

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Heller

Magazine

AMBREEN
KHAN,
MA SID'19,
DELIVERS
ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT
PROGRAMS
TO WOMEN
ARTISANS
FROM
AROUND
THE WORLD

THREADING *the* **NEEDLE**

SUMMER 2022

With support from the Heller Annual Fund and Graduate Student Association (GSA), eight Social Impact MBA students traveled to Guatemala in summer 2021 to conduct field research for their Team Consulting Project. The students consulted for Chica Bean, a specialty coffee company that collaborates with local female producers. Chica Bean roasts the coffee beans in-country, increasing the economic value of the beans and ensuring growers earn more for their crop.

Heller

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SUMMER 2022

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Alix Hackett
Kate Kaplan | Director of
Development and Alumni Relations
Beatriz Pleités Lemus, MA SID'23
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ABOUT THE COVER
Ambreen Khan, MA SID'19, in her
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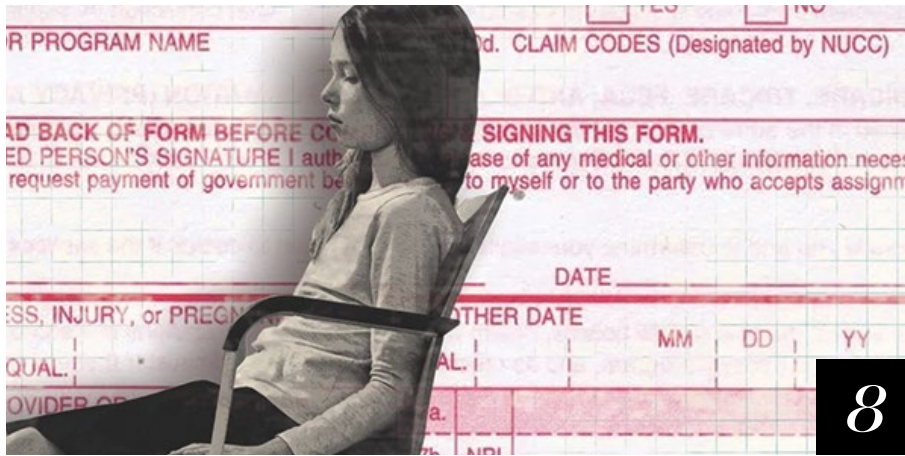
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“We need to better understand and address the ways in which racism, misogyny and xenophobia shape the conditions and workforce of care provision in the U.S. if we hope to design social policies that truly support the most vulnerable in our society.” LISA LYNCH, PAGE 22



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Letter from the Interim Dean



PHOTO BY LIZ LINDER

Dear Heller community,

In my time as the associate dean for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity and director of the Institute for Economic and Racial Equity, we at Heller have worked to develop a better sense of accountability, transparency and communication. As I step into the role of interim dean on July 1, I am eager to continue guiding our community along the pathways begun under Dean Weil's leadership.

Through our strategic vision, we have strived to communicate what is working well and where there are opportunities for improvement. We are constantly aiming to advance the quality of the Heller experience to meet the needs of an evolving workforce, and this work is informed by tools such as climate surveys, faculty activity reports, community input and performance reviews. In 2017, the newly founded Equity, Inclusion and Diversity (EID) office introduced the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) metrics as a framework that Heller now uses to track and benchmark progress.

These data show that the number of students applying to Heller is growing, and that our classes are increasingly diverse, international and interested in dual degrees — an indication that our world is more dynamic and interdisciplinary than ever before. As we look to our future, we need to create a workforce that has an exceptional ability to mold and build policy for a world that is more connected, multicultural, and prepared to work against racism/ethnocentrism and discrimination as well as existential threats such as climate change, and health, wealth and educational inequities. Our students already embrace the idea of knowledge advancing social justice. I would like to build off that idea and say that, along with knowledge, we need empathy to learn from an array of people from all backgrounds and to advance dialogue across differences. These are ideas I have learned from our brilliant Heller students.

At Heller, we understand how much the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world since our strategic vision was first established. While our environment is continuously transformed by technological advances, we must also recognize what has been lost in online approaches to communication. In-person learning allows students to connect and process information on a deeper level and prepares them to be more effective at their jobs. I aim to reincorporate these elements as we adapt to the new normal.

I look forward to continuing to partner with our students, faculty, researchers and staff as we work to enhance the academic experience and quality of research at Heller.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Madison". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Maria Madison, ScD, Interim Dean

Meet Habiba Braimah

HABIBA BRAIMAH IS A PHD CANDIDATE AND DIRECTOR OF THE BRANDEIS INTERCULTURAL CENTER.

As a scholar, an educator and a practitioner, Braimah is on a journey of self-discovery. At the Intercultural Center, she fosters a welcoming community that values diverse experiences and perspectives. Her dissertation focuses on the underrepresentation of Black women in tenure-track faculty positions in higher education. Braimah is a recipient of the Marjorie S. Trotter Doctoral Fellowship, the Barbara Wakefield Endowed Scholarship and the Wyatt Jones Endowed Fellowship.

► *What motivates you?*

Success. I am motivated by seeing other people go after their dreams. I am motivated by Black women. When I see a successful Black woman, I am in complete awe knowing that she has achieved success despite her multiple marginalized identities.

► *What did you want to be when you grew up?*

I wanted to be a pediatrician! But I think the only reason ... was to appease my parents.

When you come from an immigrant household, it is not uncommon to have parents who project their version of the American dream onto you. My parents saw my potential and encouraged me to become a doctor, but I eventually learned that it wasn't my dream. I'm still going to be a doctor, just not the type my parents wanted me to be!

► *What is the biggest misconception people have about your work?*

People think I am the expert on diversity, equity and inclusion, but the reality is that no one is an expert. A person may have



Habiba Braimah at Culture X 2022. Sponsored by the Intercultural Center, Culture X is one of Brandeis' key traditions, celebrating diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism on campus.

expertise in this area, but to expect us to be all-knowing is setting us up for failure. Information, as we know it, is constantly evolving. What was a best practice one day may no longer be culturally sensitive or relevant the next. This work requires everyone's participation, and we should all strive to be students of diversity, equity and inclusion.

► *What is the best piece of advice you ever received?*

Just do it. We get into a bad habit of overthinking, over-analyzing everything. Sometimes, we experience analysis paralysis when we do that, which then impacts our ability to do what we want to do.

That's the stage I am at in my life: just doing it. I'm going to trust my intuition, and I'm going to do it. And I won't always get it right, but at least I can learn from my failures and successes.

► *If you could enact one law, what would it be?*

I would give Black people reparations. Black people have played a critical role in the success of this nation, and I think that it's important to pay them their reparations. Beyond that, I would start thinking about how to redistribute the wealth so that everyone can live the quality of life that incorporates what is most important to them. I just want people to be, and live freely. 📌

Heller-led teams sweep at Brandeis’ largest startup pitch competition

On Feb. 13, the Brandeis Innovation Center hosted its annual SparkTank pitch competition, an experiential learning initiative that provides seed funding and mentorship to turn innovative ideas into viable businesses. Unlike other collegiate pitch competitions, SparkTank is open to students, faculty and staff across the university.

Five teams of Heller students competed in the weekend-long event, all winning prizes for their social venture concepts. “In our Social Impact MBA program, we love to invest in students who are interested in creating high-impact ventures, mentoring and supporting them as they develop their ideas,” says MBA program director Carole Carlson. “Heller students’ success at SparkTank demonstrates the value of this high-touch ecosystem.”

