Washington University in St. Louis
Brown School

Advancing Social, Economic and Health Equity through Leadership and Innovation
Dear Friends,

It is a tremendous honor and privilege to serve as the dean of the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis. Our diverse faculty, students and administrators are particularly proud of our hometown. St. Louis is a city with immense civic pride, an emerging leader in social innovation and entrepreneurship and home to some of the nicest people you will ever meet. At the same time, St. Louis faces some difficult social issues including health disparities, income inequality and structural racism and oppression. The Brown School is committed to adding our voice, our science and our resources to the ever-growing chorus demanding social justice.

Included in this booklet is a small sampling of the countless projects and research initiated by Brown School scholars that focus on social, economic and health inequities and shine an empirical light on the impact of the systemic oppression that exists around the country and around the globe. Additionally, Brown School students are working in over 500 local community based organizations and social service agencies providing needed support and preparing to be leaders in the fields of social work, public health and social policy.

By working collaboratively, faculty, students, community organizations, service providers, policymakers, public and elected officials can and will improve lives and move us towards a more just and equitable world.

I hope you will join us in this effort.

Sincerely,

Mary M. McKay
Neidorff Family and Centene Corporation Dean of the Brown School
HEALTH EQUITY WORKS

Health Equity Works specializes in bringing quality, accessible research on health and opportunity disparities into communities to accelerate collaborative action and systems change.

Founded March 2013 under the name For the Sake of All, it began as collaboration between scholars at Washington University and Saint Louis University to report on the health and well-being of African Americans in the St. Louis region. The project, with funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health, highlighted social, economic, and environmental factors that drive differences in outcomes. This resulted in the landmark report “For the Sake of All: A Report on the Health and Well-Being of African Americans in St. Louis — And Why It Matters for Everyone,” released on May 30, 2014.

In April 2018, the organization released a second report with six community partners entitled “Segregation in St. Louis: Dismantling the Divide.” The report focused on St. Louis’ significant history of housing segregation, its current impact on health and well-being in the region, and 11 policy recommendations intended to dismantle segregation and increase quality affordable housing and mobility in St. Louis. Current initiatives and key strategies focus on the following areas: school health, quality neighborhoods, economic opportunity and early childhood development.

A current project seeks to expand the use of the “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child” model in schools. Funded by a $1.1 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, this evidence-based approach supports the health and well-being of students, staff and families. Another ongoing project seeks to establish a universal Child Development Account program in 20 of St. Louis’s highest need ZIP codes. Under the program, each child would receive $500 in a Missouri MOST 529 Savings Plan account. Studies have shown these accounts provide a savings boost for families.
COLLABORATION ON RACE, INEQUALITY, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN AMERICA

Bringing together scholars from multiple disciplines, including psychology, public health and social work, CRISMA examines the impact of inequality and structural racism on people of color in the United States. Its projects focus on building resilience, exploring costs of upward social mobility, costs of mental health, and the psychosocial and environmental factors related to health and well-being across the life course.

Select projects are below:

Celebrating Strengths of Black Girls: An Intersectionality Approach
Through this initiative, CSD is working to advance equity for women and girls of color. The primary goal of the current research focuses on building resiliency that involves identifying assets and resources that serve as protective factors. The project explores culturally relevant interventions and mathematics curricula and the impact on the personal assets (e.g., self-esteem), cultural assets (e.g., racial identity beliefs), and school performance of Black girls.

Estimating Mental Health Needs
Mental health services are underutilized and African Americans are half as likely to use services for any mental health problem compared to whites. The center’s work in Estimating Mental Health Needs examines the prevalence of mental disorders among African Americans in primary care and community settings. The research also studies whether common predictors of mental health problems — particularly gender, income, employment status, marital status and insurance type — are associated with mental health disorders in this population.

