

Human ECOLOGY

Overcoming Poverty

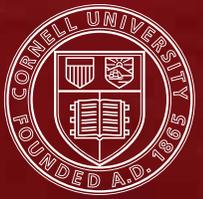


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Healthy Eating + Physical Activity = Healthy Future



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Cornell's College of Human Ecology publishes
this magazine to illustrate how its programs
address complex societal issues to improve
the human condition. This mission of human
improvement is accomplished through faculty
initiatives in research, outreach, and teaching—
with an emphasis on an ecological perspective,
collaborative projects, and multidisciplinary cur-
ricula within and across five academic units: the
Department of Design and Environmental Analysis;
the Department of Fiber Science & Apparel Design;
the Department of Human Development; the Depart-
ment of Policy Analysis and Management; and the
Division of Nutritional Sciences, a unit shared with the
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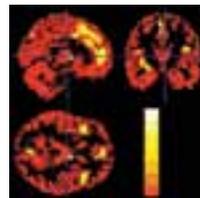
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The challenges of poverty and inequality are global, chronic, and multifaceted, demanding a commensurate response from all sectors of society. Academia, especially, has a vital role to play. Cornell University is internationally recognized for its leadership in research and outreach efforts to reduce poverty and malnutrition around the world, and the College of Human Ecology is an active contributor across many aspects of that portfolio.

Leveraging our core strength of multidisciplinary problem solving, Human Ecology sustains a broad range of programs that examine and address the ecology of poverty. Faculty, students, and extension professionals investigate economic, policy, social, biological, and behavioral aspects of the condition. These programs are integrated and infused with outreach components designed to mitigate impacts on human health and human development, and to strengthen the social and policy frameworks critical to making progress in the future.

Efforts to respond to the contemporary challenges of poverty and related issues are found across Human Ecology's three missions of academics, research, and outreach. This issue of the magazine highlights just a few of them, but taken together points toward the unique and powerful role academia must play in tackling poverty: creating the knowledge base for decision makers and professionals to make a difference in the world today, and empowering and inspiring tomorrow's leaders to dive in and create fundamental change over the course of their lives.

Sincerely,

Alan D. Mathios
Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean
College of Human Ecology

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In Short

Students team up with Nike to study running apparel

Apparel Design Professor Susan Ashdown partnered with Nike Inc. to assess the fit and wear of running shorts and shirts using the College's 3-D body scanner. The students in Ashdown's Anthropometrics and Apparel class conducted the study, which also included collecting data on the study participants' assessments of the apparel for fit, comfort, and appearance. In addition, 10 women took the shorts and shirt home for a weeklong road test and then rated the clothing again for fit and function.

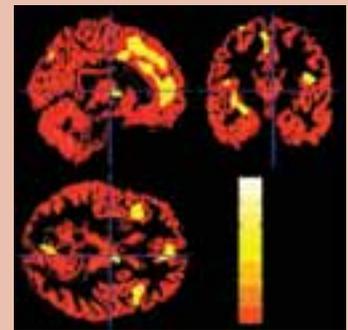


Racial discrimination contributes to mental health problems

A new study by Anthony Ong, assistant professor of human development, found that blacks may, in general, suffer from more mental health problems. Chronic exposure to discrimination and an accumulation of negative daily events places blacks at greater risk for symptoms of depression, anxiety and negative moods, Ong found. The study is one of the first to look at the underlying mechanisms through which racial discrimination affects the mental health of African Americans. It was conducted with Cornell graduate student Thomas Fuller-Rowell and Anthony Burrow, assistant professor of psychology at Loyola University-Chicago. It was published in the June issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

New MRI scanner coming to campus

As part of the Martha Van Rensselaer Hall renovations, Cornell will purchase and install a 3 tesla magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine. Two federal grants totaling more than \$5 million will fund the scanner and renovations required to build a lab space to accommodate the equipment. The project is a collaborative venture between Human Ecology and the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Veterinary Medicine. The imaging device, which should be up and running by fall 2011, will allow researchers to delve into new areas ranging from the biological processes that influence decision-making to prescription drug delivery and tissue engineering.



Webb Bridge, Melbourne, Australia

Geddes to examine Australia transportation on Fulbright scholarship

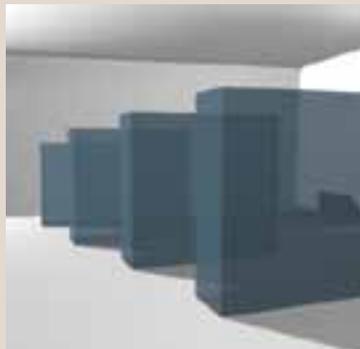
Rick Geddes, associate professor in Policy Analysis and Management, received a 2009 Fulbright U.S. Senior Scholarship to examine the lessons from Australia's use of private investment in financing transportation infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and tunnels. The scholarship, which is administered by the Australian-American Fulbright Commission in Canberra, provided Geddes with research support for six months beginning in July 2009.

Professor gets grant to detect steroid use in athletes

J. Thomas Brenna, Cornell professor of nutritional sciences, has received a \$500,000 grant to fund research on better ways to detect steroids in urine to improve drug testing of athletes for performance-enhancing substances. The Partnership for Clean Competition, a research collaborative founded last year by the National Football League, Major League Baseball, the U.S. Olympic Committee, and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, gave Brenna its first research grant to develop and implement cutting-edge methods to detect previously uncharacterized or unknown designer steroids in urine.

Nanotechnology takes new fibers to market

A new company launched last year uses nanotechnology developed by Fiber Science Assistant Professor Juan Hinestroza for a wide variety of applications including chemical warfare suits, anti-counterfeiting devices, detection of dangerous chemicals, and antibacterial products for the hospitality, law-enforcement, and medical industries. The venture company focused on commercializing this research, iFyber LLC, was launched and funded by KensaGroup LLC in collaboration with the Cornell Center for Technology Enterprise and Commercialization. iFyber LLC uses technology developed through a cross-campus collaboration by Hinestroza and Aaron Strickland, a research associate in the Department of Food Sciences.



Interior design professors develop a new vocabulary

Interior design professors Jan Jennings and Kathleen Gibson launched a new project called the Interior Archetypes Research and Teaching Project, or Intypes, which creates a vocabulary for undocumented and unnamed practices in the field of interior design. The project includes the first-ever searchable, online database for contemporary design with imagery from real buildings. The work is a collaboration of four faculty members from the Colleges of Human Ecology, Arts and Sciences, and Agriculture and Life Sciences

and more than a dozen master's students. Founding partners include the International Interior Design Association and Interior Design magazine. For more information, go to <http://intypes.cornell.edu>.



