE NEXT GENERATION

AARON D. COLEMAN, PhD CANDIDATE

Studying how social assets and social capital influence health outcomes for black Americans

I remember reading and feeling so deeply touched by June Jordan’s famous quote, “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for,” which accompanied President Barack Obama’s presidential campaign speech in 2008. It moved my spirit and consciousness in such a profound way. For many, it seemingly gave light to the multitude of experiences that color human existence.

The essence of the quote implies that the journey towards institutional change invites any- and everyone, from poor little boys and girls growing up in rural Appalachia Mountains, to city-dwelling dreamers and immigrants in pursuit of a better life. For this reason, I desire to one day hold office and to serve as a voice and as another source of representation of the opportunities, second chances and compassion that define the American people.



UNDERSTANDING EVERYDAY PEACE

**NEW COEX ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PAMINA
FIRCHOW BRINGS UNIQUE, PARTICIPATORY PEACE
AND CONFLICT RESEARCH TO HELLER**

BY **KAREN SHIH**

WHAT DOES PEACE MEAN TO YOU?

WHAT ABOUT RECONCILIATION?

INCLUSION? JUSTICE?

These concepts may seem too broad and nebulous to measure quantitatively. But they're absolutely essential when it comes to healing communities around the world that have experienced conflict and instability. That's why Associate Professor Pamina Firchow has spent the last decade developing and testing a unique methodology to capture the local understanding of these concepts as usable statistics.

"We're translating communities' everyday needs and everyday understanding of peace into statistics that policymakers can use to make decisions," she says.

She's used this methodology, called Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI), around the world, from South Sudan to Afghanistan, Sri Lanka to Colombia, working to more effectively and comprehensively represent the voices of the people.

"I was uncomfortable with the top-down approach of making policy recommendations, dictating how communities or countries should work," Firchow says. Through EPI, "we're looking at peacebuilding effectiveness from the bottom up, using collaborative methodologies to establish whether or not what we're doing is actually building peace."

Her work has been so successful that she co-founded the Everyday Peace Indicators 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2018.

Now, she's bringing her work to Heller. This fall, she joined the faculty of the MA in Conflict Resolution and Coexistence (COEX) program, where she's excited to bring students into her research and develop connections with new colleagues, especially in the MA in Sustainable International Development and MS in Global Health Policy and Management programs.

"To be able to grow and become more sophisticated in my research as I'm exposed to other fields is exciting," Firchow says.

FOUNDATIONS OF A CAREER IN PEACEBUILDING

It was an internship with an international leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner that put Firchow on the path to a career in peacebuilding.

As an undergraduate student in political science at Carleton College, she worked one summer for Oscar Arias, the former president of Costa Rica. He was a leader of an international campaign to stop the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, a field she would continue to engage in for the next several years.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree, she went on to work for the campaign at the Federation of American Scientists in Washington, D.C. Then, she earned two master's degrees: one in comparative politics from the London School of Economics, and another in international relations and peace and conflict studies from the Universidad del Salvador in Argentina, where she was a Rotary Peace Fellow.

But while she was living in Argentina, her interests shifted.

"I arrived right after the economic crisis, and I saw all the protests. Families were living in the squares. But at the same time, there was this real energy palpable in the air, an excitement for change, as these social movements were really active in the streets," Firchow says.

She realized that a lot of the theories and methodologies for peacebuilding she'd been learning in her classes were missing a crucial component: the voice of the people.

As she pursued a doctorate from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, she started to connect the participatory action research of the international development field with her interest in conflict resolution and coexistence.

CREATING THE EVERYDAY PEACE INDICATORS

"When we talk about building peace, improving coexistence and working toward reconciliation, we need to find more ways to systematically understand what communities need," says Firchow.

That's why, in 2011, as a faculty member at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, she embarked on a new project with Roger Mac Ginty, then a visiting professor from the United Kingdom.

Their goal: to have communities affected by war develop their own indicators for post-conflict success rather than having outside experts and scholars dictate them.

But the question was, how? Previous participatory research in the field had largely relied on interviews and qualitative research. It was valuable but difficult to present to policymakers, who wanted hard statistics. So Firchow and Mac Ginty developed the Everyday Peace Indicators methodology, starting with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Through extensive work with community members, the researchers generate a battery of indicators about a concept like peace or reconciliation. Examples include access to health facilities with doctors and supplies, or the ability to hold social events without police clearance (indicators are often very specific to a locality, referencing names and locations). Then, they use longitudinal surveys to measure how community perception of these indicators changes over time.