Heller Board of Advisors member Sean Rush joined the judging panel, noting, “As a judge at the recent SparkTank competition, I was extremely impressed – but not surprised – by Heller’s strong performance. It’s been a treat to watch the Heller teams’ development in Professor Carlson’s classes, the Heller Startup Challenge and now Spark. Bravo to all of them!” 📌



PHOTO COURTESY OF BECK HAYES AND ARIEL WEXLER

Beck Hayes, MBA/MA SID’22, and Ariel Wexler, MBA/MA SID’22, are co-founders of Sowing Seas, whose mission is to improve livelihoods through regenerative seafood and seaweed cultivation. As a sustainable, community-driven aquaculture initiative, the organization aims to improve economic and environmental conditions in Latin American coastal communities. Sowing Seas took first prize at the Brandeis Innovation Center’s annual SparkTank pitch competition.

The five winning Heller teams included two food-related startups in the top prizewinning slots:

FIRST PRIZE

Sowing Seas, a community-driven aquaculture venture: Beck Hayes, MBA/MA SID’22, and Ariel Wexler, MBA/MA SID’22

SECOND PRIZE

Farmer Foodie, a plant-based sustainable meal vendor: Alison Elliott, MBA/MA SID’22

THIRD PRIZE

Mission Driven NFT, a non-fungible token company: Douglass Guernsey, MBA’22, and Varun Edupuganti, IBS MS’23

Tenant2Tenant, a renter support non-profit: Shiko Rugene, MBA/MPP’23, Alton McCall, MBA’21, Samuel Aronson, MBA’21, and Andy Mendez, MBA/MA SID’23

FOURTH PRIZE

Neu, which seeks to destigmatize mental illness through inclusive apparel: Monica Oxenreiter, MBA/MPP’21, Marissa Bresnahan, MBA’22, and Heidi Mizenko, MBA’21 📌



Alumna-led foundation donates \$1 million to establish Racial Justice x Tech Policy initiative at Heller

The Kapor Center, an Oakland, California-based foundation co-chaired by Freada Kapor Klein, PhD'84, gifted \$1 million to the Institute for Economic and Racial Equity (IERE) to establish a multifaceted Racial Justice x Tech Policy (RJxTP) initiative at the Heller School. The two-year provisional gift will support

student and faculty development and establish a research prize for work conducted on hidden bias in tech.

"This initiative will address critical issues of racism and bias in the tech industry and build critical knowledge and capacity in this rapidly growing policy field," says Maria Madison, interim dean and former IERE director. "We are eager for the opportunity to deliver programming that will directly confront the digital divide, empower young scholars of color to challenge racial injustices in tech, and develop solutions for a more equitable future."

The IERE team will create a pipeline of scholars in this field, develop educational programs, launch an incubator lab and establish a Hidden Bias Research Prize. These efforts seek to combat a legacy of racial bias in tech that negatively impacts

communities of color, for example, through biased algorithms or inequitable data-privacy policies. The RJxTP initiative will be crosscutting, allowing for broad participation both within and outside the university as well as in-depth learning opportunities for students seeking specialized training in racial justice and tech policy.

Kapor Klein and her husband, Lotus founder Mitch Kapor, support initiatives to make entrepreneurship and the tech ecosystem more diverse, inclusive and impactful. Kapor Klein, who calls herself "a proud Heller alumna," says, "Establishing Heller as the preeminent institution conducting and amplifying activist research that uncovers and mitigates bias in education and employment is a humbling, joyful and full-circle moment of paying it forward." [H](#)

Heller launches Undergraduate Research Fellows program

In January 2022, Heller launched a competitive fellows program for five Brandeis undergraduate students to work with mentors in the school's 10 research centers and institutes.

The Heller-wide pilot program, modeled after the Lurie Institute's undergraduate fellowship in disability policy, has already enjoyed great interest from students and mentors and is expected to grow. The Heller Undergraduate Research

Fellows program aligns with ongoing efforts to increase Brandeis undergraduates' exposure to social policy research, including the popular Health: Science, Society, and Policy major.

"Integrating more Brandeis undergraduates into Heller research projects is something we're really excited about," says Associate Dean for Research Cindy Parks Thomas, PhD'00. "These students have a thirst for social science research experience, and we have a lot of it going on here at Heller. They make great contributions to our work by bringing new perspectives, so this is a win-win for everyone involved."

Each fellow in the program works closely with a mentor, assisting them on primary research in health policy; child, youth and family policy; economic and racial equity; or behavioral health.

The fellows commit up to eight hours per week and receive a \$2,000 stipend for the semester, funded by the Heller School. They presented their work at the Brandeis Undergraduate Research Symposium in May, and some will continue assisting their mentors through the summer.

"As a Heller research fellow, I am learning what it takes to become a successful researcher," says student Mahamed Mohamud '23, who is working with Institute for Behavioral Health researchers Margot Davis, PhD'08, and Robert Dunigan, PhD'04, on projects related to substance use disorders in underserved populations. Says Mohamud, "I hope to use this invaluable experience to make an impact in the field of medicine as an aspiring physician who will have the training to establish effective health interventions for substance use disorders." [H](#)

In Focus



The Politics Behind the Lens

Teresa Kroeger is a photographer in Washington, D.C. She's also a PhD candidate researching labor economics. She says her policy background has made her a better photojournalist.

Kroeger, who has been a professional photographer for over a decade, has captured images of multiple U.S. presidents, first ladies and members of Congress. She says her lens as a researcher can help bring to light fresh perspectives on some of the world's most photographed subjects.

"A photograph can tell a story and influence policy," she says. "And how a story is told is shaped by who tells it. My social policy work provides me with a unique vision for creating photographs that are used to tell news stories around the world."

The focus of Kroeger's dissertation is occupational segregation, something she is familiar with from her work as a photographer. Both photography and politics are male-dominated fields, and as a female photojournalist, Kroeger says she experiences different challenges and opportunities compared to those of some of her male colleagues.

"I have firsthand experience with the issues I write about. As a freelance photographer, I don't have the same protections against gender bias, discrimination and harassment that I would as an employee. Equal pay is especially difficult to fight for as an independent contractor, as is the case for millions of women and others who lack worker power." [H](#)

All photos by Teresa Kroeger

This page: Self-portrait of Teresa Kroeger with her photography press passes.

Previous page, top left: Then-Vice President Joe Biden and actress/filmmaker Olivia Wilde prepare to speak at the 2016 World Food Program USA's Annual McGovern-Dole Leadership Award Ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Top right: Rep. John Lewis at the 2016 Washington, D.C., premiere of "Race" at The Newseum. This image graces the cover of "John Lewis: American Politician and Civil Rights Icon," which is part of the Breakout Biographies series for middle school readers.

Bottom: Participants in the Women's March flood the streets of Washington, D.C., on January 21, 2017. This image appears on the cover of "Why We March: Signs of Protest and Hope — Voices from the Women's March," a pictorial retrospective of protest signs from the 2017 Women's March.