New York nutrition education celebrates 40 years

The Division of Nutritional Sciences and Cornell Cooperative Extension celebrated the 40th anniversary of conducting nutrition education in New York communities this year. Their outreach efforts began in 1969 with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and quickly grew to be the largest nutrition education program in the country, serving participants in 61 of the 62 New York counties. In 1996, Eat Smart New York began in five counties. Since then, it's been expanded to 49 counties and New York City. Over the years, nutrition educators have reached 1.3 million program participants with nutrition education.

Learning a second language is good for kids' minds

Teaching young children how to speak a second language is good for their minds, according to a new report by Barbara Lust, professor of human development and director of the Cornell Language Acquisition Lab. A study by Lust and Sujin Yang, former postdoctoral research associate at the lab, found that children who learn a second language can maintain attention despite outside stimuli better than children who know only one language.



New grant explores link between diet and aging

Shu-Bing Qian, assistant professor of nutritional sciences, has received the Ellison Medical Foundation's New Scholar Award for his work on how diet affects the aging process at the molecular level. Qian will receive \$400,000 over four years to investigate how nutrient signaling and stress pathways are related. The foundation supports basic biological research in aging relevant to understanding aging processes and age-related diseases. Qian studies the relationship between a cell's ability to sense the existence of nutrients and its ability to regulate the protein products. Qian has also won a five-year, \$1.5 million NIH Director's New Innovator Award to study the accumulation of misfolded proteins in cells, a leading cause of neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's disease.

Study finds money can't buy weight loss

A study by John Cawley, associate professor of policy analysis and management, found that cash rewards did not motivate obese people to lose much weight. Cawley and graduate student Joshua Price evaluated data on 2,407 obese employees who participated in worksite health-promotion programs that rewarded weight loss with cash payments. The majority of the obese volunteers in the study dropped out within a year. And the average weight loss of those who stayed in the program was only three to five pounds higher compared to people who received no cash

payments. The findings are published as a working paper issued by the National Bureau of Economic Research.



Researcher discovers pathway with implications in obesity

Nutritional Sciences Professor Ling Qi has discovered how two related proteins and their roles in a key molecular pathway are critical to creating obesity-causing fat cells. His paper on the topic was published in the June 3 issue of the journal *Cell Metabolism*. Targeting these proteins could lead to drug therapies to fight obesity. The study was funded by Cornell, the American Federation for Aging Research, the American Diabetes Association, and the National Institutes of Health.



Faculty from across the college discuss the dimensions of poverty from their varied perspectives.

Exploring the Ecology of Poverty

There are more than 37 million people in America living in poverty and many more who don't make enough money to cover basic expenses such as food and housing. The phenomenon has wide-ranging impacts on families, communities, the health care system, the national economy, and more.

Faculty from across the College of Human Ecology—including experts in economics, nutrition, psychology, and demographics—are examining the causes and effects of poverty for individuals, communities, and society as a whole.

This fall, Dean Alan Mathios called together a group of Human Ecology researchers to discuss the multidimensional aspects of poverty and what the college and our nation can do to alleviate the problem. John Lamson, the college's assistant dean for communications, moderated the discussion. The following are excerpts from their conversation:

Q: From your perspective, are problems with poverty today lessening or worsening?

Mathios: Real household income has risen dramatically over the past 40 or 50 years, though there was significantly slower growth in the last two decades. But it is also important to note that there are more women working full-time, so it takes a greater number of workers to generate that income.

Evans: One thing that is clear is that poor people are falling behind the average American, so while income is rising, things are looking worse and worse for the poor.

Olson: Right now, one in nine Americans participates in what used to be called the Food Stamp program. That is unbelievable. And 45 percent of infants born in the U.S. are born to mothers who participate in the Women, Infant, and Children nutrition program, which means their families are earning less than 185 percent of the federal poverty line. So this says to me that there are large numbers of Americans who are struggling to meet their needs for the basics in life, such as food.

Q: Our governments sponsor programs that alleviate the impact of poverty, and also tackle the issue with policies that are meant to address our social framework. What should the balance be, and is there a better way to address the problem?

Pillemer: There are some problems you can throw money at and cure, and poverty is one of them. Look at the impact that the Social Security program has had. We gave senior citizens more money and they stopped being poor.

Evans: That's exactly right. It's an example of a successful experiment. Prior to Social Security, the elderly were poor at the same rate that children under five were. Social Security, which critics called Socialism by the way, came into play and

changed that dramatically. Now there are very few elderly people who live in poverty. People say you can't do anything about poverty. That's rubbish. We did do something about poverty in the elderly.

Mathios: Social Security was a relatively easy sell at the time. When it was passed, the average life span was only slightly greater than 65, and people enter the program at 65, so you were only really supporting them for just a few years. And the worker population was growing very rapidly, so the per-capita tax burden on the population at the time was low. That dynamic has changed dramatically as the ratio of elderly in the program to workers continues to increase. The question is what does supporting that system mean for taxation or debt accumulation? It's not going to be as easy to support the system because of changes in demography.

These are the kinds of issues studied at the Cornell Population Program, which the college is heavily involved in. It is such an important center because it deals with the relationship between health disparities, poverty alleviation, and the fundamental demographic changes that are going to throw all of this up in the air.

Pillemer: I am curious about the interaction between poverty and race.

Olson: People in the United States don't want to talk about race, and I think part of the reason we don't do much of anything about poverty is because many Americans think poverty equals minority.

Evans: But the majority of the people who are poor are actually white. Although if you look at minority populations, a larger percentage of them are poor.

Lichter: And poor white people are far less likely to be living in poor neighborhoods or communities with other poor people.

Olson: They are dispersed in communities, and they are relatively invisible.

Evans: One of the reasons I do my research on rural poverty is that the image that most Americans have of poverty is an inner-city mom on welfare who is African American. I want to help Cornell students realize that they live right in the middle of a very poor area called upstate New York. You can literally go 10 minutes from campus and see what this is about firsthand. It's easy for students, because of all of the demands in their lives, to stay on campus or in Ithaca. It's really interesting and poignant to have students come back and talk about going into a family's home.

Q: I'd like to hear a little more about what your students bring to the table. What questions, concerns or curiosities do they have surrounding the issue of poverty? >>>



Daniel Lichter

Lichter is the Ferris Family Professor of Policy Analysis and Management and director of the Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center. His work has looked at the relationships between family change and poverty, and the extent to which poverty is concentrated geographically.



Christine Olson

Olson is a professor of Nutritional Sciences focused on maternal and child nutrition. Her work led to the development of questions used by the U.S. Census Bureau to assess hunger and food insecurity among U.S. families.



