Advancing Social, Economic and Health Equity through Global Research Initiatives
Dear Friends,

Just as our faculty, students and staff are eager to drive positive change in our city, region and nation, we have many in our community who are passionate about making an impact across the world.

Included in this publication is a selection of the research, studies and initiatives of Brown School social work and public health scholars aimed at advancing social, economic and health equity on a global scale.

In addition to leading their own research portfolios, our faculty are committed to sharing their knowledge with the next generation of global leaders. They lead field-based courses internationally, train our masters and doctoral students to assist in worldwide research initiatives, and help those students with interest in international work to find unique and challenging practicum placements.

The sustained effort by Brown School faculty and leadership to expand and align our global programs is meant to advance the School as a leader in social development and public health, especially in resource-constrained global contexts.

We hope you will engage and join us in our efforts.

Sincerely,

Mary M. McKay

Mary M. McKay
Neidorff Family and Centene Corporation Dean of the Brown School
For more than 25 years, the Brown School’s Center for Social Development has been pioneering programs around the world to create asset-building accounts for children to improve their chance for life success.

Led by Michael Sherraden, founding director of CSD and George Warren Brown Distinguished University Professor, CSD has defined this policy direction, conducted innovative research and used the findings to advance the creation of child development accounts in the U.S., the United Kingdom, South Korea and other nations, most recently in Israel.

“Universal accounts for children lead to increased asset holding, and also to better parenting, higher educational expectations, and improved social-emotional development of children,” Sherraden said.

In 2015, Israel’s parliament passed a law funding long-term savings accounts for all newborns, based on a proposal developed by Michal Grinstein-Weiss, associate director of the CSD and also a professor at the Brown School. Grinstein-Weiss worked closely with government leaders and other social policy experts for over a decade to help propose and pass the law, including organizing multiple conferences and expert delegations to raise the idea. She collaborated with executive leadership at Israel’s National Insurance Institute, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Finance.

“Passing the law is a great step toward advancing social and economic mobility of children in Israel and giving them a financial head start once they reach adulthood,” Grinstein-Weiss said. “The infrastructure of the child allowance is a powerful platform to deliver these accounts and can serve as a model for other countries.”

Sherraden said the aim of these accounts is to be fully inclusive.

“The large purpose of asset building research at the Brown School is assets for all. We aim to inform a fully inclusive policy, with accounts for everyone, starting at birth, with automatic deposits, and greater subsidies for the poor.”
Professor Carolyn Lesorogol began her work in Kenya 30 years ago, when she studied there as an undergraduate. At the time, the nation was recovering from a drought.

“I was very impressed by people’s ability to survive with relatively little assistance,” she recalled. Lesorogol realized that the strength of the community was key, and she’s been working ever since to build on that knowledge and improve the lives of Kenyans.

Her primary projects have undertaken ethnographic research about processes of land privatization and the effects of land-use choices on livelihoods and social relations, including using computer models to show over time how those choices affect food, income, households and the environment.

A second focus has been working with a community association to introduce highly productive dairy goats to improve food security, income and nutrition. The project started with 30 households and Lesorogol hopes to expand the program, which translates into better futures, particularly for children.

“If you have more food and income, you can meet other needs such as education and health,” noted Lesorogol, who is also the Brown School’s associate dean for global strategy and programs. In that role, she coordinates international practica and field-based courses for graduate students, most recently in focusing on refugee assistance and assimilation in Germany and community engagement practices in Tanzania.

“At the Brown School, we have a mission of supporting vulnerable populations around the world,” she said. “We aim to use research results to inform policies and practices that improve the lives of people around the world.”
SMART AFRICA CENTER FOCUSES ON CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH

Led by Mary McKay, Neidorff and Centene Corporation Dean of the Brown School, and Brown School Professor Fred Ssewamala, the NIMH-funded SMART Africa Center (Strengthening Mental Health and Research Training) is a transdisciplinary enterprise aimed at reducing child mental health gaps in service and research in Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda.

Context-specific influences within African nations — such as high levels of stigma associated with mental health, skepticism of professional responses to mental health challenges, high rates of poverty, and health epidemics including HIV/AIDS — increase the prevalence of serious mental health needs. These challenges, coupled with mental health policies being at their early stages of implementation, impede capacity to provide adequate services. Attempts to scale up evidence-based practices have rarely been undertaken.