Increasing Student Retention in Forest Park Community College
This randomized experiment tests whether a brief social belonging intervention will increase retention rates at a community college. Preliminary research showed positive results of increased retention and grade point average. A sample of 200 first-year freshmen entering Forest Park Community College are assigned to either a treatment or control group. Treatment group students receive a 30-minute social belonging intervention consisting of a 13-minute video, “You Are College Material — You Belong,” and a 15-17 minute discussion. Students in the control group receive the school’s standard 30-minute educational session on social services within the college. Institutional data will track whether students re-enroll the following semester and follow-up interviews with 10 in each group will provide rationales for enrollment decisions.

The Criminal Brand: America’s Invisible Class
CSD is working to expand the audience of testimonies from youth and children affected by the cycle of incarceration, violence and disenfranchisement. To that end, the Criminal Brand project has four goals: (1) focusing greater attention to the effect mass incarceration has on families, youth and children; (2) providing a digital interface and interdisciplinary platform to explore the effects of parental incarceration on youth; (3) compiling a digital archive of sound-based testimonials of youth, children, and adult children of incarcerated individuals; and (4) conducting research forums to develop success strategies that empower and support youth affected by parental incarceration.
The Race and Opportunity Lab within the Center for Social Development examines race, opportunity and social mobility with an emphasis on informing policies, interventions and intra-professional practice to improve place-based capacity to reduce inequality in adolescents’ healthy transition to adulthood. The first phase of work focuses on studies that establish baseline measures of regional capacity to ensure healthy youth development for all in the St. Louis region (St. Louis City and County). One of the lab’s current projects is:

**HomeGrown STL**
HomeGrown STL focuses on building regional capacity in St. Louis City and County to better serve and foster the positive development of young Black males ages 12-29. The death of Michael Brown highlighted immense regional concerns regarding Black boys and young men, namely long-standing disparities in health, academic attainment, employment, developmental opportunity and overall healthy transition into adulthood. National and local responses to Ferguson are yielding investments to increase programs and services. Lacking, however, is the baseline data needed to guide strategic planning and evaluation of the regions’ capacity to improve outcomes.

Ameliorating these disparities requires an evidence-based, multi-stakeholder approach. HomeGrown STL brings together key St. Louis partners to provide focused attention and infrastructure for facilitating, planning and evaluating strategic investment in data that can be used to inform services and policy to improve outcomes for Black boys and men.
SMART DECARCERATION INITIATIVE

The Smart Decarceration Initiative (SDI) within the Center for Social Development aims to build societal capacity to reduce incarceration rates in ways that are effective, sustainable and socially just through three primary strategies:

- Advancing innovations in policy and practice
- Identifying a continuum of viable exit strategies from the criminal justice system
- Cultivating networks to promote new approaches and perspectives

Achieving Smart Decarceration will require major shifts in the criminal justice system. The field of Smart Decarceration is grounded in the following guiding transformative concepts: changing the narrative on incarceration and the incarcerated; making criminal justice system-wide innovations; implementing transdisciplinary policy and practice interventions; and employing evidence-driven strategies.
Ana Baumann
Research Assistant Professor
PhD, Utah State University

Baumann’s research agenda aims to facilitate the implementation and dissemination of evidence-based interventions in low-resource settings and for minority populations, nationally and internationally. Baumann is funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute on a Minority Supplement study with the Sickle Cell Disease Implementation Consortium, a collaborative of eight sites aiming to improve the health and well-being of patients with sickle cell disease.

Baumann is the co-director, with Professor Ross Brownson, of the Dissemination and Implementation Research Core (DIRC), a methods core from the Washington University’s Institute of Clinical and Translational Science. With the DIRC team, she provides methodological expertise to advance translational research to inform and move efficacious health practices from clinical knowledge to routine care.

Baumann is currently working with the Institute of Public Health to expand the GenerationPMTO intervention, which equips parents with evidence-based social skills to improve, prevent or reverse conduct challenges in their children.
Tonya Edmond
Professor
Associate Dean for Diversity, Inclusion and Equity
PhD, University of Texas at Austin

Edmond, a faculty affiliate with the Center for Violence and Injury Prevention and the Center for Mental Health Services Research, focuses her research on testing the effectiveness of interventions for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault, sex trafficking and intimate partner violence. Prior to coming into academia, Edmond practiced for 15 years in clinical and administrative roles in domestic violence and rape crisis centers. Edmond is currently the principle investigator of a Department of Justice study testing the effectiveness of a learning collaborative as a strategy to enhance the uptake of Cognitive Processing Therapy in rape crisis centers.