“The broad concept is peace, but the methodology works on any kind of difficult-to-measure social concept, whether that’s violent extremism in Afghanistan, governance and inclusion in Kenya, or coexistence and justice in Colombia,” Firchow explains.

The process starts with focus groups: men, women and youth (girls and boys). EPI-trained facilitators discuss the concepts with the groups, which is key for community buy-in. Some participants might feel as if they won a war, for example, and not understand why they might need to discuss reconciliation, while others may be still be experiencing violence and not have thought about peace in their community.

After that, they bring the focus groups together with additional community members to form a larger group that is as representative of the community as possible, and facilitators share the indicators they’ve gleaned from previous discussions.

“For many people, that’s the ‘aha’ moment,” Firchow says. “They finally see what we’re doing. That’s the key moment, because that’s when they start to add or take out indicators.”

Finally, the broader community is invited to a final meeting, where all vote for their top indicators. That final list is developed into a survey for the entire community. Once the data is collected, the researchers code it and can make recommendations to community-based partners, village by village.

“Though it’s intensive, both in terms of time and resources, it results in this rich data,” Firchow says. “The strength of this project is in the details, because you can always generalize later on, but you cannot recreate the detailed information about how these community members are living their everyday lives.”

“A MINI-ETHNOGRAPHY”

Satellite dishes on rooftops in Afghanistan. Drinks left on a table at a bar in Rwanda. Muslim children taking part in New Year’s games in Sri Lanka.

None of these might jump immediately to mind as indicators of peace. But these were just a few of the indicators Firchow and her team have gleaned through the EPI methodology while working around the world.

“The everyday indicators are like a mini-ethnography. They serve as a window into the communities,” Firchow says.

In Afghanistan, for example, the presence of many satellite dishes indicates less violent extremism, because those extremist actors tend to prohibit radio, television and any outside media. In Rwanda, the threat of poison after the genocide meant people at a bar might take their drinks with them when they went to the bathroom — but drinks left on a table signified there was more trust. In Sri Lanka, which has struggled with religious and ethnic conflict, the ability of Muslim children to join the fun on New Year’s Day means the community has, to some extent, worked out some of those differences.

“One of the things that I thought was really interesting was that you could see the diverse issues that emerged out of seemingly similar communities,” Firchow remarks.

For example, Firchow is currently working on a United States Agency for International Development project in Sri Lanka, where she and her colleagues are embedded in its reconciliation programming, focused on repairing relations after the civil war that raged for a quarter of a century.

“Out of our set of 30 villages, one community clearly had a problem with sexual violence. These types of indicators didn’t emerge in any other place. They were very specific, and immediately I could say, ‘Look, this is a salient issue here and you need to address it.’ It’s not just one informant — the whole community feels it’s important,” she explains.

In other projects, all villages across a region may converge on certain unexpected indicators, such as in Afghanistan.



“In every single community, whether it was Taliban-controlled or not, one of the top-five indicators of peace was girls going to school,” Firchow says. “That doesn’t fit with any of our assumptions about rural Afghanistan.”

She published her findings on this topic in the journal *Foreign Policy* earlier this year, arguing that it’s important to listen to these local voices and to redirect investment toward girls’ education and women’s professional development, given the broad support.

CONVIVENCIA IN COLOMBIA

Today, Firchow’s major focus is Colombia, which was plagued by conflict for nearly half a century until peace accords between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC guerrilla movement, and the Colombian government were ratified in 2016.

“Our goal is to understand the local notions of justice and *convivencia*, a Spanish term between coexistence and reconciliation,” she says.

Firchow is working with Peter Dixon, a recently appointed research scientist at Heller, on a project funded by the National Science Foundation, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and Humanity United. They started in the Antioquia region, which was heavily affected by the conflict, and will extend to two other conflict-affected areas. Currently, they are focusing on one municipality, Dabeiba, where various post-accord actors are engaged in its villages, including work on development projects, collective reparations and FARC demobilization. The other municipality they chose in Antioquia was Urrao, which has no such actors. They’re comparing the two to evaluate the effectiveness of the different post-accord mechanisms, and are currently collecting indicators. They hope to inform the Colombian Truth Commission and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace about how these post-accord mechanisms are being received by locals.