Gary Evans

Evans is the Elizabeth Lee Vincent Professor of Human Development and of Design and Environmental Analysis. A psychologist by training, his research focuses on how poverty and its associated physical environments impact child development.

Olson: I used to teach this course called Nutrition Intervention in Communities: A Global Perspective. It taught how to design nutrition interventions anywhere in the world. One year, the class visited food pantries and soup kitchens in the surrounding communities to conduct interviews. These students, and especially the international students, were just blown away. Many of them had no idea there were people in the United States, around Cornell University, who really couldn't feed themselves.

Pillemer: My research group studies low-wage direct-care workers in the health care industry. When I discuss these studies with students, they are always astonished how people who make so little money and have so few job options are extremely caring, compassionate, and committed to their work. They're amazed that somebody doing this work seems so committed. The students end up being captivated by the interviews they're doing.

Evans: When I describe what Human Ecology is, I tell people two things. Instead of being organized by discipline or background, we're organized by problems or challenges. We bring people together who have similar interests. The other thing that is different about this college compared to other colleges and universities is that all of us are committed to making a difference. We are all scholars who want to understand how things work and create new knowledge, but we want to do that to make a difference. We want to make people's lives better. That radiates through the college. The faculty feel that way, the students pick that up, and some of the students come here because of that. That ethos is related to poverty, but it's much, much bigger than that.

Q: You hear politicians talk a lot about eradicating poverty. Is that a realistic goal? Should that be the goal that researchers, policy makers, and others put out there to shape the direction of the work that you do?

Olson: It's pretty clear that if the U.S. wants to remain a strong, viable country, we have to make it possible for people who are employed and work hard to earn enough money to support themselves. We have to make sure that kids are well-

educated. Those things are governed by policy, so policy changes can influence those things.

The solutions lie in education and economic development. The really tricky piece of this is, more than ever before, we live in a global society. We can decide not to invest in people, but we do it at our peril if we want our U.S. economy to compete on the worldwide stage. Because many other governments make stronger investments in their people, you don't see kids challenged by malnutrition in childhood. You don't see the apathy that comes from being deprived. Those are the attributes that prevent an individual achieving his or her full potential. How we address the development of our population is one of the biggest questions facing the United States of America.

Lichter: In this country, I don't think there's the political will to eradicate poverty. I am often frustrated because we do study after study on poverty. Yet, we don't put what we learn into practice. We have roughly the same poverty rate we had 40 years ago. I don't think there's a real political will to reduce poverty.

Evans: It comes from our cultural background. We have an abiding faith in individualism in the United States. If you're poor, it's your fault. If you're not successful, it's because of something you did.

But there's this faith in America—a lot of it has to do with our history and the American story—that you can pull yourself up by your boot straps. Half of the kids are born into families that don't have any boots. For a lot of reasons, people don't seem to understand the perspective that we're all in this together. And if part of the chain is weak, we're all weak. And if all parts of the chain are strong, we're all strong.

Lichter: If you look at studies that ask people why they think people are poor, it's almost evenly split between structural problems, like lack of jobs or underfunded schools, and personal attributes, like laziness or drug problems. The interesting thing is the poor are more likely to subscribe to the individual attributes. They've bought into the American dream and equal opportunity even more than other people.



Karl Pillemer

Pillemer is the Hazel E. Reed Professor of Human Development and director of the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging. In addition, he serves as the college's associate dean for outreach and extension. He has studied working conditions of minimum-wage paraprofessionals in the health care industry and currently is helping the college create outreach programs to assist the poor and reduce poverty.



Alan Mathios

Mathios is the Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean of the College of Human Ecology. In his own work, he's examined how food promotion impacts health disparities among the poor. As dean, he has endorsed several multidisciplinary projects that examine poverty, including the Cornell Population Program, which examines the demographics of poverty, and the Institute for Social Science's Persistent Poverty and Upward Mobility Theme Project.

Olson: We are going to get to the point in the United States, in my opinion, where we are not going to have a capable workforce of the size we need to sustain economically viable industries that can compete on the global stage—unless we start investing in our people. I do think these years we're in now are critical.

Q: If you had two minutes with President Obama and be agreed to grant you one wish, what would you ask him for?

Olson: I don't know that there is one thing, but I do think investing in education, making every school a good school, giving every kid a chance, is essential. I think it's important that parents be trained to do meaningful work, and that these jobs pay a living wage.

Lichter: You also have to focus on more than the supply side. The old joke is that you can give people a great education, but then you're just going to have a more highly educated group of poor people.

Evans: To me, we need something like Social Security for children and families. If we had a lobby group for children with the power and influence of the American Association of Retired Persons, things would look a lot different. That is how I would try to talk to Obama. We need people to get together to support this segment of society.

Mathios: This debate has been part of the food stamp program for a long time. Many would argue, why not give people income instead of vouchers to buy food? There's a sense that people would use the money for things the government doesn't want to subsidize.

Pillemer: How much of the issue would be resolved if we could get people to stay married and prevent out-of-wedlock births?

Lichter: That wouldn't do it. I did a study where I asked what would happen if black women stayed in school, got a job, got married, and had a child—in that order. And I found that they would still have poverty rates over twice as high as other Americans.

Q: Thinking about Human Ecology specifically, and maybe Cornell a little more broadly, is there something more or different we should be doing, or is there a particular contribution we can make to this challenge?

Mathios: The built environment and its relationship to poverty—the work done by Gary [Evans] in DEA—is a unique approach. He's looking at noise, crowding, housing quality, and how all of that impacts the cycle of poverty. That's a unique aspect of our college contributing to this.

The other unique aspect is the Division of Nutritional Sciences and their work in the role that fundamental nutrition plays in creating health disparities. To have a nutritional sciences program with such an extensive outreach component is unique.

Olson: The way I think about this question is through something Gary [Evans] said to me once: if we really want to change the world, maybe the way to do it is through our undergraduates. The ecological model, the ability to see a problem like poverty from multiple levels—from the individual level, to the community level, to the societal level—if we could help our undergrads develop that kind of framework for thinking about poverty, that would ultimately have an impact on the world. I think it's a really important thing to do. ● ● ●



Richard Burkhauser's research on nearly every aspect of U.S. poverty policy—income inequality, minimum wage, welfare reform, health care, and Social Security—has turned up some surprising facts.

A Card-Carrying Capitalist Tackles Poverty

It's 8:55 a.m. on a bright Tuesday morning in September. Professor Richard Burkhauser is standing at the front of Call Auditorium in Kennedy Hall watching students file into Economics 1110: Introductory Microeconomics. For those who arrive early, the Bugs Bunny cartoon "The Rabbit of Seville" is playing on the main auditorium screen, a throw-back to cartoon previews that played at movie theaters during Burkhauser's childhood.