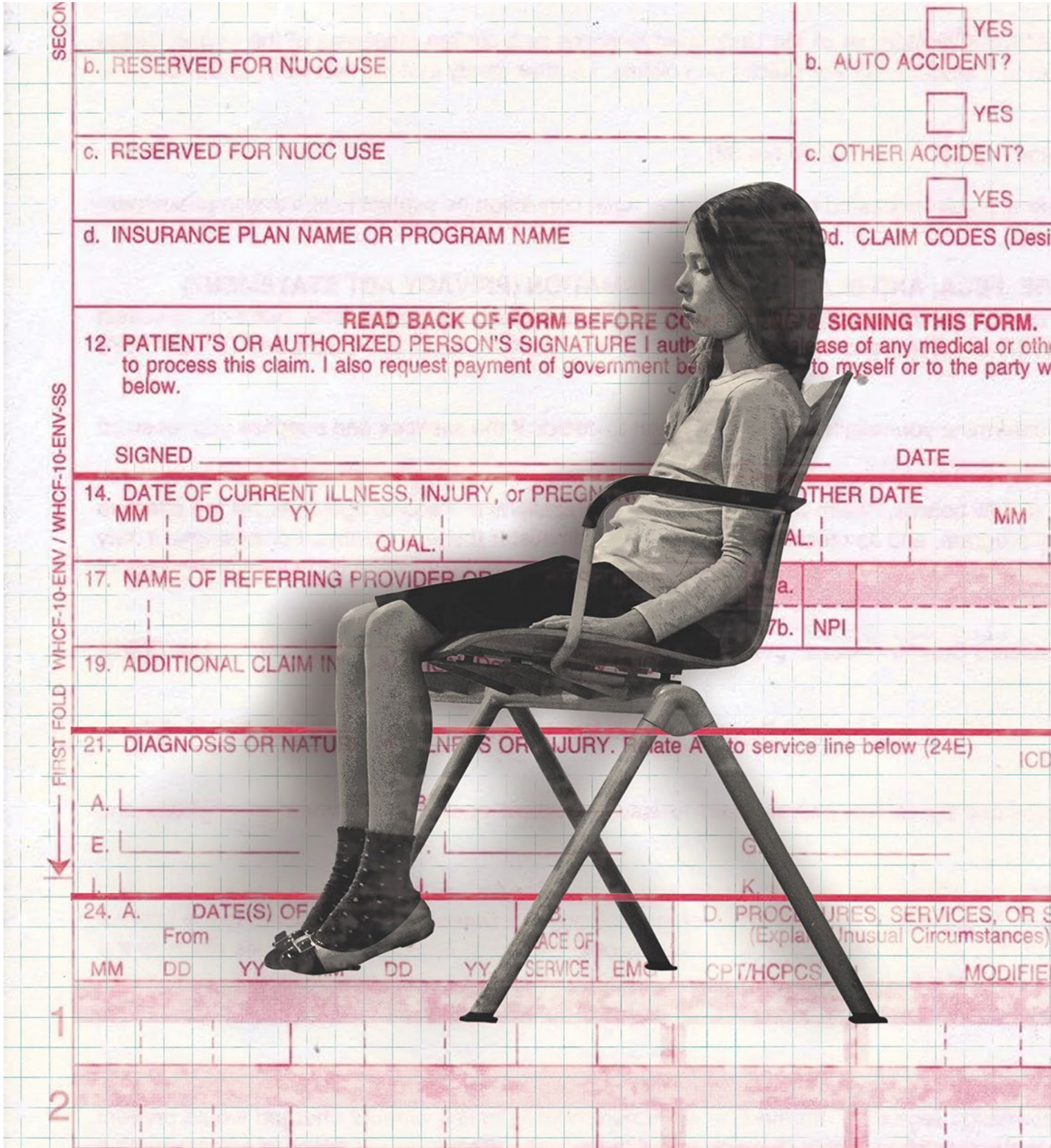


ILLUSTRATION BY JESSICA TANNY

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Children in Crisis

DR. ILAN SCHWARTZ, EMBA'21, IS REDUCING TREATMENT BACKLOGS FOR CHILD PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS, MANY OF WHOM ARE WAITING DAYS OR WEEKS TO RECEIVE EMERGENCY CARE

by BETHANY ROMANO, MBA'17

With schools closed and social isolation driving many young people to despair, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated already-rising rates of pediatric mental health problems across the nation. Frustrated by red tape and long wait times for children in need of care, Dr. Ilan Schwartz, EMBA'21, found a solution.

Inspired by his executive MBA program at the Heller School, in 2020 Schwartz established a one-of-a-kind crisis stabilization program at Newton-Wellesley Hospital, where he is chief of pediatric emergency medicine. His award-winning Child Psychiatry Short Stay Service (ChiPSSS) alleviates emergency department crowding, provides timely mental health treatment to patients in need, and allows the hospital to bill insurers for services they previously could not invoice.

Now he's trying to promote this program and help other Boston-area hospitals to do the same, which could further ease the pressure on Massachusetts' strained child psychiatric-care system.

A RISING TIDE OF PEDIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

In the spring of 2020, as the first wave of COVID-19 crested throughout the Northeast, Schwartz saw another crisis on the horizon: child psychiatric care.

The number of kids in his emergency department facing mental health crises had risen steadily for several years. By 2019, he says, about 5% of pediatric visits were related to mental health, and most of these patients were transferred to a hospital with a pediatric psych bed within 24 to 48 hours.

During the pandemic, he says, "Pediatric emergency department visits plummeted by 60%, but psychiatric patients increased by 35%. And on average, they were sicker — more likely to have attempted suicide or inflicted serious self-harm. On top of all that, the number of child psychiatric beds in Massachusetts dropped from about 60 beds to about 40, as double rooms were converted to single rooms and less staff were available to cover pediatric psych inpatient beds."

Much like ICU beds, pediatric psych beds are a specific, highly regulated form of hospital care. Kids in need of a psychiatric bed couldn't be admitted to Newton-Wellesley's pediatric inpatient unit, even though the unit had space available and a child psychiatrist on staff. As a result, children in crisis were often stuck waiting in emergency

**CHILDREN IN CRISIS
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departments for transfer to an open bed at another hospital, sometimes for weeks at a time.

Schwartz's pediatric emergency department began filling with psych patients who were too sick to be discharged but had nowhere else to go. The increased crowding was a problem, but even more concerning was the impact he saw on patients.

"Boarding in the emergency department is not pleasant," he says. "These are small hospital rooms with no windows, no private bathroom, no access to a shower. And emergency departments are 24/7 operations: The lights are always on, the phones ring all night. It's not a good place for a kid in severe psychiatric distress."

Schwartz recalls watching a 7-year-old who had been boarding in the emergency department for 10 days gently kicking

a soccer ball with a hospital guard in a tiny hallway. "That was his only exercise for the day. It's absolutely terrible," he says.

A CRISIS OF BUREAUCRACY

The obvious solution to providing proper care for these children is to increase the number of pediatric psych beds. But, Schwartz explains, that's easier said than done. "The biggest obstacle is a state mandate requiring any pediatric psych bed to remain a pediatric psych bed, permanently. You can't create a new bed when it's needed, then convert it later."

As hospital beds go, pediatric psych brings in relatively little revenue, and even less for complex patients who need weeks or months of treatment. That financial reality discourages hospitals from adding pediatric psych beds, particularly if they're prohibited from converting them back.

Ironically, Newton-Wellesley Hospital seemed to have everything it needed to treat many of these patients, especially less-complex cases. "We had inpatient beds available, we had general psychiatrists and child psychiatrists, pediatricians, social workers, plenty of residents and fellows to provide round-the-clock care," says Schwartz. "But without the right kind of beds, we could not admit and treat these patients. It was maddening."

Schwartz mulled over this convoluted series of regulations and incentives for months until he had the idea to establish a child psychiatric short-stay service at Newton-Wellesley. "But I'm not a psychiatrist, and I don't work in the inpatient department," he says. "So I went to speak to our chief of child psychiatry, Dr. Elizabeth Booma. I asked if she wanted to work with me on my idea. Her eyes got wide, and she said yes.

"And she actually corrected me," adds Schwartz, recalling their conversation. "She was providing care to those patients boarding in our emergency department. She rounded on them every day,

prescribed them medications, spent time calling around looking for beds, but she couldn't bill for any of that time because she doesn't work in the emergency department. So the hospital was actually losing money on services it was providing to patients it simply couldn't admit."

"Ilan and I used to talk about his dream for a short-stay observation unit, and we'd joke about how the hospital would never let us do it," says Booma. "When he was doing his MBA, he decided to give it a real shot."

EMBA LESSONS IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Schwartz, then a student in Heller's Executive MBA for Physicians program, decided to use this challenge as the basis for his Team Consulting Project, a capstone in which students undertake a change management initiative in their own health care organization.

"We have seen so many of these projects have a direct and significant impact on patients, families, communities and organizations after they have been imagined and put in place," says professor and EMBA program director Jon Chilingirian.

He adds, "We teach our EMBA physicians that to create a service vision in health care organizations, they must develop care programs that create value for their patients, all of the caregivers and the organization; there can be no trade-off between cost, outcomes and patient experience."