Next spring, thanks to a Fulbright Fellowship, Firchow will be on the ground in Colombia, where she will also be working on two other Carnegie Corporation-funded projects. One is piloting the possibility of creating a bottom-up barometer for indigenous groups and is being tested with the Pasto indigenous people in Nariño and Putumayo. Another focuses on data flows in peace processes, which serves as

the basis of her next book with Mac Ginty, “The Data Myth: Information Flows and Decision-Making in Peace Processes.” This follows her first book, “Reclaiming Everyday Peace: Local Voices in Measurement and Evaluation After War,” published last year by Cambridge University Press, which discusses EPI methodology and presents local peacebuilding effectiveness findings using case studies in Colombia and Uganda.

“If you look at communities in war-torn societies in the post-conflict period, surprisingly and perplexingly, the interventions are mostly not peacebuilding interventions, such as relationship building and rebuilding the social network and fabric of the community,” she says. “Instead, they’re focused on development, security. In the book, I argue that it’s clear what’s needed is more societal relationship building and more funding for these kinds of peacebuilding interventions.”

NEW OPPORTUNITIES AT HELLER

This fall, after five years at George Mason University’s School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, including a year as a Jennings Randolph Senior Fellow at USIP, Firchow started at Heller as an associate professor in the COEX program.

“The students are enormously dedicated and engaged. I was thinking, during orientation, that it kind of feels like a family, and that’s wonderful, especially when you are dealing with such difficult issues and topics in peace and conflict studies,” she says. “A master’s program like this can retraumatize, so having those networks and ability to depend on one another is enormously important.”

Firchow is eager to bring students into her work, as well as tap her network for guest speakers to invite into her classes.

Though she’s just a semester into her tenure, she’s seen the overlaps between her work and the research of her colleagues in other fields, and she’s eager to learn from them as she expands EPI’s scope and projects.

“I’m happy to be part of the COEX program,” Firchow says, as a faculty member of a graduate school that also houses master’s programs in international development and global health. “These really are the cornerstones of peacebuilding, and it creates a trifecta that’s unique. Being able to exchange ideas between programs, learn from one another, that’s really exciting.”

Firchow and Heller research scientist Peter Dixon are evaluating the effectiveness of the different post-accord mechanisms with locals in Dabeiba and Urrao, two municipalities in the Antioquia department.

Firchow will be expanding her post-accord work in Colombia to additional municipalities in Cauca as well as a yet-to-be determined department, to help inform the Colombian Truth Commission and Special Jurisdiction for Peace about how the mechanisms are being received by locals.



In the spring, Firchow will return to Colombia, in part, to research developing a bottom-up barometer for indigenous groups in the Nariño and Putumayo departments.



BY **MARIA MADISON**

Associate Dean, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity

DR. ANDREW KOLODNY

*Medical Director, Opioid Policy Research
Collaborative*

BRIDGING THE DISPARITIES GAP IN THE OPIOID CRISIS

THE PREVAILING NARRATIVE AROUND THE OPIOID ADDICTION EPIDEMIC FAILS TO RECOGNIZE ITS EFFECTS ON NONWHITE POPULATIONS

The opioid addiction epidemic has ravaged the United States for the last two decades. But in 2019, data started to show that the epidemic might be subsiding, with opioid deaths plateauing or declining for the first time since 1980.

Maria Madison, who has an scD in public health and is Heller's associate dean for equity, inclusion and diversity, feels that this broad, positive narrative overlooks significant racial disparities in the data. She reached out to Andrew Kolodny, medical director of the Opioid Policy Research Collaborative at Heller, to voice her concerns. This fall, they sat down for a conversation with Heller Magazine about the need to recognize racial and other disparities in the data and the best way for health care workers, law enforcement officials and policy-makers to address all populations affected by the opioid epidemic.



MARIA MADISON: When I heard you and others describing the “light at the end of the tunnel” of the opioid epidemic, my question was, “For whom is the light shining at the end of the tunnel?” It could be dangerous to say the light is shining for

everyone, because we want to continue to emphasize to politicians and policymakers that whatever progress has been made has been very uneven across racial and other groups.



