Final Emerging Scholars Projects 2017-2018

School Discipline Decisions among Educators, Administrators, and School Resource Officers by Region: Implications for understanding the school-to-prison pipeline
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Project Description: It is well known that students of color and students with disabilities are overrepresented in school suspensions and expulsions, a problem that has become known as the School-to-Prison pipeline because of the association of suspensions with likelihood of dropout and subsequent risk for negative outcomes including involvement with the criminal justice system. However, research has failed to examine the causes of this overrepresentation with experimental rigor. In fact, in over a decade of research on the School-to-Prison Pipeline, this project is the first demonstration of implicit bias in disciplinary decision-making based on student disability status. Undergraduate research assistants in my lab have been involved in designing the research measures, administering the protocol to college students, and testing its validity with HS teachers in the field. Currently, they are preparing the study to be administered to educators, administrators, and school resource officers in MA and GA, two states that differ dramatically in the level of suspension used in high schools. We will be able to see whether believing that a student who has committed a school-conduct violation either has, or does not have, a disability makes a difference in the length of suspension awarded.

The Musical Playground
Elissa Johnson-Green, Assistant Professor of Music
Emily Gaskins, Music Education

Project description: Providing equal and free access to interactive musical play drives us. The EcoSonic Playground project develops interdisciplinary STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math) and sustainability education through project-based learning. Through a differentiated, engineering focused curriculum, children will build large-scale, indoor musical instrument play structures using majority reusable materials. Sustainability education will be combined with architectural design processes, technology (including design tools and iPads) acoustics, and materials experimentation, which will immerse children in kinesthetic deep-skills learning. The EcoSonic Playground program will be brought to underserved communities, wherever exists the greatest need for creative opportunity. Using majority reusable materials, children will design and build musical instruments that will be attached to PVC pipe scaffolding, in essence creating sculptures that can be played. The university project team designed and built two working models, which included the following: Computer tower covers, computer cord, large water containers, dryer vent tubes, telephone cords, pots and pans, bicycle wheels, electrical tape, propane tanks, large water barrels, and PVC pipe. These models have been installed at UMass Lowell’s Durgin Hall where students have been playing on them – recently for a two-hour jam session. We plan to partner with organizations and people who work with the following: Incarcerated youth, children on the autism spectrum, children with a range of other special needs, public schools, community organizations who provide after
school care, and organizations making efforts to involve at-risk youth in positive and meaningful activity. Presently, we have connected with a local elementary school, where we will implement the EcoSonic Playground program. This school’s neighborhood has been designated low SES, with the community comprising predominantly immigrant families. We are working with the school’s principal to align the EcoSonic Playground curriculum with the children’s skills and educational needs. Community involvement will be at the core of designing, creating, and building the instruments/play structures. It is imperative in our present political and social climate that we discover ways to strengthen children’s social-emotional connection among peers and to their community.

Refugees, Media, and Public Opinion
Cheryl Llewelyn, Assistant Professor of Sociology
Zanya Basma, Political Science

Project Description: Media has become increasingly difficult to decipher. We have seen the rise of “fake news” and “alternative facts.” At the same time, research has shown that media has the power to persuade its audience, even when the evidence is false, influencing public opinion. This influence of the media is especially important regarding public opinion of immigrants and refugees, many of whom have fled their countries of origin to escape violent conditions. Noncitizens, immigrants, and people of color tend to receive the most negative news in the United States, including Syrian refugees, who are treated as threats by politicians and the media as ISIS attacks increase globally. With the executive order by Donald Trump, dissuading media’s coverage on this group of refugees and immigrants has become even more timely and important. In 2015, California, Michigan, Florida, Arizona, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Texas received the most Syrian refugees of all of the 50 states, during a time when the media shared about the tumultuous events around the world, potentially changing the public’s opinion of Muslims and Syrians everywhere. In this project, we will evaluate the media’s coverage of Syrian refugees through content analysis of the most widely read newspapers in each of the states. Since the media has the potential to persuade public opinion and impact the public's reception of immigrants, it is important to understand the dominant news narratives about Syrian refugees in the states with the largest populations.