Edmond is a faculty fellow in the university’s Office of the Provost working on diversity and inclusion initiatives as well as women faculty leadership development.

Michal Grinstein-Weiss
Shanti K. Khinduka Distinguished Professor
Associate Dean for Policy Initiatives; Director, Envolve Center for Health Behavior Change
PhD, Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis

Grinstein-Weiss is the founding director of the Envolve Center for Health Behavior Change. As a leading expert and researcher in social and economic development, Grinstein-Weiss is an influential voice in the design of innovative social policies to promote household financial security and asset building, both in the United States and internationally. Currently, she is leading several large-scale research initiatives focused on developing savings policies and promoting financial inclusion among low- and moderate-income households and applying behavioral insights to the delivery of managed care to improve health outcomes.

Grinstein-Weiss also serves as a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and previously held an associate professor position in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she founded the Asset-Building Research Group.
Darrell Hudson
Associate Professor
PhD, University of Michigan

Hudson’s research agenda focuses on racial/ethnic health disparities and the role of social determinants of health, particularly how socioeconomic position and social context affect health and health disparities. Hudson is currently investigating why — despite greater exposure to stress, lower levels of socioeconomic position, and bearing a disproportionate burden of physical health disparities — data show African Americans to have lower rates of depression compared to whites. Hudson’s published research includes studies examining racial/ethnic differences in depression, including the effects of socioeconomic position, racial discrimination and coping behaviors on depression.

In addition to his research, Hudson teaches courses in social epidemiology, health behavior and health promotion, as well as the course “Popular Culture and Public Health.” He also co-directs the Collaboration on Race, Inequality, and Social Mobility in America (CRISMA) at Washington University. Hudson holds a joint appointment with the Washington University Department of Psychiatry and is a faculty scholar with the Institute for Public Health.

Sean Joe
Benjamin E. Youngdahl Professor of Social Development
Associate Dean for Faculty and Research
PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Joe is a nationally recognized authority on suicidal behavior among African Americans. His research focuses on Black adolescents’ mental health service use patterns, the role of religion in Black suicidal behavior, salivary biomarkers for suicidal behavior, and development of father-focused, family-based interventions to prevent urban African-American adolescent males from engaging in multiple forms of self-destructive behaviors.

He is the founder and director of the Emerging Scholars Interdisciplinary Network, a national interdisciplinary and multi-ethnic professional development network for early-career social and behavior scientists. At the Brown School, he is the principle investigator of the Race and Opportunity Lab, which examines race in science, and the intersection of ethnicity and opportunity for social mobility — with an emphasis on informing policies, interventions, and intra-professional practice to reduce inequality in adolescents’ healthy transition to adulthood.
Sheretta T. Butler-Barnes
Associate Professor
PhD, Wayne State University

Butler-Barnes is one of the directors of the Brown School’s Collaboration on Race, Inequalities, and Social Mobility in America (CRISMA). Her work is currently focused on advancing equity for women and girls of color. Her project, Celebrating Strengths of Black Girls: An Intersectionality Approach, centers on building girls’ resiliency through identifying assets and resources that serve as protective factors. It explores culturally relevant interventions and mathematics curricula and the impact on the self-esteem, racial identity beliefs and school performance of Black girls. In light of this work, she recently was invited to attend the United State of Women Summit at the White House.

Before coming to the Brown School, Butler-Barnes was a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan’s School of Education, affiliated with the Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context. During her fellowship, she conducted research on how individual-level factors connected to Black youths’ cultural backgrounds (racial identity beliefs, religiosity) and ecological risk and resources (community violence, family and peer support) influence their achievement and psychological well-being outcomes.

Renee Cunningham-Williams
Associate Professor
Associate Dean for Doctoral Education
PhD, Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis

Cunningham-Williams is a leading expert in the epidemiology and comorbidity of problem gambling, substance use/abuse, and mental and behavioral health, particularly among African-American youth and emerging adults. Her social work experience includes work with teen mothers, adult probationers/parolees and adult survivors of abuse.