The professor is dressed patriotically in a navy blue suit, a red-striped shirt, and a red tie—fitting attire for the day's lecture, where he will make the case that low- and middle-income Americans have done better economically over the past 30 years than most people believe.

On a side screen, there is a question asking students if they've registered with the course's web site. Everyone who enters class receives a clicker they can use to answer questions that Burkhauser poses. The professor uses the technology to take attendance in the 400-person class and also to engage the large class directly.

At 9:05 a.m.—the period's official start-time—377 students have answered the first question, and Burkhauser is ready to launch into his lecture.

Some policies do more harm than good

In a field where most academics fall solidly on one side of the political spectrum, Burkhauser stands in the nearly-vacant middle ground between conservatives and liberals. An economist trained at the University of Chicago, he calls himself a card-carrying capitalist. But he applies those principles to what most would consider the liberal issues of poverty, income inequality, and policies that impact vulnerable populations.

"This is a great country," he said. "I think we've got it right in valuing individual liberty, and I think private markets do a pretty good job of allocating resources. Yet I also believe that no American who works hard and plays by the rules should be poor and that it is our responsibility through government policy to reduce such poverty. However, in doing so, we need to recognize that not all programs that claim to help the poor actually do. Too often the unintended consequences of government policies do more harm than good."

Over the past 30 years, Burkhauser has conducted research on nearly every aspect of U.S. poverty policy, including income inequality, minimum wage, welfare reform, health care, and Social Security. He's worked for the United States Information

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Agency, the United Nations, the renowned Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, and as a professor at Vanderbilt and Syracuse universities.

The core of his work focuses on a single question, which he explains like this: “There will always be low-income people in the United States. The question is, what do we know about them and what’s the best policy in the long run to improve their economic lives?”

Middle is moving up

At the start of the Microeconomics lecture, Burkhauser displayed several questions for the class to answer with their clickers. First, he asked students to guess what their families’ household incomes are, and then he compared their answers with the national distribution. Twenty-eight percent of the class said their parents earn more than \$250,000 a year, compared to only 2 percent across the nation.

“You have made a wise decision in your choice of parents and there’s nothing wrong with that,” he told the class. “But it’s important to know where you and your family fit relative to the rest of the United States distribution. From that perspective, you are now ready to learn about the economic system that created that distribution and the reasons for it.”

Then Burkhauser asked a series of questions that got at two central points: whether students believe that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer; and whether the gains to African Americans and single women have been larger or smaller than average. According to their answers, most students believed that the poor are getting poorer. The class was split 50/50 on the questions about African Americans and single women.

With that foundation, the professor launched into his lecture. He explained a statistical measure of income inequality and demonstrated how poverty rates rise and fall with the business cycle. He talked about a glitch in the way the U.S. Census Bureau officially counts income.

And then he got to his main point: a series of graphs that show the number of middle-income people shrinking in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, and the number of upper-income people growing.

“Where are people in the middle going?” he asked the class rhetorically. “They’re moving up! All of those people who used to be bunched around \$30,000 a year are now on average making \$50,000 a year adjusted for inflation. But they are much more spread out around this higher average. Yes, there is an increase in inequality. But that’s because people are getting unequally richer. Is this a bad thing? Despite what is often asserted, the vast majority of people—black or white, single mothers included—are considerably better off today than they were 30 or even 20 years ago.”

Get the facts straight

When you ask Burkhauser who he admires, he quickly names former U.S. Senator Pat Moynihan—a renowned sociology scholar and long-time public servant. Moynihan was known for his saying “in policy analysis, you can have

your own opinions, but not your own facts.” Or, as Burkhauser says, to do policy, you need to first get the numbers right.

“I care as deeply as anyone else about poverty,” Burkhauser said. “But in my view, too many people who care about poverty don’t actually understand its root causes and how to address them.”

“There will always be low-income people in the United States. The question is, what do we know about them and what’s the best policy in the long run to improve their economic lives?”

—Richard Burkhauser

A prime example Burkhauser points to is the minimum wage debate. His work on the topic—which argues that increasing the minimum wage is not an effective way to help the poor—has been quoted extensively in the national media including the *Wall Street Journal*, National Public Radio, and the *Boston Globe*.

To him, the issue comes down to a simple supply-and-demand equation. If you raise the minimum wage, some low-skilled workers will lose their jobs and others who would be willing to work at this higher wage will not be able to find employment.

Burkhauser and Joseph Sabia, a Cornell doctorate graduate currently teaching at American University, have found no relationship between state minimum wage increases and subsequent drops in state poverty rates. Their paper was published in the journal *Contemporary Economic Policy* in 2007.

Another analysis by the duo shows that most workers who would gain from increasing the current federal minimum wage to \$9.50 per hour, a policy President Obama pledged to accomplish while he was running for election last year, do not live in poor families. Forty-two percent live in families in the top half of the income distribution and only 23 percent live in poor or near-poor families. This paper is scheduled to be published in an upcoming issue of the *Southern Economic Journal*.

Given these numbers, Burkhauser argues that “some supporters of the minimum wage seem more interested in symbolically helping the working poor than focusing on programs that do help them. This is especially unfortunate since programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit do help the poor and could even more if expanded.”

Top-coding obscures picture

Another topic that has recently piqued Burkhauser’s passion for accuracy is a little-known survey technique called top-coding.

To maintain the anonymity of rich survey respondents in its public data sets, the U.S. Census Bureau groups together households that report income above a set level and assigns them a single income, or a top-coded value. For instance, before 1995, those earning \$1 million or more annually were given the same top-coded value of \$1 million, even though most earned much more.

This practice, on average, greatly understated the income of the richest Americans. So in 1995, rather than simply assigning a top-coded value, the Census Bureau began to assign the mean value of all the incomes that were top-coded. Since this average value was far higher than the previous top-code, it suddenly appeared that the richest Americans were

earning much more than before. But the only change was that the government began more accurately reporting their income.

“People comparing changes in income inequality in years before and after 1995 will confuse an increase in income inequality with an improvement in the way income is measured,” Burkhauser said. “Prior to 1995, income inequality was much greater than we realized, but inequality has been growing at a much slower rate than we originally thought.”

Burkhauser’s paper on the issue—written with Shuaizhang Feng, a Cornell doctorate graduate currently at Princeton University; Stephen P. Jenkins of the University of Essex; and Cornell graduate student Jeff Larrimore—was published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in September.