Heller faculty guided Schwartz through the steps of positive organizational change, from recruiting an effective team to identifying supporters and converting any blockers. Schwartz recruited Booma, as well as nurses and social workers, seeking the support of those who work directly with patients before approaching hospital administration. Everyone was intrigued by his idea, which he'd dubbed ChiPSSS: Child Psychiatry Short Stay Service.

EMBA faculty member Carole Carlson, who teaches the Team Consulting Project course, admired the depth of his approach. "What really impressed me," she says, "is how he drew from courses throughout the program—in strategy, negotiations, leadership and entrepreneurship—to develop

an important project that benefits stakeholders throughout the hospital, most importantly, his patients and their families.”

In July 2020, Schwartz called the hospital’s risk-management office and asked a colleague to vet his concept. “A week later, she called me back and said from a risk management perspective, it was doable. We just had to be careful not to call ourselves a psychiatric unit, and to only admit patients under observation. That was my first big yes,” says Schwartz.

From there, he approached the finance office, using lessons from his accounting courses to propose a budget-neutral model. “Everybody comes to them asking for money, but my proposal utilized existing resources, so they heard me out,” Schwartz remarks. “And I was able to talk intelligently about how this program could allow the hospital to bill appropriately—which we hadn’t been doing—for patients that our psychiatrists were treating in the emergency department. Suddenly, the CFO was interested.”

Schwartz also employed some guerrilla marketing tactics, encouraging his partners in nursing, as well as frustrated patients and parents, to contact hospital leadership directly and ask for a short-stay psychiatric service like the one he hoped to implement.

“By the time I called the CMO [chief medical officer], he had heard about this program idea from so many other people that he canceled a meeting to hear my pitch—and then he said yes,” adds Schwartz.

INTRODUCING THE CHIPSSS PROGRAM

Schwartz and his team had the green light, but they had to be careful not to violate any regulations. They could only treat patients under observation for 72 hours, so complex patients in need of longer-term treatment were not eligible; instead, they would be prioritized for transfer to a pediatric psych bed. ChiPSSS would focus on patients who could be reliably stabilized and discharged within a few days.

The program began admitting patients in January 2021. Schwartz remembers their very first patient: a 17-year-old survivor of sexual assault. Every year on the

anniversary of her trauma, she experienced severe symptoms of PTSD and anxiety, requiring a two- or three-day hospital stay.

“This is a patient where we know exactly what’s going on. She needed to be treated, but she didn’t need a psychiatric hospital. We could help her. And we did,” he says, remembering the case proudly.

Within three months, ChiPSSS admitted 16 patients, none of whom were readmitted to the hospital, suggesting that the model worked well for the patients they’re targeting. And they could already see positive impacts in the emergency department: Boarders had an average stay of 58 hours before being admitted, while ChiPSSS patients were admitted under observation in just five hours.

Moreover, the program was a financial success. The hospital could bill insurers for providing care to ChiPSSS patients. In March 2022, Schwartz and his team received a Pillars of Excellence Award from the Mass General Brigham hospital system for their work on ChiPSSS.

Chilingerian calls the program “a great demonstration of Dr. Schwartz’s leadership

“AND I WAS ABLE TO TALK INTELLIGENTLY ABOUT HOW THIS PROGRAM COULD ALLOW THE HOSPITAL TO BILL APPROPRIATELY—WHICH WE HADN’T BEEN DOING—FOR PATIENTS THAT OUR PSYCHIATRISTS WERE TREATING IN THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT. SUDDENLY, THE CFO WAS INTERESTED.”

and learning agility in applying what he learned in class with us,” adding that the ChiPSSS pilot “improved patient and caregiver satisfaction, and reduced pediatric length of stay while increasing revenues for the hospital and freeing up needed acute hospital beds.

“We want our EMBA physicians to be better equipped to deal with complex and ambiguous problems and opportunities,” says Chilingerian. “That means they will be able to move away from ideas that do not work and take the lead to discover and implement changes that really do work.”


EYES ON THE PRIZE

Despite these early successes, ChiPSSS has hit its fair share of bumps along the way, largely in the form of staffing issues that have affected so many health care organizations throughout the pandemic. At times, staff shortages grew so severe that the program had to be temporarily suspended. Booma notes that they hired several new staff in late spring 2022, which will allow them to get the program fully up and running again.

Even with a fully functioning short-stay unit at Newton-Wellesley Hospital, Schwartz stresses that he considers the overall problem far from fixed. ChiPSSS is a pressure valve—it takes advantage of inefficiencies in an existing system to help a small number of patients—but the system remains fundamentally flawed.

“We have not been able to fix the crux of the problem, which is the shortage of psychiatric beds available to pediatric patients. Truly sick kids are still waiting far longer than they should for those beds, and they’re waiting in emergency departments like ours,” notes Schwartz.

He’s started to connect with colleagues at other hospitals, and says his goal is to expand this model to every local hospital that has a pediatric psychiatrist in-house. “The more hospitals that do this, the fewer pediatric psych patients we have boarding in emergency departments and the less of a backlog there is for those 40 coveted beds,” Schwartz says.

“That’s the real goal.” 



FABRIC *of* *CHANGE*

FASHION DESIGNER,
MORNING-SHOW
ANCHOR AND NONPROFIT
CO-FOUNDER AMBREEN
KHAN, MA SID'19,
FOSTERS ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT FOR
WOMEN EVERYWHERE
SHE GOES

by KAREN SHIH





The remote mountain region of Gilgit-Baltistan in northern Pakistan — where K2 and several of the world’s highest peaks tower above turquoise glacial lakes and rivers — holds special meaning for Ambreen Khan, MA SID’19.

Most of her childhood summers, her father and uncle would pack up their combined 13 kids in the crowded city of Karachi, the largest in the country, and head north to their ancestral village in the Hunza Valley. There, Khan and her siblings played in the fields and fresh mountain air with their cousins. Khan, always a leader, often rallied the other kids for games and adventures.

“As pretty as the valley was, I always thought, ‘I’m here for summer break and I can leave, but what about my cousins and other family members, especially the young girls?’ There’s no infrastructure, no roads, no bathrooms here,” she says. Beyond marrying young and having a family, Khan saw few opportunities for girls.

Years later, after Khan established herself as a successful couture fashion designer and television host, these childhood experiences motivated her to use her skills and influence to establish the Emypyrean Foundation, a nonprofit organization that teaches income-building skills to women and girls. In the years since, she’s adopted a nimble, hands-on approach that has taken her work from artisans and garment workers in rural and urban Pakistan to Afghan refugees in her new home of Dallas-Forth Worth, Texas.

AN UNEXPECTED PATH

It’s easy to get lost in the beauty of Khan’s bridal designs. The intricate embroidery, detailed ornamentation and geometric shapes, which echo the Mughal architecture that inspires her, create complex patterns across the flowing fabric.

That complexity is reflected in Khan’s life, which never followed the path others may have expected from her.

“The elders established in my head that I would be a doctor or a nurse, or go into computer science or become an accountant,” she says. “But none of that was for me. I was so into art and fashion, but no schools in Karachi taught fashion design.”

Not to be discouraged, she started making clothes at home. Her mother taught her to make harem pants. From there, Khan kept experimenting.

“When I was 15, I designed a tunic with embroidery and flared pants for me and my friend — we became very famous at school,” she says. “My dream was to go to the U.S. and study at FIT [the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City],” but her family didn’t have the means to send her abroad.

Instead, she studied commerce as an undergraduate. But just as she finished her degree, Karachi became home to the Asian Institute of Fashion Design, led by a French-educated designer. Despite having already completed one bachelor’s degree, and undeterred by the fact that she was older than many of the other students, Khan took the entrance exam and enrolled in its very first class, with financial support from her brother, Johnny.

Khan knew she was entering uncharted territory when she graduated, so she took every opportunity that came her way. She taught at local textile and vocational schools and consulted for multinational companies producing clothing for brands like Wrangler and Levi’s. She then started her own business, based on her passion for high fashion: designing custom-made wedding gowns.