As a National Institutes of Health (NIH) postdoctoral fellow and former Washington University School of Medicine faculty member, Cunningham-Williams conducted transdisciplinary work in the fields of social work, public health, psychiatric epidemiology, nosology and biostatistics. This diverse experience has led to award-winning NIH and privately-funded research, including research for the development of diagnostic assessments for gambling disorder and Transdisciplinary Training in Addictions Research. With over 25 years of administrative leadership, her scholarship, teaching and service also focuses on the quality of doctoral education and research capacity-building for underrepresented minority scholars.
**Jack A. Kirkland**

Associate Professor  
MSW, Syracuse University

Kirkland is an internationally known scholar who lectures, consults and writes on the African-American family and on social and economic development. Kirkland was an activist and strategist in the Civil Rights Movement and has since pursued a number of roles as a public servant and elected official. He has also designed and led numerous workshops in African-American culture for public school teachers across the country, focused on improving multicultural classroom environments.

With the graduate students he teaches, Kirkland brings to life issues of community work, group relations, international social development, racism, social planning, and urban environments. His field-based summer course, “Poverty – The Impact of Institutionalized Racism,” immerses students in the community of East St. Louis and teaches them to strategize on policies that can combat the effects of intentional urban blight and poverty.

**RESEARCH INTERESTS:**
- International and national community economic development
- Urban issues
- International, state, and regional planning
- International social development
- Multicultural education

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**Patricia Kohl**

Associate Professor  
Associate Dean for Social Work  
PhD, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Kohl’s scholarship is focused on strengthening, implementing, and sustaining evidence-based interventions that improve the quality of care provided to vulnerable families. Her intervention and implementation research is informed by analyses of large datasets to examine how characteristics of parents within the child welfare service system, such as substance abuse and mental illness, influence parenting behaviors, child emotional and behavioral health, and the safety of children.

Among other projects, Kohl is currently working to adapt an evidence-based parent training program to increase father participation, as well as to improve father-child interactions. She is affiliated with the Brown School’s Center for Mental Health Services Research and the Center for Violence and Injury Prevention. She is also affiliated with the National Institute of Mental Health’s Implementation Research Institute. Her work has received support from the National Institute of Mental Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**RESEARCH INTERESTS:**
- Child welfare
- Engaging hard-to-reach populations in treatment
- Parent training
Von Nebbitt
Associate Professor
PhD, Brown School at Washington University

Nebbitt’s practice and research experiences are in the areas of urban African-American children and youth, with a primary research agenda of increasing empirical and theoretical knowledge of the effects of living in urban public housing. He examines how exposure to community and household violence, peer networks, and social cohesion and belonging are related to the mental and behavioral health of adolescents living in these environments.

Nebbitt has published approximately 40 papers and a book, “Adolescents in Public Housing: Addressing Psychological and Behavioral Health” (2015). His research has garnered support from the National Institute of Drug Abuse, National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, the Silberman Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation.

David A. Patterson Silver Wolf
Associate Professor
PhD, University of Louisville

Patterson Silver Wolf has over 15 years of experience providing clinical services in substance use disorder treatment field. He investigates how empirically supported interventions are implemented in community-based services, specifically as it relates to therapist and organizational characteristics. He is the director of Community-Academic Partnership on Addiction (CAPA), which works with several St Louis-based organizations that bring science to addiction services. He is also co-directs the Collaboration on Race, Inequalities, and Social Mobility in America (CRISMA) and studies factors that improve underrepresented minority college student’s academic success. He is specifically interested in American Indian/Alaska Native health and wellness, particularly on issues related to college retention. At the Brown School, he teaches substance abuse courses, chairs the American Indian Studies in Social Work Concentration and works closely with Kathryn M. Buder Center Scholars.