Inconsistent top-coding also causes measurement problems in other areas. Because women, African Americans, and those without

college educations are “top-coded” at lower rates than men, whites, and those with college educations, previous comparisons of the earnings gaps between them are inaccurate as well. These findings are reported by Burkhauser and Larrimore in the August 2009 issue of the *Monthly Labor Review*.

“Our findings suggest that the wage gap between women and men, between blacks and whites, and between high school and college graduates is larger than people think,” Burkhauser said.

Economics is powerful lens

In Burkhauser’s eyes, economics provides a powerful lens to explain the behavior of groups of people. He uses it in his research and in his teaching, and also in establishing his personal views on poverty policy.

He is currently working with colleague Kosali Simon, an associate professor in Policy Analysis and Management, on a project that will take into account the value of employer- and government-provided health insurance when measuring income inequality and poverty levels.

Burkhauser believes official government statistics should include the value of these resources, as well as other in-kind transfers like food stamps, when calculating income. Doing so would likely reduce reported levels of inequality and poverty, he said.

However, he and most other poverty scholars believe the government should also raise the official poverty line to take into consideration economic growth. (Since its establishment

in 1964, the poverty line has only been increased to offset inflation.) This would increase the level of measured poverty.

Burkhauser is a fan of welfare reforms passed in 1996, which he contends truly changed the system by making it possible and profitable for single mothers to work. The changes included limiting welfare payments to five years, setting up systems that supported working parents, handing over management of the welfare program to the states, and dramatically increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit. They resulted in fewer people using the welfare system, more work, more income, and less poverty for single mothers and their children.

“What we learned from welfare reform is that giving people money without some bridge to work locks them into a culture of poverty,” he said. “Making work pay via government subsidies is the way to directly improve the lives of the working poor in the short run.

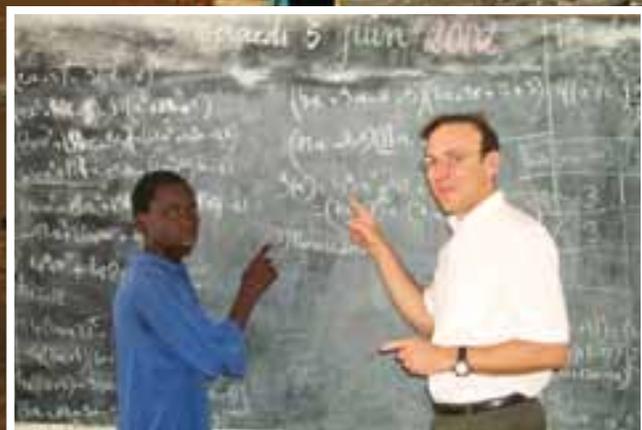
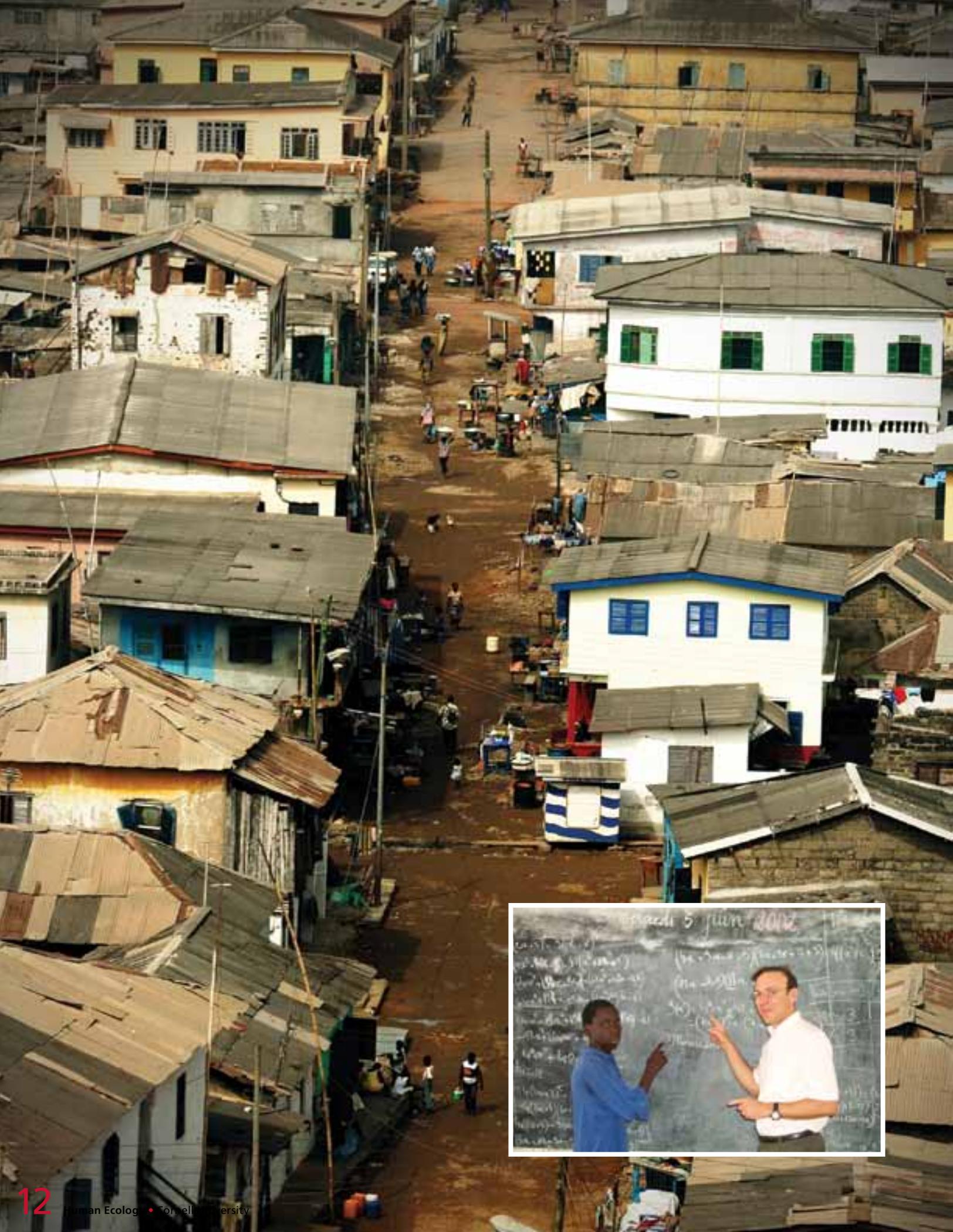
“In American society, the root cause of poverty is the inability to bring something of value to the labor market,” he said. “The best thing this country can do to ensure the long-term success of poor children is to provide them with access to the things that will make them productive in our society—and that’s education and training. Tax dollars spent wisely on effective education and

training will increase worker productivity and hence overall economic growth. But in deciding in which programs to invest our tax dollars, it is important to distinguish those that do good from those that simply create the perception that we are doing good.” ● ● ●



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Professor David Sahn and colleagues use in-depth surveys to delve into the economics and environments that perpetuate poverty in developing nations.