Then, unexpectedly, she became a morning-television staple, having caught the eye of television producers after doing a short TV segment about pattern-making. “One thing led to another, and I became a prominent morning-show anchor, five days a week,” Khan says.

Her ability to multitask is remarkable, even to her friends. Ayesha Shafi, CEO of

the Radio Azad network, where Khan has a show today, says, “I think her day has 48 hours. The way she is able to balance all her different responsibilities; it is not easy.”

Khan’s early wedding-gown business was her first foray into empowering women. She opened a small factory in Karachi to produce her designs and today has 12 employees — all from impoverished backgrounds and some, refugees. Khan offers training, bonuses and maternity leave, benefits available to few working women, especially factory workers.

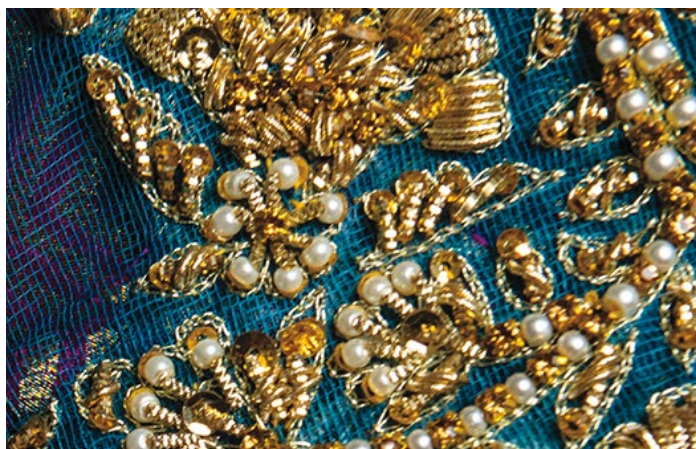
“I want these girls to have economic sustenance, social growth and mental growth,” says Khan, who hopes to expand into menswear and seasonal collections so she can increase the number of women she employs.

NO EASY ANSWER

Back in 2010, a tragedy in Hunza Valley reconnected her to her ancestral homeland. A massive landslide destroyed the village of Attabad and others downstream, not far from where she spent her childhood summers. Dozens died and thousands were displaced, forcing families to find new means to earn a living.

The Aga Khan Foundation, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with a strong presence throughout South and Central Asia, reached out to Khan, who had always proudly proclaimed her Gilgit-Baltistan roots. The foundation asked her to help train women interested in becoming tailors, since she had a teaching background and speaks the local language. Over the next eight years, she took on skills-training and artisan-support programs for large NGOs, including BRAC Pakistan, and managed a World Bank grant at the Indus Heritage Trust. Khan trained over 5,000 artisans and helped create better local and international markets for their products.

Throughout this period, she was able to continue her fashion design and television work, thanks to supportive female bosses. But she felt increasingly drawn to the women and girls in the northern villages,



From sketches to stitches, Khan's work has reached women from across the globe. Khan collaborates with Pakistani women to craft intricate embroidered designs, and last year she dressed Mallory Fuller, Miss Texas 2021, and her colleagues for a Diwali fashion show highlighting her clothing.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY KEVIN BROWN AND TASNIM ZAKI. OTHERS COURTESY OF AMREEN KHAN. PHOTO NEXT PAGE BY KEVIN BROWN

where she felt she could make a bigger difference.

“There was a point where I had to make a choice,” she says. “Should I quit television and pursue my education to become a development practitioner, and leave everything behind?”

There was no easy answer: Her friends and family asked if she was having a midlife crisis, and she faced criticism for walking away from what appeared to be a glamorous, successful life.

“I remember submitting a proposal for program amendments with the World Bank grant, and it was dismissed because of my qualifications, since I had gone to fashion school,” Khan says. She wanted to be taken more seriously. That’s when she decided to come to the Heller School.

‘HELLER GAVE ME THE COURAGE’

In 2017, Khan created the Emypyrean Foundation with her sister, Nadia, and her brother, Johnny. Their original focus was on female artisans living in extreme poverty in South Asia, teaching them to take traditional handicrafts and embroidery to market, and training them in fashion design and textile creation to start small businesses.

But the Emypyrean Foundation quickly moved beyond its original focus — providing garment-industry skills to women artisans in South Asia — and adopted a nimble, hands-on approach.

“If I was working for another organization, I would not be able to create all these programs,” Khan says.

It was just one year later that Khan enrolled in Heller’s MA in Sustainable International Development (SID) program. She was drawn to Heller’s welcoming environment, where nobody remarked on her accent, and its ideal combination of international development and social entrepreneurship courses, which gave her the grounding she needed to take her Emypyrean Foundation to the next level and expand the reach of her work.

“Heller gave me the courage to do hands-on things in the field,” says Khan. “What I’m doing now is enhancing what I learned with real-world experience.”

“Ambreen brought a strong voice as a woman from a part of the world where women have to fight through a lot of obstacles to develop their own voices,” says Joan Dassin ’69, then-director of the SID program and Khan’s academic adviser. “I wish we had more students with artistic inclinations, like Ambreen. There’s room in this field for people to pursue all types of activities, even music or dance, because they can generate income and employment.”

For her master’s practicum, Khan worked for Proyecto Inmigrante, an outreach project in Texas. The experience gave her insight into the experiences of those trying to navigate the complicated U.S. immigration system, and opened her eyes to how she might expand her foundation not only in South Asia but also within the United States.

When Khan graduated from Heller, she moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where she met her husband, immigration attorney Bhavik Amaidas. “We got married in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic over a Zoom call,” recalls Khan. “The judge allowed five people to be on the call, and due to the shutdown, we couldn’t invite anyone else. It was hilarious, as the wedding was six-and-a-half minutes long.”

In Texas, Khan realized that the recent influx of Afghan refugees could also benefit from her foundation’s work, and in addition to collecting household items to donate to refugee families, she developed a program to train women in dressmaking. Khan also piloted an online program for domestic violence victims in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex to learn graphic design, spurred by her sister and co-founder, Nadia, a graphic designer.

As COVID-19 brought the world to a standstill, the Emypyrean Foundation’s agility became even more important. “Where bigger organizations need more

time to plan and get approval, we can take these liberties and meet the immediate need,” she says. For example, when COVID-19 disrupted supply chains, Khan and her local consultants created a program to teach women in Gilgit-Baltistan to stitch reusable cloth sanitary pads, providing both a livelihood for the women and a way for girls to continue attending school during their menstrual cycles.

Khan’s brother and co-founder, Johnny, says, “We’re immensely proud of Ambreen. She has such a passion for empowering women, and young girls can look at her and see the possibilities when you work hard and have tenacity.”

CREATING A MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Khan continues to raise her profile as a designer, with brides from Saudi Arabia to Canada requesting her services, and hopes the increased visibility will help her better advocate for overlooked populations. One way she’s doing that is through her weekly show on Radio Azad, a South Asian entertainment station that broadcasts locally in Texas and globally online. She addresses topics that are often taboo, such as LGBTQ+ rights, using her platform to open the minds of more conservative listeners.

“She is able to tackle these difficult issues by making the shows fact-based, logical and very empathetic,” says Radio Azad CEO Shafi. “She is able to see things from different viewpoints, outside of one’s own bubble. Ambreen is just a trailblazer.”

Though her road to development work has been unusual, Khan has no regrets about her circuitous path. She’s eager to expand her impact beyond her homeland of Pakistan and her new home in the United States.

“I see myself becoming a better activist for women,” she says. “I envision my foundation and my social enterprise growing. If we can get these girls to train more girls from humble backgrounds, we can create a multiplier effect in these communities.” ■



THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

**SELF-DESCRIBED DATA NERD
LISA LYNCH, P'17, H'17, INSPIRES
HER ECONOMICS STUDENTS WITH
HUMAN-FOCUSED NARRATIVES**

by ANNIE HARRISON, RABB MS'21

photos by MIKE LOVETT



Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts between economic interests and social-policy priorities have dominated national headlines, from the minimum wage, to child care tax credits, to high-profile collective-bargaining efforts.