Patterson Silver Wolf is Faculty Scholar in the Washington University Institute for Public Health, a Faculty Affiliate in the Center for Violence and Injury Prevention and National Institute on Drug Abuse funded TranSTAR Brown School PhD Program, and National Institute of Mental Health-funded T32 pre- and postdoctoral training faculty.
Jason Purnell

Associate Professor
PhD, Ohio State University

Trained in applied psychology and public health, Purnell focuses his research on how socioeconomic and sociocultural factors influence health behaviors and health outcomes, and on mobilizing community action on the social determinants of health. He currently leads Health Equity Works (HEW), the new name and expanded mission of the Brown School initiative previously known as For the Sake of All. HEW is committed to St. Louis and to translating data and research into collaborative community action to advance health equity. Purnell is active in the St. Louis community, including service on the boards of Beyond Housing, Inc., the American Youth Foundation, and the Peace and Justice Commission of the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

He is a faculty affiliate with the Prevention Research Center and the Center for Public Health Systems Science at the Brown School, a faculty scholar in the Institute for Public Health, and Faculty Director of Thriving Communities in the Center for Social Development at the Brown School. Purnell is a licensed psychologist in the state of Missouri and a former director of community engagement with the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

Vetta L. Sanders Thompson

E. Desmond Lee Professor of Racial and Ethnic Diversity
PhD, Duke University

Sanders Thompson is a leading researcher in the areas of racial identity, psychosocial implications of race and ethnicity in health communications, access to health services, and determinates of health and mental health disparities. She has built a unique record of research that combines a sophisticated social science understanding of racial identity, rigorous measurement, and community-based participatory research.

Sanders Thompson is affiliated faculty for the Interdisciplinary Program in Urban Studies and the Center on Urban Research and Public Policy at Washington University. She currently teaches several Brown School courses, including “Social Justice and Human Diversity” and “Transdisciplinary Problem-Solving: Interrogating Health, Race and Inequalities.”
Michael Sherraden

George Warren Brown Distinguished University Professor
Director, Center for Social Development
PhD, University of Michigan

Sherraden is the founding director of the Center for Social Development (CSD) at Washington University in St Louis. CSD’s mission is to create and study innovations in policy and practices that enable individuals, families and communities to formulate and achieve life goals, and contribute to the economy and society. He has helped define a growing body of research and policy to promote inclusion in asset building, which has influenced asset-based policies and programs in the U.S. and many other countries. He also initiated a campus-wide collaboration at Washington University called Livable Lives, which studies social and economic conditions in the bottom tiers of society.

Sherraden’s research on Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s contributed to the creation of AmeriCorps, and he was in attendance for the signing of the bill at the White House. Currently, he teaches social policy, social innovation, and effective strategies in applied social science at the Brown School and is a co-director of the national initiative Grand Challenges in Social Work. Sherraden was listed by Time magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

RESEARCH INTERESTS:
- Social innovation and policy
- Asset building
- Civic engagement and civic service
- Community development

Rachel Tabak

Research Associate Professor
PhD, RD, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Tabak’s work focuses on community-based obesity prevention and promotion of physical activity and nutrition, as well as dissemination and implementation research. She is involved in research studies examining interventions to promote healthy nutrition and activity behaviors in families, particularly in the home environment. In partnership with co-investigator Professor Debra Haire-Joshu, Tabak recently received a $3.3 million NIH grant to prevent weight gain and chronic disease among mothers through a partnership with Parents as Teachers.

Tabak’s work examines how key stakeholders, including researchers, advocates, and policymakers, affect how research evidence is transformed into programs and policies. She also evaluates the effect of worksite policies and environments on worker health behaviors.

At the Brown School, she is a faculty scholar for the Prevention Research Center, the Center for Diabetes Translation Research, and the Envolve Center for Health Behavior Change.
OUR VISION

To create positive social change through our path-breaking research and educational excellence.

OUR MISSION

To educate and prepare future social work and public health leaders in areas of policy, practice and research.

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To pioneer research and apply results to impact policy and practice locally, nationally and internationally.

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To collaborate with organizations to use evidence to improve access to and quality of social services and to address social and economic justice.

Founded in 1925, the George Warren Brown School was named with a generous gift from Betty Bofinger Brown in memory of her late husband.

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