

Brandeis

THE HELLER SCHOOL
FOR SOCIAL POLICY
AND MANAGEMENT

PhD IN SOCIAL POLICY

**Research Focused.
Impact Driven.**

- Health
- Behavioral Health
- Economic and Racial Equity
- Children, Youth and Families

heller.brandeis.edu/phd



Combat Injustice with Effective Policymaking

At Heller, we believe in the power of rigorous research and scholarship to drive positive change in populations worldwide. Our Doctor of Philosophy in Social Policy program is at the forefront of shaping social policy for the better, addressing critical issues that affect individuals and communities locally and around the world.

The Heller PhD curriculum is designed to train students to ask critical questions about social policies and their outcomes, and to conduct rigorous, creative research in search of innovative solutions to persistent social problems. Working alongside a close-knit cohort of students committed to the pursuit of social justice on a diverse range of issues, you'll complete courses that provide a comprehensive perspective on today's — and tomorrow's — most critical social policy challenges. You'll graduate with the tools, skills, and knowledge you need to make a positive difference in the world.

Gaining a Deep Understanding of Today's Greatest Social Problems

At Heller, we find solutions to pervasive social problems through rigorous, innovative research. During your time here, you'll complete a small set of required core courses on theory and methods and immerse yourself in one of four policy concentrations, honing in on the area of study that best aligns with your interests and professional goals. You'll investigate key aspects of the academic research process, including peer-reviewed publishing, proposal and grant writing, and navigating ethical guidelines for human subjects research. Your experience at Heller will culminate in a written dissertation that challenges you to conduct original research on a compelling social policy issue.

As active thought leaders in their fields, our faculty have spent decades applying practical, research-informed methodologies to social policymaking. They will serve as your instructors, mentors, and champions as you dive into Heller's challenging coursework, helping you build the essential skills and networks that you'll need to attain your dream career in social policy.

Program Structure

Full-time enrollment / Fall admission

Sample Courses

- Issues in National Health Policy
- Immigration Policy and Human Rights
- Economics of Behavioral Health
- Social Experimentation in Child, Youth, and Family Policymaking
- Race and Stratification in the U.S. Economy
- Substance Use and Societal Consequences and Issues in Addiction Treatment
- Law and Social Policy: Constructions of Race and Ethnicity and Their Consequences
- Disability Policy: Intersections with Health, Poverty, Education and Family Policy

Curriculum and Concentrations

During their first two years at Heller, students take 60 credit hours, participate in a doctoral seminar in one of four concentration areas, and pass a comprehensive exam. Students in their third year must prepare and successfully defend a dissertation proposal. After their proposal is approved, students focus on preparing and defending their dissertation. Although full-time doctoral students have up to 10 years to complete all degree requirements, many students finish the program in five years or less.

PhD students may choose electives from any of the following focus areas:

- **The Health Policy concentration** prepares graduates for challenging careers developing research and policy that influence the quality, accessibility, and delivery of health care in the U.S. and around the world.
- **The Behavioral Health Policy concentration** emphasizes applied health services research and policy development that considers the intersection and linkage of health, behavior, and systems of care, targeting alcohol, drugs, and mental health issues.



- **The Economic and Racial Equity Policy concentration** enables students to develop a theoretical and empirical understanding of the causes, manifestations, and consequences of social and economic inequities and prepares them for challenging careers developing research and policy that addresses and aims to eliminate these inequities.
- **The Children, Youth and Families Policy concentration** hones students' skills in developing policy and conducting research and evaluation studies that help maximize the potential of young people.

The Dissertation

Completing a dissertation on a significant social policy issue is a complex undertaking. All of the knowledge and skills gained from coursework, seminars, independent study, and research experience at Heller will be applied toward the development and execution of your chosen dissertation. You'll have the option of presenting the problem statement, literature review, methodology, findings, and policy implications of your dissertation project as a traditional monograph-style dissertation, or you may opt to prepare three papers of a publishable standard on related topics. As you prepare your dissertation, you'll gain valuable experience reviewing and interpreting relevant literature and applying your analytical skills to answering a research question of your own design.

Recent dissertations from across PhD program concentrations include:

- Kaili Mauricio, 2024. "Debt, Stress, and Health in an Aging America: The Relationship Between Older U.S. Adults' Debt and Their Short-Term Health Outcomes."
- Kartik Trivedi, 2024. "Algorithms, Disability and HR: Three Papers Examining the Interplay of Algorithmic Advice and Human Judgment in Hiring People with Disabilities."
- Jamie Morgan, 2023. "Advancing Abortion Justice: An Ethnography of Gender-Based Violence and Contentious Politics at Clinics."
- Mark Zocchi, 2023. "Expanding Access to Community Care in the Veterans Health Administration: Impact on Utilization and Outcomes for Veterans with Type 2 Diabetes."