In July 2016, SMART Africa launched its first annual Conference on Child Behavioral Health in Sub-Saharan Africa in Kampala, Uganda. This widely-attended conference brought together academics, researchers, policymakers, programmers, NGO leaders, students, early career professionals and community members to create service models to better serve the youth population. A subsequent 2017 conference in Uganda has sustained the momentum for change.
A three-year research project, led by Brown School Professor Rodrigo Reis, aims to enhance the understanding of how the built environment influences the physical activity of older adults in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Curitiba, Brazil.

The project engages an international, multi-disciplinary team of researchers drawn from the fields of public health, geography, planning and management, as well as a range of key stakeholders promoting this policy agenda in Brazil, the United Kingdom, and around the world.

The team is developing evidence for the improvement of physical activity and well-being of older adults in both cities. The project will also advance policy tools, with the overall aim of assisting active aging in place.

The research focuses on:
- Finding solutions that have been implemented in developing countries or low-income communities in developed countries
- Informing policies to implement changes in cities
- Advancing science toward livability in cities

“Solutions can be found many places and applied across cities,” Reis commented. “The issues we are facing in low-income St. Louis communities are the same issues that low-income populations are facing in other developed countries, such as those in Europe.”

“The Brown School has a very interesting role,” he said. “By combining public health and social work, we are better able to address the social determinants of health.”
BOXGIRLS: STRONG GIRLS, SAFE COMMUNITIES

Boxgirls South Africa seeks to build safe communities by strengthening girls and young women in disadvantaged communities through education, leadership development and violence prevention.

Founded by Heather Cameron, the Michael B. Kaufman Professor of Practice in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Boxgirls serves 20 primary schools with evidence-based, after-school programs for fifth-grade girls, as well as community events and parent outreach to build capacity for violence prevention in the wider community. The program is part of a global best practice initiative funded by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and Comic Relief.

In March 2017, Cameron took five Olin Business School students to Cape Town to work on Boxgirls’ marketing and impact strategy as part of Olin’s Center for Experiential Learning practicum. Additional collaborations are planned with impact accelerators and agencies in Cape Town for student and research exchanges.

“The success of sustainable development goals depends on effective grassroots organizations, innovative foundations and government, and impact-oriented university research,” Cameron said. “At the Brown School, with our practice, policy and research strength we contribute to all three at a global level.”
ADVANCING PARENTING RESOURCES AND CHILD NUTRITION IN HAITI

A collaboration between Patricia Kohl and Lora Iannotti, associate professors at the Brown School, hopes to improve parenting and child development in Haiti.

The project created and tested an innovative nutrition and parenting intervention to promote healthy growth and development among young children in an urban slum of Haiti. Mothers participated in peer discussion groups on the themes of positive parenting, water, sanitation and hygiene, and the importance of animal source foods in the diets of young children. Each of the 15 families participating in the pilot study were provided with eggs for 12 weeks.

Kohl’s expertise in parenting and Iannotti’s in nutrition were key to the success of the research. Kohl is the Brown School’s associate dean for social work, and Iannotti is the associate dean for public health.

“It’s the best example of transdisciplinary research I’ve worked on,” Iannotti said. “It’s got all the elements — biology, economics, policy and social development.”

Research assistants and staff at the Brown School, along with the study coordinator, are currently analyzing data on child social development, diet and other health outcomes, as well as the receptivity of parents. They hope to build on favorable results and secure funding to expand the project to more families.

Iannotti and Kohl said the potential for success in Haiti can be translated elsewhere.

“What we’re learning in Haiti is applicable to impoverished communities in the U.S.,” Kohl said.
Key Faculty

Heather Cameron  
Michael B. Kaufman Professor of Practice in Social Entrepreneurship  
PhD, York University, Toronto

An international expert in social innovation, Cameron develops and teaches a transdisciplinary curriculum in social innovation and entrepreneurship, advises students at the masters and doctoral levels, builds career and enterprise pipelines, and pursues research on comparative urban education and development.

She is the founder of several prize-winning social enterprises in the fields of education and sports for community development. Those projects include Boxgirls and Camp Group, a winner of the Google Impact Challenge for its educational tool for refugee children.