Going Deep for Data in Africa

When Professor David Sahn designs a household survey to examine the causes of poverty in Africa, he collects more information from the participating families than most Americans share with their family members and closest friends.

Sahn enlists the expertise of developmental psychologists, education specialists, health professionals, sociologists, and African academics to create in-depth questionnaires that enable him to formulate complex economic models of behavior crucial to understanding the impact of policy and programs on the well-being of the poor.

Many of the surveys that Sahn designs and conducts involve African information collectors, or enumerators, who spend many hours, often over two to three days, with the households randomly selected to be included in the study.

“The families are incredibly cooperative,” Sahn said. “Can you imagine someone coming to your house to spend three days and ask you all of these personal questions? The result is that we are able to collect a lot of in-depth, high-quality data, which at least relative to survey research in the U.S., is done at a very low cost. So we can take a look at complex behaviors and decision-making patterns in these families that would be prohibitively expensive in developed countries.”

The technique illustrates Sahn’s sweeping approach to poverty research. For more than 20 years, he has investigated the causes of poverty, hunger, and deprivation in developing countries along with the impact of policies and programs designed to improve living standards.

An economist in the Division of Nutritional Sciences, his work focuses on malnutrition and disease, but also extends to broader issues including education and economic well-being. Sahn is the director of the Cornell Food and Nutrition Policy Program (CFNPP), which seeks to determine how policy changes impact welfare and living standards in developing countries.

For a typical household survey, Sahn will send two or more enumerators to each household, generally making sure that males and females are interviewed by someone of the same gender. They make observations and ask questions in the local languages, many times asking questions in several ways or to several household members over the course of the survey to make sure the information is accurate.

Along with their efforts to gather accurate information on outcomes such as schooling and cognition, health and nutritional status, incomes and labor market outcomes, the enumerators collect community-level data on the local schools, health centers, and economy activity. That information enables Sahn to understand the impact of policy and intervention programs on behaviors and a range of living standards.

“We are working in complex environments where there are many factors that go into people’s behaviors and decisions,” he said. “When you start > > >

intervening in people's lives, the assessment of what is a good program or policy changes dramatically when you broaden the lens you're using to examine it. There is no such thing as a simple solution, especially in environments where unintended consequences and what economists refer to as externalities often play a significant role."

From children to young adults

Assessing whether programs designed to alleviate poverty and improve health and nutrition actually work is a central focus of Sahn's work. A concrete example is his research in Madagascar and Senegal. It is the final stage of a longitudinal study that examines the impact of family background, as well as a range of policies and programs on health, education, fertility, and labor market outcomes.

The young adults in the study were first surveyed in the early 1990s, when they were beginning primary school. Sahn returned to survey the same children when they were between 13 and 15 years old. (By then, one-third had dropped out of school and more than half had repeated a grade.) Now Sahn is leading a team that will follow up with the group next year, when participants will be 19 to 21 years old. This round of the study is funded by the Agence Inter-Etablissements de Recherche pour le Développement (AIRD), the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

"When we first tested the kids, we wanted to know as much as possible about their schooling, cognitive skills, and their family and community environment," Sahn said.

"This time, many in the survey will have left their parents' homes, transitioned into the labor market, and even started new families. We're collecting all of the information we can about their lives today," he said. "Are they healthy? Do they have jobs? Are they married? Do they have children? Are their children healthy? A lot of my time is spent thinking about the right questions to ask. This round is exciting and fascinating because we're able to explore, for example, the impact of early childhood conditions and interventions on the transition into adulthood."

Environments must change

The Madagascar and Senegal study is just one example of research conducted by Sahn and other faculty in the CFNPP. Over the past several years, the group has delved into the relationships among crime, poverty, and geographical isolation in Madagascar; socio-economic determinants of children's health in Russia; the determinants of infant mortality rates in a cross-section of countries; and the links between the demand for health care and the consumption of food and leisure in Vietnam.

In more than 20 years of conducting poverty research in developing countries, Sahn has worked with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, several United Nations agencies, the World Bank, and the

International Monetary Fund. Over time, he has drawn a few general conclusions about the best ways to help the poor.

"If you look at progress that has been made in the well-being of the poor, the evidence is quite mixed," he said. "Of greatest concern to me is the relatively slow rate of improvement in most indicators of health and education in

sub-Saharan Africa. The money spent by the development community has yielded returns that are not very impressive.

"Improving the design and choices in terms of the public provision of health and education services and anti-poverty programs does make a difference at the microlevel. To do so, we need more research and evaluations of what works,

—David Sahn

why, and where," he said.

Sahn believes that the only sustainable solution is to change the environments in which people live. "You accomplish that by promoting economic growth through improving human capital and physical infrastructure, and increasing people's income. That's still at the heart of the issue," he said.

Sahn does his best to contribute to those efforts through his work to improve capacity of African researchers in academia and government. He's active in the African Economic Research Consortium, an international nonprofit group focused on strengthening capacity of Africans and promoting evidence-based policy-making.

"I'm very involved in providing training and mentoring to African economists," he said. "It's so incredibly valuable and rewarding because they are better able to define the problems and formulate sustainable solutions. The people I work with end up in important positions in African universities and government agencies, and they're training the next generation of African scholars and researchers. That's going to be critical to improving the lives of the millions of Africans who remain mired in poverty." ● ● ●

David Sahn

Sahn received a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Michigan and went on to earn his doctorate degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Before coming to Cornell in 1988, he worked as an economist at the World Bank and as a research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute.



For more information:

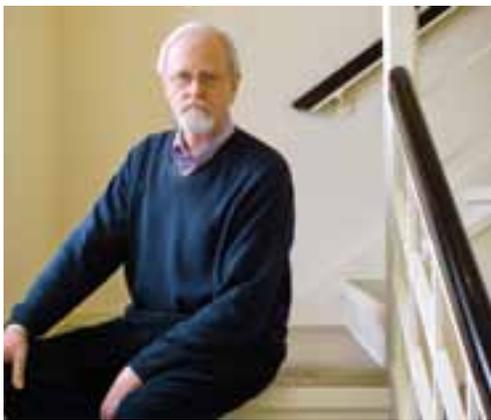
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Training Grad Students to Tackle Food Systems and Poverty Problems

Although farming and food distribution improvements have increased the quality of life in Asia, Europe, and North America, 2.6 billion people still live on less than \$2 a day and suffer from chronic extreme poverty.