Underrepresented Populations and Perinatal Care
Joseph Gonzalez, Assistant Professor of Psychology
Melanie Bingham, Psychology

Project Description: While progress in health disparities research has contributed to significant reductions in infant and maternal mortality, and improvements in outcomes such as healthy birth weight, optimal infant feeding, and appropriate diagnosis and treatment for perinatal mood disorders, critical gaps remain for underrepresented populations (e.g., adolescents/young adults, immigrant/refugees, queer families, and sexual assault survivors). The Sexual, Reproductive, and Perinatal Health Disparities (SRPHD) project seeks to target these population-specific shortcomings through the development, distribution, and analysis of a robust survey measure designed to assess: (a) clinical and informal health care access and
utilization; (b) peer and social support systems; and (c) policy-level actions that influence individual experiences of reproductive and perinatal health. These critical data will aid in determining the unique perinatal care needs of these populations, and in identifying risk and protective factors that may be deployed in meaningful intervention models to optimize their maternal-infant outcomes.

**Bio-Markers and Counter-Messages: An Exploratory study of extremist propaganda, aggression and Effective Counter Messaging**

Neil Shortland, Lecturer, School of Criminology and Justice Studies
Kyrielle Ross, Psychology and Criminal Justice

Project Description: Advances in technology are shaping the current counter-terrorism landscape. As evidenced through a series of Islamic State "inspired" plots, and the many cases of extremist travelers, individuals are becoming exposed to extremist material online and, through a process of "radicalization," are engaging in terrorist behavior. Hence the online-sphere is an important domain, and one in which we are increasingly seeing efforts to engage and counter the extremist ideologies of groups such as the Islamic State. However, despite significant investment and a series of very diverse programs being launched, due to a lack of investment in basic social scientific research, we remain woefully ill-equipped to develop effective counter-messages. We do not know what messages have worked, what types of messages would work, and crucially, why a counter-message would be effective with a given audience within a given set of circumstances. To begin to answer these questions over the past 24 months I have been engaged in several empirical studies that have sought to empirically measure both individual differences in reactions to extremist propaganda, and the effectiveness of several different types of counter-message. The results have been promising, however a lot of further work is required to further understand the dynamic interplay of the message, the messenger and (most importantly) the recipient. Given this, this research seeks to further investigate the role of online propaganda and counter-messages. Specifically, it incorporates high-fidelity biosocial markers of aggression along with a series of behavioral scenarios to expand our understanding of the role of both online propaganda, individual risk factors that may predict negative outcomes, and the effectiveness of extremist counter-messages.

**Experimental Games in Entrepreneurial Finance**

Michael Ciuchta, Assistant Professor of Management
David Kingsley, Assistant Professor of Economics
Kevin Strathdee, Economics

Project Description: This project investigates the entrepreneur – venture capitalist relationship. The entrepreneur seeks funding and expertise that will ultimately make them more productive and profitable. The venture capitalist seeks a return on their investment that will be determined by the effort the entrepreneur exerts into the venture. This relationship can be quantified using the price of equity that the entrepreneur sells to the venture capitalist. For example, consider the negotiations that take place on the show Shark Tank. However, there is
uncertainty on both sides of this relationship. How much will the venture capitalist actually increase the productivity of the entrepreneur? How much effort will the entrepreneur actually put into the venture? We will investigate how both sides of this relationship handle uncertainty. The intent of the project is to measure how asymmetric information (adverse selection and moral hazard) affect this market. The hypothesis is that asymmetric information harms the market and thus the project will seek to provide policy recommendations to improve market outcomes. This research will be conducted in the Manning School of Business behavioral lab using economic experiments.