DR. ANDREW KOLODNY: I was so happy when you called me, Maria, because you’re right — the national data mask important differences in geography, age and race. The data can even be misleading at times. We get the overall number of people who are dying,

and the national data will report specific drugs, including types of opioids; then policymakers may draw conclusions based on that data. We’re not doing a great job of responding to the epidemic, and one of the reasons is that there’s an epidemiology to our epidemic. We need to understand how it affects different populations differently — we’re not doing a good job of looking at those differences.

From 1997 to about 2011, there was a 900% increase in opioid addiction in the United States, mostly among whites. However, starting around 2013, the opioid crisis began impacting heroin-using survivors of the previous opioid-addiction epidemic, which peaked in the 1970s. That epidemic disproportionately affected low-income blacks and Latinos. The emergence of illicit fentanyl in the eastern half of the United States created a much more dangerous heroin supply. We’ve seen a soaring increase in deaths from heroin users, which has a disproportionate impact on people of color.

MM: If you look at life expectancies across America, the life-expectancy gap between races had been narrowing over

the last few decades until very recently, with the emergence of illicit fentanyl. That’s because more whites were dying from opioid drug overdoses, while blacks have been experiencing improvements in life expectancy because of improvements in chronic diseases.

But why have blacks not become addicted to prescription opioids at the same rate as whites? There are many reasons. Three that come to mind that draw our attention to systemic racism are:

1. White practitioners’ belief that blacks don’t experience pain in the same way as whites.
2. Some of those practitioners are less likely to prescribe opioids to blacks because they view them as predisposed to becoming addicted, as deviants.
3. Blacks are less likely to access health services because of historical distrust of the American medical system and lessons from past drug epidemics (involving incarceration, for example).

AK: When we talk about the soaring increase in addiction to prescription opioids, it’s disproportionately white. I believe that racist notions about pain and racial stereotypes about addiction or diversion of prescriptions have played a protective role for nonwhites. Doctors have been prescribing opioids more conservatively to nonwhites than they have to whites. Doctors should have been prescribing opioids very cautiously to all their patients, but have prescribed much too aggressively for their white patients.

For many doctors, the idea that their prescriptions could cause addiction is foreign to them. They may understand we have an opioid crisis, but they assume it’s driven by so-called “drug abusers.” They think their job is to avoid prescribing to people who might want opioids to get high. But they fail to recognize that addiction can occur even when opioids are taken exactly as prescribed. They may have a notion of what an “addict” is, and it seems impossible to them that their white middle-class patient could somehow turn into an “addict.” During my training in medical school, I witnessed a woman who had cancer and who needed opioids, but was scared of becoming addicted. The doctor’s response was, “This isn’t going to turn you into one of those people who steals radios out of cars.”

MM: At the root of how we talk about the epidemic and understand it is systemic racism. The language that's used around the white epidemic is "substance use disorder" versus the language that's used around blacks is "drug addict" or "crack whores." Right now, a common term is "deaths of despair," for example, for suicides as a result of opioids. There's compassionate language that's been applied to the white population, and the policy response follows that cognitive empathy. Federal, state and local governments have found money to support these individuals who are addicted.

Compare that to the black population. Black individuals are more likely to be incarcerated than placed into free treatment programs. We have done such a poor job of addressing systemic racism around these issues. The narrative now is that the pharmaceutical companies must pay, the physicians are at fault or the FDA is at fault. It's not the individual at fault. But when it's the black population, there's terrifying differential treatment, not just of blacks but of black men in particular, evidenced in their particularly worse life expectancy rates overall and over centuries.

AK: With the heroin epidemic of the 1970s and the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s, the message from policy-makers was that we could arrest our way out of this problem, contributing greatly to mass incarceration. But this time, even conservative politicians say arresting people isn't the answer. In the HBO documentary "Warning: This Drug May Kill You," [on which Kolodny served as medical consultant] there's a scene of a young white heroin user whose mother and counselor bring her to a police station to access help. The policeman speaks to her compassionately. When he goes through her belongings and finds heroin, he tells her, "We're going to throw this out," and she's taken to an addiction treatment program. The idea that a nonwhite person who was addicted to crack cocaine could have gone to a police station for treatment and help — you never would have seen that.

I remember once I was at an opioid crisis rally in Washington, D.C., wearing a T-shirt promoting the rally with a syringe on it. A group of African American men saw me with the shirt and basically said, "You all didn't care so much about this when it was affecting our communities." And I understand that sentiment.

