

New Interdisciplinary Scholar Networks to build better social welfare research

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Building on the eminent interdisciplinary tradition at the University of Chicago, the School of Social Service Administration has launched a new initiative that will take its multidisciplinary problem-solving approach to a new level. The new Interdisciplinary Scholar Network initiative at SSA will bring together scholars across disciplinary and professional lines to generate innovative and more comprehensive knowledge aimed at addressing some of society's most intractable social problems.

SSA's more than century-long tradition draws from the work of great scholars and practitioners who use a diverse set of lenses to tackle problems [social workers](#) persistently face, such as [poverty](#), violence, homelessness or [mental illness](#). Problems like these are not easily understood from within a single disciplinary vantage point, nor quickly resolved with a limited "toolbox" of interventions. Building on SSA's distinctive tradition, this initiative will convene scholars and leaders across the country to generate more systematic solutions to such problems.

"There is no question that our deeply embedded interdisciplinary culture at SSA will provide a fertile platform from which to launch more robust scholarship yielding greater benefit to society," says Neil Guterman, dean of SSA and the Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor. "And the scholar network vehicle will help catalyze the development and translation of new [scholarship](#) so that it can more readily be put into practice—in the field and in the classroom."

SSA faculty will lead the networks, which will be anchored at SSA and will bring together many of the nation's intellectual and professional leaders in social welfare to generate evidence-based solutions with tangible impact. This past winter, Guterman solicited and received a wide array of proposals from SSA faculty to establish new networks. SSA will provide initial support to launch two of the proposed networks, slated to begin their work during the coming year.

The Employment Instability, Family Well-being and Social Policy Network will enhance the capacity of the field to study employment instability at the lower end of the labor market and to develop and evaluate interventions aimed at reducing employment instability and its effects on children and families. Joined by a steering committee of 12 scholars from the fields of social work, human development, psychology, economics, public policy and sociology, principal investigators Susan Lambert and Heather Hill will organize a broad network of researchers, employers and policy professionals to stimulate research designed to inform both employer practice and public policy. The network's planned activities include convening a conference on conceptualizing and measuring employment instability, awarding pilot research grants, and providing training on the development and evaluation of workplace interventions and law.

The steering committee for this network are scholars from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, Center for Law and Social Policy, Congressional Budget Office, City University of New York, Penn State, University of California Los Angeles, University of Washington School of Social Work, and the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy Studies and SSA. The network will be open to a broad set of affiliates, and in September will solicit members to join the network through an online process.

The STI and HIV Intervention Network will conduct research on the

biological, behavioral and structural factors that heighten vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections and HIV among ethnic minority communities in the United States, and will develop and evaluate interventions to alleviate existing STI/HIV disparities. The network, led by principal investigator Dexter Voisin and co-principal investigators Alida Bouris and Matthew Epperson, will work with 10 scholars representing the fields of social work, psychology, public health, nursing and medicine.

These scholars, from Emory University, Georgia State University, University of Kentucky, University of Maryland, University of Toronto and the University of Chicago Medical Center, will collaborate on new interdisciplinary research projects. The [network](#) also will host research seminars and conferences and provide a centralized platform for faculty, students and community partners interested in addressing STI and HIV prevention among vulnerable communities in Chicago.

"These new scholar networks will connect theory to practice in the highest intellectual tradition of the University, while at the same time linking some of our most influential social welfare researchers with leading scholars across the nation," said Provost Thomas F. Rosenbaum. "I look forward to the creation of a powerful new tradition at SSA."

Provided by University of Chicago

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