**The Fabled Fourth Estate: Challenging Assumptions about Media Freedom and Human Rights**

*Jenifer Whitten-Woodring, Associate Professor Political Science*

*Nicole Anderson, Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies*

Project Description: For more than a century, philosophers, politicians, human rights advocates and ordinary people have called for media freedom. Indeed, spreading media freedom is widely seen as a key to promoting development, democracy and human rights. Every year United States and European Union donors contribute millions of dollars to media assistance programs aimed at improving media freedom and Internet access in the developing world. The idea is that independent media will keep government in line and make life better for citizens. These are grand expectations. Many journalists have risked their lives and some have died striving to fulfill them. Yet, really, little is known as to whether free media are up to the task. Recent quantitative studies have found that the effects of media freedom on human rights vary depending on the presence/absence of democratic institutions and access to the Internet. Building on this work, this research uses comparative case studies and presents evidence that there are conditions that must be in place before media freedom can make a difference in human rights.

**Ethics and Diversity in Chronic Pain and Opioid Policy**

*Nicholas Evans, Assistant Professor of Philosophy*

*Hannah Daly, Political Science*

Project Description: The so-called “opioid epidemic” has been labelled as one of America’s most pressing health challenges, with the number of unintentional overdose deaths from prescription pain relievers quadrupling since 1999. In response, the United States Federal Government has produced new recommendations restricting access to prescription opioids in an effort to prevent the proliferation of the drugs and associated medical complications. State governments are following suit: for example, in Massachusetts a prescription for Schedule II opioid drugs (e.g. hydrocodone, morphine) can only be filled if it is prescribed by a registered practitioner from MA or its six neighboring states, in an effort to prevent multiple prescriptions from out of state providers. Despite this proactive response, there is almost no literature on the ethics of restricting access to painkillers. More troubling, there is a dearth of understanding about who is being impacted by these restrictions. Almost 100 million Americans suffer from chronic pain, and may have their life and work severely impaired by their condition. Women and people of color are more likely to suffer from chronic pain, and find it harder to access care.
Moreover, existing social inequities may exacerbate the need for self-medication: for example, improper treatment of gunshot victims has been linked to the need to self-medicate with Percoset. There is thus an open question regarding the justice of these opioid policies, which the proposed project intends to answer. Typically, restrictive public health policies are only justified in case they produce limited or minimal suffering, prevent substantial public health harms, respect or attentive to individual autonomy, and are just. There is, however, no evidence that these policies satisfy any of these requirements. This is in part because it isn’t clear that the primary victims of the opioid epidemic are also those most impacted by restrictive opioid prescription and use policies. If in fact the converse is true: that the group of individuals at risk of dying from opioid overdoses is sufficiently distinct from the group of individuals whose medical care is impacted by opioid restrictions, then these policies may be both ineffective and unjust. This project seeks to uncover, if it exists, such an injustice, and propose reforms to public health policy and medical practice in response to this ethical issue.

The Inclusion of Students with Emotional Disturbance in K-12 Schools: Effective Practices, Teacher Challenges, and Essential Considerations
John McKenna, Assistant Professor of Moderate Disabilities
Emily Bergman, English and Psychology

Project Description: Students who receive special education services for emotional disturbance (ED) commonly receive the majority of their academic instruction in inclusive, general education classrooms. However, few evidence-based instructional practices (e.g., practices proven effective through rigorous research) have been identified for use with this student population in inclusive settings. Furthermore, little is known in regards to the practices schools commonly use and find effective for use with students with ED in general education classrooms. These factors represent a significant concern as schools are responsible for making certain that all students with disabilities including those with ED receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). This project will (1) identify evidence-based instructional practices for students with ED who receive instruction in inclusive, general education classrooms, (2) identify effective practices teachers commonly use to support students with ED in inclusive settings, (3) identify challenges teachers commonly experience, and (4) identify teacher professional development and training needs. This project will involve creating a research survey instrument, conducting at least one comprehensive literature synthesis, and writing an article on effective strategies for school-based professionals.