She continues to work all over the world as an advisor and evaluator of development and education projects, most recently for the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan, where she has trained teachers and worked to develop a sports and health curriculum for schools. In Germany, Cameron is involved with the RespAct primary school participation and neighborhood cohesion program for the refugee population.

Michal Grinstein-Weiss  
Professor; Director, Envolve Center for Health Behavior Change;  
Associate Director, Center for Social Development  
PhD, Washington University in St. Louis

Grinstein-Weiss is a leading expert and researcher in social and economic development. She 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, most notably in Israel. She has led successful research collaborations with top industry, government and philanthropic partners, including Fortune 500 companies, major foundations and government agencies.

She is currently working with a group of government stakeholders to design an evaluation research agenda around Israel’s new Savings for Every Child law, which provides savings accounts for every newborn. She has held leadership roles with the Brookings Institution and the Clinton Global Initiative and was recently identified as one of the highest-impact social work scholars by Research on Social Work Practice.
Peter Hovmand
Associate Professor of Practice; Director of the Social System Design Laboratory
PhD, Michigan State University

Hovmand is the founding director of the Brown School's Social System Design Laboratory. The lab's research, teaching and practice has a global reach with a specific focus on developing and supporting the development of “communities of practice” in system dynamics to address important social and public health issues. This work emphasizes building a global, collaborative network of system dynamics practitioners to impact local, regional and national policies.

The lab is engaged and leading the advance of science and application of community-based system dynamics in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, China, India, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Panama and Honduras. Topics explored range from reducing maternal and neonatal mortality, to obesity prevention, to redesigning mental health services for adults and children.

Lora Iannotti
Associate Professor; Associate Dean for Public Health
PhD, Johns Hopkins University

Iannotti, an expert in young child nutrition and nutrient deficiencies related to poverty and infectious diseases, has over 10 years of experience working with non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies on nutrition and food security programming and policy in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. She is a scholar at the Institute for Public Health and works on campus-wide initiatives to promote the international engagement of Washington University.

She is currently collaborating with Patricia Kohl, associate professor and associate dean for social work, to develop a parenting intervention in Haiti that addresses nutrition, child development, and water, sanitation and hygiene. Her other research includes the Lulun Project in Ecuador, which studies the effects of eggs on growth and nutrition when introduced early in the complementary feeding period. Iannotti is also researching nutrition and health impacts from improved breeds of goats in the pastoralist community of Samburu in Kenya, in collaboration with Carolyn Lesorogol, professor and associate dean for global strategy and programs.
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 for vulnerable families. Through her research, which is informed by years of clinical practice with children and families, she seeks to close the gap between research and community-based practice.

Her research involves analyses of large datasets to examine how characteristics of parents within the child welfare service system influence parenting, child emotional and behavioral health, and the safety of children. She is currently working to adapt an evidence-based parent training program to increase father participation and improve father-child interactions. She is also collaborating with Lora Iannotti, associate professor and associate dean for public health, to develop a parenting intervention in Haiti that addresses nutrition, child development, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

Carolyn Lesorogol
Professor; Associate Dean for Global Strategy and Programs
PhD, Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis

Lesorogol researches international social development to understand how dynamic social change affects the well-being of families and communities. Using ethnography and mixed methods, she investigates the transition from communal to private land among Samburu pastoralists in Kenya, and its long-term effects on land use, cooperation, social norms and livelihoods. She designs and implements capacity-building community programs, including work with a community association in Kenya introducing a highly productive breed of dairy goats to improve household nutrition and income, in collaboration with Lora Iannotti, associate professor and associate dean for public health.

As an associate dean, Lesorogol leads the Brown School’s efforts to engage students, faculty and staff in issues of global significance. The Global Programs Office supports international practica, international field-based courses, research and global programming at the School. She teaches masters classes in international social development theory and practice and the doctoral course in qualitative research; she also coordinates the International Social and Economic Development concentration in the Master of Social Work program.
Mary M. McKay  
Neidorff Family and Centene Corporation Dean; Professor  
PhD, University of Illinois at Chicago

Working with colleagues in the field, Dean McKay has developed a substantial body of research findings around practices to improve involvement in family-based HIV prevention programs and mental health services for children, youth and families in high-poverty urban areas. Her career in HIV science began with CHAMP (Collaborative HIV Prevention and Adolescent Mental Health Project), a collaborative effort between university and community members to test HIV prevention and mental health promotion approaches in urban, low-income communities. The study began in Chicago and has been replicated in New York City, South Africa, Argentina, Trinidad, Thailand and Indonesia.