- Drew A. Zachary, 2023. "How Might We Democratize Data? Analyzing Implications of Federal Data System Design for Communities and Individuals."
- Margaret Giles, 2023. "The Massachusetts Recovery High Schools: Ensuring Success in School and in Recovery."
- Elizabeth Pierce, 2022. "Today's Dollars, Tomorrow's Dreams: Interim Asset Effects of Children's Savings Accounts."
- Joanna Taylor, 2022. "Pathways Into and Out of Confinement: A Life-Course Study of Girls and School Discipline."
- Andréa Harris, 2021. "The Burdening Hypothesis: Deconstructing Racial Identity Politics, Power, Otherness and Health in Immigrant and U.S.-Born Women of Color."
- Cecilia Flores-Rodriguez, 2021. "Flexing on 'em: Exploring Inequities in Breastfeeding, Postpartum Depression, and Perceived Discrimination in Latinas by Street Race and Afro-Latinidad."

Outcomes

During your time at Heller, you'll gain critical skills in social policy research along with a wealth of expertise in your policy concentration area. Our vast alumni network will help you connect with global opportunities and generate positive social change in your career. You'll graduate from a top-ranked program prepared to apply analytical tools and methods to developing effective social policies that move society forward. Placements for recent PhD graduates include:

- Yale School of Public Health, *Postdoctoral Fellow*
- Roche, *Health Policy Manager*
- MA Department of Public Health, *Health Care and Safety Consultant*
- Harvard Medical School, *Instructor/Team Leader*
- Booz Allen Hamilton, *Associate*
- MA House of Representatives, *State Representative*
- Tripod Education Partners, *Associate*
- Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, *Associate Research Scientist*

Why Heller?

A PhD from Heller prepares you for a career effecting impactful change in structures that touch nearly every aspect of our lives. Here are just a few reasons students choose Heller's PhD in Social Policy:

- We embrace an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on fields such as sociology, economics, political science, and public health to provide a comprehensive understanding of social policy issues.
- Our curriculum trains students to ask critical questions about social policies and their outcomes and to conduct rigorous, creative research in search of solutions to persistent social problems.
- Each of our four concentrations — Health; Behavioral Health; Economic and Racial Equity; and Children, Youth, and Families — is linked to Heller's renowned research institutes.
- Heller provides funding for full-time PhD students — including a stipend — during their first four years. Funding is not contingent on working as a teaching assistant or research assistant.
- The PhD program includes just a small set of core requirements, allowing you to design an individualized learning plan that suits your research interests.
- Heller's motto is "Knowledge Advancing Social Justice" and our PhD program encourages students to explore how social policies impact marginalized and vulnerable populations, with an emphasis on addressing disparities and promoting equity.

Our Commitment to Diversity

The Heller School endorses a broad definition of diversity reflective of differences that include, but are not limited to, age, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, visa status, culture, economic status and background, gender and gender expression, sexual orientation and identity, religion, political views, academic background and interests, abilities, learning styles and pace, physical appearance, and individual personality.

Admissions

We seek students driven to make systemic policy changes and conduct the research needed to shape informed policy. If you enjoy diving deep into the causes, history, and solutions for persistent social challenges and hope to contribute to the body of knowledge advancing these issues, the Heller PhD in Social Policy may be right for you. We actively and thoughtfully pursue a diverse student body that reflects a variety of backgrounds, cultures, professional experiences, and personal interests.

Financial Assistance

All full-time PhD students receive tuition and stipend support for their first four years of doctoral study with no work requirement. A number of teaching assistantships and graduate research positions are also available.

Perspectives from Our Alumni

"Heller was an environment where I was able to develop as a researcher, to do the kind of work that I wanted to do. I was lucky to find a place where people were supporting each other and really aligned with the mission. The first time I visited, I heard the message about social justice everywhere in the building. It signaled to me that this was a place I would want to be."

—Sara Chaganti, PhD'18
*Deputy Director, Regional & Community Outreach
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston*

"Before joining Heller, I had little knowledge about the U.S. health care system or research methods used to do health policy research. Every moment learning about economic theory and U.S. health policy was a eureka moment. I joined a research team my first year at Heller and found working under a team of researchers was extremely enriching, and played a key role in defining my doctoral dissertation and my current work."

—Ramandeep Kaur, PhD'15
*Research Health Economist
RTI International*

"I knew I really wanted to do research that could be used to help make the world a better place. I also knew, after working for a few years, that I had gone about as far as my previous expertise and training could take me. If I was going to commit to a research career, I needed more training, and Heller was the right place to get it."

—Sasha Albert, PhD'20
*Associate Director, Research and Cost Trends
Massachusetts Health Policy Commission*




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