MM: So how can we dismantle systemic racism and help end this crisis? I believe we need better medical school training on how we're 99.999% the same, so that we can change differential treatment. We need compassionate conversations and nondiscriminatory language. We must allocate funding equitably across populations. We have to create policies that attack the root cause of prescription drug distribution with the same fervor and energy we attacked the tobacco industry and are now attacking the pharmaceutical industry.

And we must shine a light on those most impacted by discriminatory practices and beliefs. People ask me, "Maria, why are you always talking about race, particularly indigenous and black women and men?" Because they have some of the lowest life expectancy in this country, and that's because of systemic racism. With persistently low life expectancy, they are the miner's canary for those left out of the common narratives in too many public health discussions, policies and responses. The differentials in life expectancy are warnings that the atmosphere in the mine is toxic not just for the canary, but for the miners as well. Focusing only on a white opioid crisis obscures the bigger picture. We fail society when we miss opportunities to draw attention to those most persistently affected by U.S. disparities in health, education, labor and wages.

AK: I agree with everything you said. We need to understand the way this epidemic is affecting different groups. Trying to draw conclusions from national overdose death data can be misleading — we must drill down. There's a popular narrative that this has turned from a prescription opioid problem, into a heroin problem, into an illicit fentanyl problem. That narrative implies there's a homogeneous group of drug users, who are white, switching from one drug to another. We actually have different groups of opioid-addicted Americans, and the opioid crisis looks different in different parts of the country. The geographic area that's experienced the sharpest increase in opioid overdose deaths over the past few years is Washington, D.C., where an aging group of nonwhite men are dying at an astonishingly high rate because of fentanyl in the heroin supply.

If you don't understand the epidemiology, you will fail in your responses to the problem. You won't direct the resources to where they're most needed. Your prevention efforts will fail. Your treatment efforts will fail. You must dig deeper.

ANTOINETTE HAYS RECEIVES LIVING LEGENDS IN MASS. NURSING AWARD



TOP:
ANTOINETTE HAYS
BOTTOM:
NICOLE RODRIGUEZ

According to the admirers of Antoinette (Toni) Hays, PhD’90, the secret recipe to her success is that she has a blend of patience with enough impatience to get things done. Whether it’s strengthening Regis College’s bottom line and academic excellence during an era of upheaval in higher education, earning a doctorate while working and raising children, or innovating nursing education in Haiti, Hays approaches her life’s work by focusing on forward movement and making sure she gets a seat at the table.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) recognized Hays’ contributions to nursing with a Living Legends in Massachusetts Nursing Award this past spring. In her acceptance speech, Hays recognized her collaborators in Regis’ nursing-education programs as well as ANA’s invaluable advocacy in helping nurses break through the glass ceiling to now “serve as hospital CEOs, leaders of major corporations and presidents of universities.” Hays says she was honored and overwhelmed by the support of all of the people that night, representing 40 years of collective work.

With nursing degrees from Boston College and Boston University, Hays sought a doctorate from Heller to apply an interdisciplinary approach to policy related to geriatrics and the field of gerontology. President of Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts, since 2011, Hays was initially a member of the faculty, and then the founding dean of the Richard and Sheila Young School of Nursing at Regis in the two decades before she commenced her presidency.

Throughout her career, Hays has utilized the framework of the nursing process for assessment, problem identification, plan development, implementation and evaluation in the world of higher education leadership on a daily basis. In addition, says Hays, “my education at Heller, including a deeper understanding of economic, political and sociological theories, coupled with skills in statistics and research methods, has given me a distinct advantage.”

Her career is distinguished by her commitment to underserved populations, be it the elderly or the impoverished people of Haiti, using her expertise to address policies and infrastructures that can improve lives. One of the initiatives that Hays is proudest of is the Regis Haiti Project, which she launched 10 years ago with Partners in Health to increase credentials of nursing faculty. “When I saw the shortage of nursing clinicians and educators in Haiti, which has the highest rate of infant mortality in the Western Hemisphere, I knew Regis had a role to play,” she says.

Throughout her career, Hays has found a way to create the multiplier effect of an investment in human capital — increasing the number of compassionate and well-qualified people providing health care. Fortunately for society, Hays has no plans to slow down anytime soon.

NICOLE RODRIGUEZ IS LEADING POLICY CHANGE FOR LOW- INCOME PEOPLE

“I’ve understood for as long as I can remember how good policy decisions can really change people’s lives — and how bad decisions can really affect them, too,” says Nicole Rodriguez, MPP’14, the new president of the Heller Alumni Association board.