Dean McKay’s research also aligns with the SMART Africa Center (Strengthening Mental Health and Research Training in Africa), funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the International Center for Child Health & Asset Development.

Sojung Park  
Assistant Professor  
PhD, University of Michigan

An environmental gerontologist, Park aims to redress disparities in health and well-being in old age by matching aging individuals’ needs and environmental resources. She examines aspects of vulnerability in old age — such as poverty, living alone and chronic medical issues — as risk factors for compromised health and well-being. Her research has examined health, hospitalization and nursing home admission.

Her research in senior housing has been recognized in her home country of South Korea, where she is contributing to policy development on senior housing for low-income older adults. As a policy advisor on housing for the Korean government, she has been involved in research commissioned by the nation’s Ministry of Health and Welfare to develop senior housing models for low-income elders. With her collaborators, she has developed a conceptual framework for a residential care model and is developing a pilot study of low-income senior housing.
Rodrigo Reis
Professor
PhD, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianopolis, Brazil

Reis’s research focuses on physical activity and public health, with a particular interest in community interventions for promoting physical activity, the effect of the built environment and community on health, active transportation and health, and physical activity analysis.

His global work includes projects in Curitiba, Brazil; Belfast, Northern Ireland; and Bogota, Colombia. Other large, multisite studies examine the connections between the built and social environment on physical activity and health outcomes, and the role of urban planning and design on health. Reis also has worked on projects evaluating local and national community-based physical activity projects and policies in Brazil and, more recently, on the factors related to scalability of physical activity interventions worldwide.

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

The founding director of the Center for Social Development, Sherraden has defined and informed a growing body of applied research and policy to promote inclusion in asset building. This work has contributed to the development of Individual Development Accounts and Child Development Accounts in cities and states in the U.S. and in many other countries, including South Korea, Israel and the United Kingdom. The CSD focuses on testing social innovations and taking research evidence to practice and policy.

Sherraden has trained dozens of doctoral graduates of the Brown School, and he uses the CSD to support the development of young faculty members in areas such as smart decarceration, inclusive housing, racial inequality and social mobility, child and youth development, and environment and social development. In recent years, he has co-chaired the national steering committee for the Grand Challenges for Social Work.
Fred M. Ssewamala
Professor; Director, International Center for Child Health and Asset Development
PhD, Columbia University

Ssewamala is engaged in innovative research that informs, develops and tests family-based, savings-led economic and social protection interventions. These interventions aim to improve life chances and long-term developmental impacts — including health, mental health and educational outcomes — for poor and vulnerable children and youth, particularly those impacted by HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. His research engages collaboratively with local institutions including schools, clinics, financial institutions and local governments to ensure scale-up and sustainability.

In 2013, Ssewamala established the International Center for Child Health and Asset Development at Columbia University, to contribute to the reduction of poverty and improvement of public health outcomes for youth and families in low-resource communities, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries. The center supports research, develops training programs and mentorship opportunities, and increases public awareness of asset-based programs. The center moved to the Brown School when Ssewamala joined the faculty in 2017.

Jean-Francois Trani
Associate Professor
PhD, Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris, France

Trani investigates the intersection of mental health, disability, vulnerability and poverty with a focus on field research that informs policy and service design for individuals living in fragile, conflict-affected nations and other low-income countries. Using the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen, he hypothesizes that lack of opportunity or poor conversion factors are linked to the stigmatization of the disabled and other groups, which results in social exclusion and creates mental distress.

He has completed a four-year, quasi-experiment comparing a community-based rehabilitation program of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan to usual care for persons with disabilities. His research has contributed to policy papers of the ministries of Education and Public Health in Afghanistan. He is an editor of ALER, the European Journal of Disability Research and the Revue Tiers Monde. His teaching is linked to his professional experience in global health and international development.
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.

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

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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