At the Heller School, Lisa Lynch, P'17, H'17, the Maurice B. Hexter Professor of Social and Economic Policy, helps students make sense of these issues and more. By bringing her experiences in Brandeis University leadership and government, and as a scholar, into the classroom, Lynch prepares students to better understand the role of economics in shaping social policy.

Lynch, who calls herself a “data nerd,” says many students who take economics in graduate school may have avoided it as undergraduates because they found the topic too difficult or seemingly irrelevant to their course of study. She hopes students who take her classes gain a deeper understanding of how economic analysis helps inform social justice policy work.

“Economics is not the be-all and end-all of social policy, but I do think a lot of tools and empirical work done in economics can be very helpful to our students at both the master’s and PhD level,” she says.

Lynch returned to Heller in fall 2021 after serving as the Brandeis University provost and executive vice president for academic affairs from 2014 to 2015 and 2016 to 2020, and as interim president from 2015 to 2016. She previously served as dean of the Heller School from 2008 to 2014. She is also an advisory board member of the Eli J. & Phyllis N. Segal Citizen Leadership Program and Our Generation Speaks, and she recently was named director of the Institute for Economic and Racial Equity.

Last fall, after a nine-year hiatus from the classroom, Lynch taught Economic Theory and Social Policy, a required course for the Master of Public Policy (MPP) program, and a PhD seminar titled Labor Economics as Applied to Social Policy.

“I had a lot of fun trying to re-imagine and re-engineer both classes,” explains Lynch, who sourced her MPP class readings from an innovative project called CORE (Curriculum Open-access Resources in Economics).

“THE ISSUE OF PERSISTENT AND DEEP-SEATED INEQUALITY IN OUR SOCIETY WAS WHAT MOTIVATED ME TO GET INTO ECONOMICS,” LYNCH SAYS. “UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE VOICE IS IMPORTANT IN ADDRESSING THAT INEQUALITY IN THE LABOR MARKET.”

The international consortium of economists behind CORE are committed to transforming how economics is taught by making the curriculum accessible, relevant for real-world issues, and available and free to everyone.

“Too often, students are turned off from economics because the theory seems removed from the problems our students want to address — injustice, inequality, climate change and the future of work,” says Lynch. She has also included more women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) scholars in the course materials than what is often found in traditional introductory economics courses. Her ultimate goal: “I want to make sure our students become fluent in the language of economics

so that they can both use economics and communicate with economists.”

‘PULLING TOGETHER’

Lynch is an internationally renowned labor-market economist whose early work focused on school-to-work transitions, especially for people who pursue vocational skills and training in lieu of attending college. In particular, Lynch focused on racial and gender differences in labor-market outcomes and what types of training were open and available for young people, as well as the returns on those investments. She has also studied the role of investments in organizational innovation and technology in productivity and labor-market outcomes. In this work, she examined the specific role that unions can play in raising productivity and reducing wage inequality.

“The issue of persistent and deep-seated inequality in our society was what motivated me to get into economics,” Lynch says. “Understanding the role of collective voice is important in addressing that inequality in the labor market.”

She adds that a lot of the issues of discrimination being faced today are the same issues she saw early in her career in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While there has been some progress in the past 40 years, she notes, “We deserve much more.”

In contrast to the “lean in” movement popularized in 2013 by Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg, Lynch prefers the term “pulling together.”

Labor markets with increasing concentrations of employer power make it difficult for individual employees to stand up and push back on inequality, Lynch says. Institutions such as unions and worker advocacy groups, as well as having the ability to collectively bargain over wages and working conditions, provide opportunities for employees to pull together to advocate for their interests.

“It’s very hard for any single individual — [I’ve found this] as a scholar, as a woman who has experienced inequity in the labor market, and as an administrator working to do better — to push back against that discrimination alone,” she says. “I really

believe strongly in the power of collective action.”

When it comes to supporting the collective voice of students, faculty and staff during her time as an administrator at Brandeis, Lynch points to the Draft Implementation Plan for Diversity and Inclusion at Brandeis that Ford Hall 2015 student organizers and she as interim president signed in December 2015. She believes there is a need to jointly commit to doing the work to change for the better and become a truly equitable, diverse and inclusive campus.

“As I said at the time, the agreement was the result of an enormous amount of honest discussion about our mutual goals and how to make Brandeis an even more diverse and inclusive university,” she notes. “We all acknowledged that while much work has been done, actions would need to be sustained over time by all to accomplish real change. No single person or program can change the university.”

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE WORKERS

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised unique labor-market challenges over the past two years, forcing some employers and employees to reckon with long-standing issues.

Addressing the potential for profound change in the labor market, Anthony Klotz, an associate professor of management at Texas A&M University, predicted that a large number of people would leave their jobs in 2021 due to factors related to the pandemic and heightened burnout, a phenomenon he termed the “Great Resignation.”

Lynch observes that while the term “Great Resignation” represents some workers who drop out of the labor market to care for family members and those who decide to retire because it feels unsafe to be working, for many who are quitting their jobs, it is a time to move into new employment with better wages, benefits and working conditions.

“Many American workers are finally getting a pay increase after decades of wage stagnation, poor benefits and uncertain work schedules,” she says.

Lynch notes that some journalists covering economics, such as the team at NPR’s Planet Money blog and podcast,

BELOW LEFT: Lynch during Brandeis’ 2016 Commencement.

BELOW RIGHT: On November 19, 2015, a group of students, self-identified as Concerned Students 2015, issued a list of 13 demands to the university administration, requesting a response within 24 hours. The next day, approximately 100 Brandeis students marched to the administrative buildings and began a 13-day sit-in outside the office of then-Interim President Lisa Lynch. The direct action became known as #FordHall2015 and was led primarily by Black students and other students of color.

Here, Lynch meets with students on December 1, 2015, after the sit-in ended and an agreement was reached between student negotiators and the university administration.





PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA LYNCH

Lynch with President Clinton in the White House when Lynch was chief economist at the U.S. Department of Labor, circa 1995.

have suggested that this moment should actually be called the “Great Renegotiation.” With more job openings, they argue, workers have greater power to negotiate a better position.

But not all workers are able to benefit from this movement, Lynch points out. In particular, workers in the home health care and child care sectors are not seeing the same large wage increases and improved working conditions as workers in other industries.

“Care-sector workers are overwhelmingly women and disproportionately Black, Hispanic and immigrants,” says Lynch. “We need to better understand and address the ways in which racism, misogyny and xenophobia shape the conditions and

workforce of care provision in the U.S. if we hope to design social policies that truly support the most vulnerable in our society.”

TEACHING THROUGH STORYTELLING

In addition to her classroom teaching and academic administrative leadership, Lynch has a strong background in public service, having served as chief economist at the U.S. Department of Labor from 1995 to 1997; a member of the Governor’s Council of Economic Advisors for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from 2008 to 2015; director (2004 to 2009) and chair of the board of directors (2007 to 2009) of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston; and currently a member of the Economic Advisory Panel

of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. In 2022, she received a Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA) Lifetime Achievement Award for her work advancing workplace relations.

Lynch says she often pulls from her various experiences as a policymaker and an academic, and as a senior manager in higher education, to illustrate the concepts she teaches.

“I believe very strongly in the power of storytelling,” she adds.

Pierrce Holmes, MPP’22, was one of the students in Lynch’s Economic Theory and Social Policy course last fall. He says the class helped demystify economics for him, allowing him to feel more comfortable

talking about economic issues, and strengthening his arguments as a policymaker.

Holmes, who is a Segal Fellow, notes that Lynch's skill at applying economics to various topics helped appeal to students' diverse social-policy interests and made the course-work feel practical.