She was raised in Boston by a single mom who worked two jobs. The family relied on public benefits, and when it came time for Rodriguez to go to college, she used federal Pell Grants to help fund her studies at Villanova University.

“I saw my mom’s struggle. It was a heavy burden for her, figuring out how to be a mom and an employee, feeling guilty about choosing work over family. We, as a society, can do better,” she says. That’s why Rodriguez chose to study public policy, with a focus on work-family issues.

She was drawn to Heller because of MPP program leaders Janet Boguslaw and Michael Doonan, PhD’02, who have supported her professionally and personally from the moment she applied through today.

“I’ve never experienced that at any other higher education institution, the support that the staff gives the students, and for that I will always be grateful. I know their door is always open,” she says.

After graduating from Heller, Rodriguez got a fellowship with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, where she was placed with the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. At the think tank, she worked as the lead researcher on policy campaigns for earned sick time, paid family and medical leave, and the \$15 minimum wage — all of which were successful.

“When I was writing my policy reports and advocating at the Massachusetts State House, I had a jump-start because I had worked on these things in grad school,” she says. “I actually used the reports I had written. It was a perfect transition into my professional policy life.”

After a couple of years, she was hired at Community Labor United as a senior researcher. One of her key campaigns was a public-good coalition, which pulls together four sectors — education, housing, health and human services, and transportation — that have seen the worst of privatization.

This fall, Rodriguez stepped into a new role as research director for New Jersey Policy Perspective, a statewide policy think tank focusing on strategies that impact low-income people.

“As a Boston ‘lifer,’ I’m sad to leave but excited about the new opportunity,” she says.

Moving away from Massachusetts doesn’t diminish her Heller connection, however. As president of the Alumni Association board, Rodriguez notes, “My goal is to expand the diversity of voices that are represented, not only on the board but throughout the alumni community. As the first Latina president and a second-generation immigrant, I see the world differently than people who may not have experienced certain hardships. I know I can offer that perspective as we more meaningfully engage alumni around the world.”

ADEYEMI OKUNOGBE IS WORKING TO IMPROVE HEALTH SYSTEMS GLOBALLY

It was Adeyemi Okunogbe’s childhood dream to become a doctor. But after practicing medicine for two years, he realized he wanted to make a different impact.

“I realized how positive change at the system level would improve population health and make medical care more effective and efficient,” says Okunogbe, MS’12. “Many of my patients couldn’t pay for their medical bills or buy their drugs, and were living in poverty and unhealthy environments. By working to influence health policy, I thought I could help change that.”

That’s why he chose Heller’s MS in Global Health Policy and Management program, which provided him with the health systems framework and social justice paradigm with which he has approached his work in global health. He has worked at the RAND Corporation and the World Bank and is currently at RTI International, an independent nonprofit research institute.

At RTI, he is a health systems specialist in the Global Health Division, and provides technical assistance in strengthening health systems, health economics and health financing to projects in low- and middle-income countries. His current portfolio includes Uganda, Zambia, Kenya, the Philippines and his home country of Nigeria. In Uganda, for example, he is working on a political economy analysis on the opportunities and challenges of integrating neglected tropical diseases into the Ugandan health system.

Okunogbe credits Heller for setting him on the path to his current role.

“Heller was where I first understood health policy, its linkages to global health, and the social justice issues around global health,” he says. “Heller helped me choose a focus on research to provide rigorous evidence that health policymakers can use to make meaningful decisions.”



ADEYEMI OKUNOGBE



SHADI SHEIKHSARAF

He credits his mentor, Associate Professor Diana Bowser, as well as faculty members like MS Program Director Allyala Nandakumar and Professor Donald Shepard, for serving as role models and giving him opportunities to conduct research.

Okunogbe worked for Bowser as a research assistant for a year after graduating from Heller before pursuing a PhD from the Pardee RAND Graduate School, where he studied health financing and received his degree in fall 2018. Bowser served on his dissertation committee, and they've continued to work together.

Most recently, they collaborated on a World Health Organization-funded study on how financing from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has influenced investments in human resources for health across 21 countries in the eastern Mediterranean region.

"When I came to Heller, my understanding and perspective on health was limited to diagnosing and treating human ailments," Okunogbe says. "After I graduated, I had the framework and paradigms for thinking about health policy, global health and social justice."