A new interdisciplinary program funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) will train a cadre of graduate students, including students from the Division of Nutritional Sciences, to tackle food systems and agricultural problems that contribute to extreme poverty.

A five-year, \$3.2 million NSF grant will support 25 Ph.D. students for two years each in the Food Systems and Poverty Reduction Integrative Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT) program, administered through the Cornell International Institute for Food, Agriculture, and Development. The grant is funded through federal stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, intended to spur economic development by expanding educational opportunities, among other things.



Per Pinstrup-Andersen

Open to U.S. citizens and permanent residents, the program will begin in August 2010 with more than 20 graduate fields participating. The curriculum will include a seminar series; field research in Kenya and Ethiopia to study both highland and dryland agricultural systems in collaboration with partners at Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia and the International Livestock Research Institute; and a three-semester core course sequence that takes interdisciplinary approaches to addressing such problems as water shortages, climate change and vulnerability to food systems, soil degradation, pests and diseases, and food supply chains.

“The idea behind the program is to expose students to different disciplinary approaches to the same problem,” said



Chris Barrett

Chris Barrett, the Steven B. and Janice G. Ashley Professor of Applied Economics and Management in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the program’s principal investigator. “If you are tackling issues related to pests and disease, for example, a food scientist’s approach will be different from that of a plant pathologist or an entomologist.

Students will also learn to use and link together new concepts and computer modeling techniques applied by different disciplines for more integrated and dynamic insights on these issues. For example, if researchers want to study problems of maintaining a small but productive farm, they must integrate information on soils, crop selection, fertilizer use, livestock, water management, and more.

A seminar series will include talks by Cornell and other food experts. During weeks between those talks, professional development seminars will teach students such skills as how to write grant proposals, make effective presentations, manage data, uphold research ethics, and work in a multicultural field setting.

“Some of the biggest challenges facing society revolve around poverty, food, and the environment, areas that have been hallmarks of graduate Cornell training for years,” Barrett said. “This program will deepen that training and stitch together interdisciplinary approaches.”

Per Pinstrup-Andersen, the H. E. Babcock Professor of Food, Nutrition, and Public Policy is a co-principal investigator on the grant. Other co-principal investigators include Rebecca Nelson, associate professor of plant breeding and genetics and of plant pathology and plant-microbe biology; Alice Pell, professor of animal science and vice provost for international relations; and Alison Power, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology and dean of the Graduate School.

—KRISHNA RAMANUJAN



Nutrition educators are extending their reach to help more low-income families, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

Cooperative Extension Serves Up Nutrition Education in NYC

Marilyn Waters-Courtney, a community nutrition educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension in New York City, has been educating New Yorkers about how to improve their diets for several decades.

Now, in addition to training low-income families and volunteers who work at soup kitchens, Waters-Courtney is also helping to train dozens of new community educators.

That's because Cornell Cooperative Extension's office in New York City received a \$4.8 million grant this year to educate people who receive assistance under the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly referred to as food stamps, as well as those who utilize and operate soup kitchens and food pantries in the city. In previous years, the office received about \$1 million a year to conduct the same education programs on a smaller scale.

Much of the program's curriculum and training for community educators was developed in conjunction with faculty members in the Division of Nutritional Sciences. Faculty members also conduct site visits to evaluate the curriculum and educational materials.

This year, the program in New York City will educate more than 12,000 families in organized nutrition education courses, plus several thousand more in nutrition demonstrations at food pantries.

To expand their offerings, the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) office has

more than doubled the number of nutrition educators it employs from 35 to 85, and it has opened new offices in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, said Don Tobias, executive director of CCE in New York City.

"We've been doing this program for 13 years," he said. "Last year, the City of New York told us they were impressed with our results. They wanted us to take on some additional responsibilities.

"The idea is to help assistance-recipients make the most of their benefits and to help the soup pantries and food kitchens offer more nutritious meals to their patrons, said Carol Parker-Duncanson, the CCE's program leader for nutrition and health.

"We want to help people stretch their food stamp dollars to make sure they're getting as much nutrition out of them as possible," she said. "We're also trying to build the capacity in the staff of food pantries and soup kitchens, so that they can deliver nutrition education to the people they serve.

"There are many reasons people don't eat healthy foods," Parker-Duncanson said. "Part of it is financial, part is lack of knowledge, and part is cultural habits and patterns surrounding foods. Those are all components we try to address."

Conscientious cooking

On Monday mornings in September and October, Waters-Courtney taught a >>>

nutrition education course to volunteers in the soup kitchen and food pantry at Union Baptist Church in Brooklyn. Twice a week, their soup kitchen serves hundreds of hot meals to community members. The church also has a food pantry that gives out bags of groceries for people to take home.

“Anyone who is hungry is welcome,” said Olivia High, the director and coordinator of outreach programs at the church. “The Bible says you should feed the hungry. When I see all of those people in here eating, I am just so happy.”

Seventeen volunteers from the church signed up for the eight-week CCE nutrition course, which includes lessons on food safety, portion size, and how to read a nutrition label.

In one particularly impactful lesson, Waters-Courtney asked participants to calculate and then measure out the amount of sugar in a variety of beverages. With her hair pulled back in a tidy bun, she embodies the typical teacher persona. And her commanding, bright personality easily pulls her students into the lessons.

“If you just stop drinking one soda a day, by the end of the year you’ll lose a lot of weight,” she told the class. “We take in a lot of empty calories when we don’t pay attention to things like sugar content and serving size.”

The group performed the same exercise looking at the sodium and fat content in a variety of foods, and then they used the church kitchen to prepare a meal together. While the group cooked, Waters-Courtney offered practical tips such as rinsing sodium from canned vegetables and using separate cutting boards for vegetables and meats.

“I’ve got one body, and if I don’t take care of this body, it will break down,” she told them. “Now we’re feeding somebody else, and their lives are in our hands. We need to make sure they have a healthy meal.”

Evidence of change

CCE’s unique curriculum is a major reason why the program has been so successful, Tobias said. And it is a model that has been replicated in cities and states across the nation.

“Thanks to help from the Division of Nutritional Sciences and an innovative staff here, we offer a very hands-on education experience,” he said. “It’s not just a person standing in front of a classroom lecturing. Because of that, we have a very high attendance rate in the classes. They come back, they stay with us.”