"I think the things that made Lisa most effective were her ability to make concepts understandable and the way she made everything relevant," he says. "Despite her extremely high-level work as an economist, she was able to make the theories and graphs digestible to an audience of people with little-to-no economics background. That's one of the hallmarks of a great instructor."

Although Holmes doesn't consider economics a central tenet of his personal work and research, he recognizes that the economy plays a large role in many policy issues, and he is grateful the class gave him the skills to better analyze and frame his work.

"Having some of the foundational knowledge to engage in those discussions and apply the lens to my own work will help make it relevant to a broader audience," he says. "Simply having the perspective and familiarity will make my work stronger."

Daniella Levine, MPP'22, also took Economic Theory and Social Policy with Lynch in fall 2021. While she recognized how important it was to understand how markets influence social policy in a capitalist society, she admits she wasn't exactly looking forward to the course at first.

"I was very much expecting the class to be mundane and hard to digest," Levine says, "but Lisa made it very easy for me to understand and apply a lot of the theories and concepts not just to policies, but to everyday life."

Levine grew to appreciate that the course wasn't just focused on numbers and theoretical concepts, and that Lynch related everything back to students' real social-policy work. Levine says this interdisciplinary approach helped change her perception of economics and how she can fit into that larger story.


Levine explains that although economics can be challenging for a lot of students, in Lynch's class, no question felt too small or insignificant. Although Lynch has worked

with prominent economists at national and international levels, she was always approachable and would take the time to stop in the hallway to chat with students.

"She's so accomplished but so down-to-earth, and it made it really exciting to learn from someone who values every individual," Levine remarks.

For Lynch, the adage is true: She learns as much from her students and their stories as they learn from her. She says one of her favorite things about teaching Heller

students is discovering how their personal and professional experiences have shaped their social-policy interests, and their work inspires her every day, both in and out of the classroom.

"Our students are our future," Lynch says. "I enjoy the opportunity to engage with and support our students as they acquire new tools — and to challenge them as well — so that when they leave Heller, they are able to attack these huge issues. There's still a lot of work to be done." 



Lynch talks economics with her former students, Jennifer Cañas, MA SID'23, and Enner Martinez, MA SID'22.

HELLER ENTREPRENEURS

Like many Heller student entrepreneurs, Jessica Sanon, MBA'18, first pitched sySTEMic flow at the Heller Startup Challenge. Here are a few other alumni-founded companies and organizations that got a boost at the Heller School:

● **WAFAA ARBASH, MA SID/COEX'17**

Founder and CEO of WorkAround, a startup that connects refugees and displaced people with remote work providing data-tagging services for machine learning.

● **ROBA BULGA JILO, MA SID/MBA'19**

Founder of Nomad Dairy, an organization that supports indigenous camel herders in Ethiopia by refrigerating, pasteurizing and transporting camel milk to sell in Addis Ababa.

● **LESLEY JOSEPH, MS GHPM'16**

Founder of Saint Apollonia Mobile Dental Clinic, which offers dental education and basic dentistry services to rural communities in Haiti.

● **BRENNA SCHNEIDER, MBA'12**

Founder and CEO of 99Degrees Custom, an apparel manufacturer that specializes in producing technical activewear and wearable technologies.

● **SAMANTHA EISENSTEIN WATSON '01, MBA'06**

Founder of The Samfund, an organization that provides financial assistance and support to young adult cancer survivors.



JESSICA SANON, MBA'18 One of the BOLD 9: Brandeis' annual list of up-and-coming recent alumni

When Jessica Sanon, MBA'18, shared her personal story and pitched her business plan at the annual Heller Startup Challenge, she had no idea how deeply it would resonate with others. As a child and adolescent, Sanon excelled in math —so much so that she decided to major in math in college —yet she found herself failing Calculus 1 as a first-year college student.

“I learned that many women —especially BIPOC women — going into STEM end up switching fields because they didn’t have the option to take calculus in high school and/or had limited access to BIPOC leaders in the field. I realized that I was not the only one,” she says.

After graduating college and working for a year in the Commonwealth Corps, a Massachusetts state-funded internship program, Sanon joined Heller’s Social Impact MBA program with an idea: to start a company that bridges the gap between STEM education and math proficiency for BIPOC girls and young women. After succeeding in several campus pitch competitions, she founded sySTEMic flow in 2017.

Sanon’s sySTEMic flow offers rigorous math courses and connects youths with professionals and career opportunities in STEM. The programs focus on “transitional gaps,” such as the leap from middle school to high school, or high school to postsecondary opportunities. So far, sySTEMic flow programs have partnered with universities and schools as well as with nonprofit organizations like the United Way and EforAll in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and they’re rapidly becoming a national platform.

The organization’s holistic model goes beyond the classroom, incorporating socio-emotional learning and exposure to various STEM careers. Two key features separate sySTEMic flow from other academic-prep programs: a laser focus on serving BIPOC girls, and an emphasis on confidence and participation rather than on grades and test scores.

“In our programs, we don’t focus on the letter grade; instead, we look at whether the student feels confident and if they understand the skill sets they’re gaining,” says Sanon. Participants report that sySTEMic flow programs reconfirmed their interest in STEM and gave them the confidence to participate more in class. “Those are success stories,” explains Sanon. “The ultimate goal of what we do is confidence-building. Everything else will follow.”

In spring 2022, Brandeis recognized Sanon on its annual BOLD 9 list, which honors up-and-coming recent alumni who are fostering change, thought leadership and social impact.

“I’m really honored that I was selected,” Sanon says. “That means our work is making a difference, and that Brandeis also values the underlying mission of sySTEMic flow: equity, access and opportunity for BIPOC girls.” ■



**MATTHEW BROOKNER,
MPP/MA'13, PHD'21**

Digging into the data

As an associate research scientist at Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Matthew Brookner, MPP/MA'13, PhD'21, has to know his way around data. Whether it's survey results that help cities better meet their Jewish communities' needs or demographic figures that help organizations advocate for Jewish voters, Brookner's work is built around distilling large datasets into solid conclusions that produce results.

That's something for which a PhD from the Heller School prepared him well. "The exposure to tools like [the statistical software] HLM and large national data sets at Heller was so useful," he says. "It gave me the chance to experiment and provided a leg up in my work so I didn't have to learn on the job, so to speak."

The methodological courses, he recalls, were crucial. That's because in addition to analyzing data, Brookner also must develop research tools in ways that ensure accuracy. For interviews, this means wrestling with the subjectivity of the data and limiting influence on interviewees to avoid manipulated responses. For tools like surveys, it means accounting for bias and calculating how to weigh answers for the most telling results.

"The survey research class at Heller has proven invaluable to my work," Brookner explains. "Also, the qualitative research course gave me the grounding for a lot of the focus groups and interviews I have conducted."

Of course, Brookner, a recipient of the Sillerman Fellowship and the Marjorie S. Trotter Doctoral Fellowship, took much more from his Heller experience than just the nuts and bolts of his current work. Brookner admits that a career in research was far off his radar when he started Heller's Master of Public Policy program in 2011. When faculty mentors suggested he had a knack for research, however, he continued into the PhD program, where new possibilities opened for him.

"The program exposed me to so many different types of research," he says, "and the concentration seminars exposed me to all the different ways it could be used professionally."

Now, looking back on his time at Heller, Brookner credits the school with not only giving him the tools for his current work but also providing direction.

"Heller is a great place to find your intellectual passion," says Brookner. "Heller gave me the space to determine what I wanted to research, and how, and more importantly, the support structures to figure it out on my own. Not all doctoral programs provide such a space for exploration, and for me, it was a great fit." ■



**MARIAMA KHAN,
MA SID'08**

Becoming a cultural scholar

Mariama Khan, MA SID'08, a native of The Gambia in West Africa, has always been interested in African culture, but it wasn't until she enrolled in the Heller School's MA in Sustainable International Development program that she decided to make it her life's work.