SHADI SHEIKHSARAF IS IMPROVING THE LIVES OF DISPLACED PEOPLE

"I'm a child of war," says Shadi Sheikhsharaf, MA SID/COEX'17. She grew up in Iran during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s, which raged throughout her childhood. "The trauma is still with me. But that was motivation for me to work on humanitarian activities and conflict prevention and post-conflict healing, for the betterment of people's lives."

Today, she's doing just that at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as an associate reporting officer in Erbil, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The country hosts about 252,000 refugees, primarily from Syria, with more than half in Erbil. Additionally, about 3.4 million Iraqis are internally displaced. UNHCR provides protection services, shelter, core relief items and basic-needs assistance, as well as camp management services for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs).

"It's very emotional work — you need to be very strong. It's not easy to see that you have limited power to solve all the issues you see every day," Sheikhsharaf says.

In her role, she visits the six IDP camps and four refugee camps regularly, checking in on the various sectors on the ground, including protection, community-based activities and education, to collect data for monthly reports on their activities. She works closely with different units in the field office, in the camps and with partners to make sure they are reporting their indicators accurately. Additionally, she's uncovering and highlighting stories from the camps for social media.

Her work today reminds her of her own childhood, when she was internally displaced in Iran. She recalls a bomb going off near her primary school and being let out into the streets in utter chaos.

So how does an Iranian who grew up during a war with Iraq end up working in that country?

It all started with her Heller connections. Sheikhsharaf chose to come to Heller after several years of working with UNHCR and the U.N. Population Fund in Iran. She wanted broader perspective and knowledge to continue with her humanitarian work.

At Heller, she met people from Iraq for the first time.

"When you're at war, you do not see the other side. It's not easy. But I started talking to my classmates from Iraq. We became friends and understood that the fear we experienced was the same," she says. "Having classmates from all over the world helps you to get rid of some of the biases you have."

At Heller, she continued her work with refugees, co-founding WorkAround with Wafaa Arbash, MA SID/COEX'17, and Jennie Kelly, MA SID/MBA'17, which provides economic empowerment to refugees through online employment.

After graduation, she worked with Cynthia Cohen, director of Brandeis' program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, but always wanted to return to the field. When the opportunity at UNHCR in Iraq came up, she decided to go for it.

The best part of her job is visiting the children, Sheikhsharaf says. "I use my basic knowledge of Arabic and sign language and play with them to provide some happy moments. Even if I can't solve all of their problems, at least I can follow the mission of my name, which means happiness, and make them smile."

HELLER AT 60

60th Anniversary Celebration

JUNE 5-6, 2020

Join us during Brandeis Alumni Weekend for panels featuring Heller alumni, faculty, students and guests on our anniversary theme, "Closing the Disparity Gap."

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

FRIDAY, JUNE 5

A talk by Haile Menkerios '70, former special representative of the U.N. Secretary General to the African Union

SATURDAY, JUNE 6

Gala celebration with keynote address by University Professor Anita Hill and honors for distinguished members of the Heller community

This event is part of the Heller School's 60th Anniversary celebration from 2019-20, featuring 60 events, publications and actions that highlight Heller's commitment to closing the disparity gap. #Heller60for60

For more details: heller.brandeis.edu/60

BACK COVER(AGE)

The #MeToo movement demolished the myth that sexual violence was insignificant.

ANITA HILL IN A NEW YORK TIMES OP-ED THAT CALLS SEXUAL VIOLENCE A NATIONAL CRISIS

A labor market and economy that's more and more made up of these independent contractors is all the more one where you're going to have lower pay, stagnating wages and growing earning inequality.

DAVID WEIL IN BUSINESS INSIDER ON A NEW CALIFORNIA BILL, AB5, THAT CLASSIFIES GIG WORKERS AS EMPLOYEES

The ESOP account, in particular, reportedly made many of the women interviewed more economically secure for retirement.

JANET BOGUSLAW IN NONPROFIT QUARTERLY ON THE BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEE STOCK OWNERSHIP PLANS FOR WORKERS

In the last decade, 10 to 15 years... [there's] a much better understanding that there is a racial wealth gap and how drastic, deep and steep it really is.

THOMAS SHAPIRO IN THE GLOBE POST ON HOW TO FIX THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP IN THE UNITED STATES