"My interest in the subject kept growing when I was at Heller," recalls Khan. "[Professor Emerita of the Practice] Susan Holcombe, in particular, was always encouraging me to explore my culture, to think about language, and it became a cornerstone of what I believe development should include."

More than a decade later, Khan has established a successful career as a cultural scholar, publishing on the relationship between indigenous languages and development in West Africa, and the impact of border politics on kinship ties.

In her latest book, "Politics in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau: Precolonial Influence on the Postcolonial State," which she dedicated to Holcombe, Khan explores how the culture and traditions of the precolonial Kaabu empire have been used to shape political rhetoric in

both countries throughout history. In particular, many modern-day political movements have demonstrated a renewed sense of cultural awareness, employing indigenous terms and motifs to prove their legitimacy, Khan writes.

In her research, Khan conducted interviews and utilized archival materials, but she also drew heavily from cultural evidence, like indigenous songs and oral traditions.

"I used these historical resources to show how people express their belonging to the state and their vision of politics," Khan says. "The evidence suggests that people want change, they want democratic leadership."

After graduating from the Heller School in 2008, Khan continued working for the Gambian government, but decided to leave in 2010. She eventually returned to the United States and joined the faculty of Lehman College of the City University of New York, where she teaches today.

In her work, which includes teaching, research, writing poetry and filmmaking, Khan continues to draw on lessons she learned from the Heller School, where her professors encouraged her to pursue new experiences, from her introduction to graduate teaching to directing her first film.

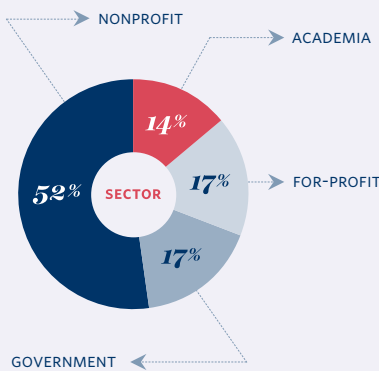
"There were so many professors whom I personally learned from inside and outside of class, and their lessons continue to be part of my life," says Khan. "I gained both an education and wisdom from Brandeis, and that is very rare." ■

".. Politics in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau have been beyond comprehension, full of unpredictable patterns and outcomes. In short, politics in the two countries is literally insane."

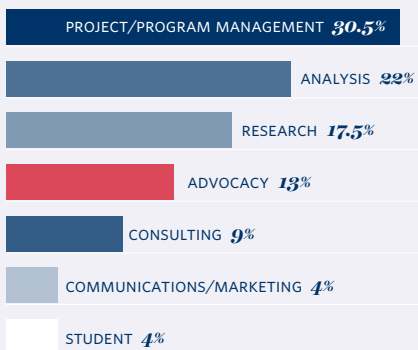
QUOTED FROM "INTRODUCTION: THE SEARCH FOR GOOD LEADERSHIP" IN MARIAMA KHAN'S NEWEST BOOK, "POLITICS IN THE GAMBIA AND GUINEA-BISSAU"

**2021 MPP ALUMNI CAREERS:
FIRST DESTINATIONS**

Like many of his classmates, Lang Le, MPP'10, built a career as a health policy expert working in the public sector. See where MPP graduates from 2021 landed after graduating:



JOB FUNCTION



LANG LE, MPP'10
Bringing the Affordable Care Act from theory to practice

In 2008, Lang Le, MPP'10, left the non-profit sector to join Heller's second-ever cohort of Master of Public Policy students. Little did he know he'd forge a new career in health policy just as the U.S. health care landscape turned upside down. Le graduated in 2010—the same year the Affordable Care Act became law—and he accepted a position at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, where he has worked ever since.

When he was a child, Le and his family immigrated to the U.S. as refugees from Vietnam. That experience fueled in him a desire to make the most of every opportunity, and, he says, “to contribute to policies and programs that continuously improve the lives of people who access and rely on Medicare to maintain their well-being and health.”

Those early months at CMS were grueling, he admits. “I was thrown into the fire,” he says.

At CMS, Le joined a group assigned with implementing ACA provisions around value-based purchasing, which ties payment to the quality (rather than the quantity)

of care that patients receive. Within his first year, he drafted Reports to Congress about implementing value-based purchasing in skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies and ambulatory surgical centers.

Le is still at CMS, though he's worked on multiple policies and in various program areas over the last 10 years. “I've essentially gone from helping design a value-based purchasing program for skilled nursing facilities when I first joined CMS in late 2010, to implementing a national version of that program years later,” he says.

According to Le, the COVID-19 pandemic shone a spotlight on the need for quality improvements in nursing homes, which are linked to nearly a quarter of all COVID deaths in the U.S. In his 2022 State of the Union address, President Biden recognized this program as a key tool for improving the quality of care across 15,000 nursing homes nationally.

Le, who received a Charles and Francene Rodgers Endowed Scholarship for his master's studies, credits Heller for giving him the skills to succeed in health policy. “I am able to work on complex national health care policies with diverse internal and external stakeholders because Heller has provided me with the research, analytic and policy framework in order to be successful,” he says.

“More importantly,” he adds, “I am forever proud to represent Heller as a professional in government, and to be reminded every day that the work to advance social justice is ongoing.”



Building Our EID Framework: Updates from Interim Dean Maria Madison

Heller established baseline and benchmarking metrics around equity, inclusion and diversity (EID) in 2018. As part of this endeavor, we created goals, workshops and interventions. The framework allows us to track and monitor progress and impact. Heller conducted climate surveys in 2018 and 2022 to measure changes in demographics, vulnerabilities, belonging and inclusion, and satisfaction.

In 2018, Heller had a 72% satisfaction rate. We set a goal to reach a more than 75% satisfaction rate, and in 2022, 83% of respondents said they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” — a more than 10% increase in satisfaction. We will investigate what is occurring across the other 17%.

Student vulnerability has also increased during this time frame, however. Vulnerability refers to challenges such as food insecurity and mental health markers for depression. Heller is partnering with offices such as the Brandeis Counseling Center to provide resources.

Our next steps are to further analyze the differences in responses from the 2018 and 2022 climate surveys, conducting cross-tabulation for demographics and programs. We will examine student sense of belonging/inclusion, discrimination/harassment and mental health markers for depression. We will also review faculty activity reports and course evaluations, among other tools and community feedback. Our goal is to continue to improve the educational and community experiences at Heller.

Thank you!

What do Heller School students have to say about your generosity?

“It gave me the flexibility and fortitude needed to continue on with my dissertation research.”
— PhD candidate

“It directly impacted my professional trajectory for the best, and for this I am so grateful.”
— MBA/MA SID student

“It helps the next generation of change-makers build a strong foundation for their careers, and I can’t tell you enough just how valuable that is.”
— MBA student

“It relieves one financial worry so I can focus on my academic priorities.”
— MS GHPM student



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BACK COVER(AGE)

THOMAS SHAPIRO

“It’s important to understand the way that policy — the immediate past of policy and current policy — continues the legacy of enslavement in different forms in the United States.”

QUOTED ON THE FEDERATION CONVERSATION PODCAST ON THE PIGFORD RESEARCH PROJECT

DOLORES ACEVEDO-GARCIA

“Rarely, if ever, in our nation’s history has a policy change had such dramatic effects in such a short time.”

QUOTED IN THE HILL ON THE IMPACT OF THE CHILD TAX CREDIT ON CHILD POVERTY RATES IN 2021

TATJANA MESCHEDE

“The kind of jobs that went away immediately when the pandemic hit impacted communities of color to a much greater extent than white communities.”

QUOTED ON CNBC ON THE WIDENING OF THE POST-PANDEMIC WEALTH GAP

LAURENCE SIMON

“Caste on university campuses, and in the wider public and policy world in the U.S., is a hidden discrimination.”

QUOTED IN THE TIMES OF INDIA ON ADDING CASTE TO NONDISCRIMINATION POLICIES