Jamie Dollahite, assistant professor of nutritional sciences, is the director of the Food and Nutrition Education in Communities group in the Division of Nutritional Sciences. The group helps to train professional community educators and staff members, develop educational resources, provide technical assistance to programs, and evaluate outcomes for participants in counties across the state.

The group’s contributions begin with the training program for the community educators, said Joan Doyle Paddock, senior extension associate in Nutritional Sciences.

“Many of our community educators haven’t had formal training in nutrition before, because the focus in recruiting is to hire local community members who can relate to the course participants,” she said. “We’ve developed and rolled out a 19-lesson training session that provides them with the latest information on nutrition that is based on scientific research.”

Members of the faculty also conduct site visits and administer surveys to participants in the program.

“We have tremendous support from the Division of Nutritional Sciences that has allowed us to collect really great data about the families we serve,” Tobias said. “We have received a lot of information about how people are changing their behavior because of the program.”

The evaluations involve surveying the participants before and after nutrition courses to ask them about specific behaviors, such as whether they wash their hands before eating or if they use a list for grocery shopping.

“We’re not interested in them just learning the information; we’re looking for them to make behavioral changes,” Doyle Paddock said. “Over the years, we’ve collected a lot of evidence that shows this program really does make a difference.” ● ● ●

Undersecretary of Agriculture Turns to Cornell as a Model of Urban Extension

When Rajiv Shah, the new undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), wanted to see how scientific research helps serve the public in urban environments, he turned to Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) in New York City.

“We are in the process of reimagining what the science agencies can do to help advance the president’s priorities,” Shah said. The USDA is planning to launch the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which will address the issues of food safety, nutrition, and obesity and will be modeled after the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Shah met with Don Tobias, executive director of CCE in New York City; Julian Imperato-McGinley, associate dean of translational research and education at Weill Cornell Medical College; and several CCE staff members this fall to learn about Cornell’s programs serving the metropolitan area.

CCE’s nutrition and health education programs seemed to interest Shah the most, according to Tobias. “He was very interested in the size of the programs and the methods we were using in nutrition education,” Tobias said. “He seemed to be particularly interested in what we were doing in the schools and the Kitchens of Faith community.”

Eighteen churches in New York City have become Kitchens of Faith by completing an eight-session training program emphasizing nutrition. They also participate in regular videoconference sessions in which health care professionals answer their questions.



—Liz Borod Wright

Undersecretary of Agriculture Rajiv Shah, left, meets with Don Tobias, executive director of CCE in New York City, in CCE’s offices on E. 34th St. in Manhattan to learn about Cornell’s programs serving the metropolitan area.

For more information:

nyc.ccextension.org



Mental Health Problems Contribute to Persistent Food Insecurity

When low-income mothers and children suffer from mental health problems, their families are less likely to have consistent access to nutritional foods, according to a new study conducted by researchers in Nutritional Sciences.

Poor mental health is associated with keeping families “food-insecure” over time by preventing the depressed household member from working, preventing other household members from working, and limiting access to childcare for depressed children.

The study was published in the August issue of the *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*. The lead author is Megan Lent '06, a Nutritional Sciences research aide. Other authors include Lindsay Petrovic '07; Josephine Swanson, former assistant dean for extension and outreach; and Nutrition Professor Christine Olson.

The team conducted annual in-depth interviews with 30 low-income mothers in two rural counties in New York over the course of three years.

“We wanted to know about family well-being, including whether families had enough of the right kinds of foods to eat in order to be healthy,” explained Lent. “What we found is that, over the three years, in families who started off food-insecure and ended up food-insecure, the mother was more likely to suffer from depressive symptoms.”

The researchers found that having a high score on the study’s measure of depressive symptoms was related to the persistence of food insecurity.

“This gives us some confidence in suggesting that it is more likely that mental health problems lead to food insecurity than it is that food insecurity leads to mental health problems,” Olson said. “The mechanisms uncovered in the study also support our suggested direction of causality.”

“Depression leads to an inability to participate in the workforce and that keeps people in food insecurity and poverty,” she said. “In rural areas, there is little access to mental health care. People don’t have health coverage or can’t access care due to transportation issues. This makes it hard to maintain employment when you are not feeling well.”

The mothers who participated in the study were surveyed from 2000–2003, but Lent said the results are likely even more relevant now.

“Today, we would probably find fewer people with adequate health care coverage and even higher rates of food insecurity given the economy,” she said. ● ● ●

Working Conditions Impact Family Food Choices

The working conditions of parents in low-income families have a significant impact on the food choices of the family, according to a new study conducted by Carol Devine, a professor in the Division of Nutritional Sciences.

Irregular work schedules, long hours, job dissatisfaction, and lack of access to healthy foods lead parents to coping strategies such as eating take-out meals, missing meals, and serving prepared entrees. Ultimately, parents’ choices impact their children’s diets.

“Long work hours and irregular schedules mean more time away from family, less time for household food work, difficulty in maintaining a regular meal pattern, and less opportunity to participate in family meals,” Devine explained. “This situation may result in feelings of time scarcity, fatigue, and strain that leave parents with less personal energy for food and meals.”

The study found that fathers who worked long hours or had non-standard schedules were more likely to use take-out meals, miss family meals, purchase prepared entrees, and eat while working. Mothers purchased restaurant meals or prepared entrees or missed breakfast. About a quarter of mothers and fathers said they did not have access to healthful, reasonably priced, or good-tasting food at or near work.

These challenges could be alleviated with worksite interventions such as improving access to healthy foods and adapting hours and schedules to give employees more time for healthy meals, Devine said.

The study appeared in the September–October 2009 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. Co-authors include Extension Associate Tracy J. Farrell, Research Aide Margaret Jastran, Associate Professor Elaine Wethington, and Professor Carole A. Bisogni. Also contributing to the study was Christine E. Blake, assistant professor at the University of South Carolina.



Persistent Poverty and Upward Mobility: Project Update

The 10 members of the Persistent Poverty and Upward Mobility Project—including four Human Ecology faculty—have taken up residence in offices at the end of a long corridor in Myron Taylor Hall.

For 20 hours each week, the experts from various disciplines—economics, nutrition, sociology, political science, and others—will work on a campus-wide initiative in Cornell’s Institute for Social Sciences. Their common focus will be investigating “poverty traps” and how to develop better programs that help people escape poverty, both in the United States and in developing nations.

“I immediately saw the possibility of theoretical advances in the way we think about poverty and how those advances can inform interventions on the ground,” said Jordan Matsudaira, a labor economist in Policy Analysis and Management focused on urban poverty and education.

The group has planned a weekly lecture series that features experts from across the nation addressing a wide range of topics that impact the poor, including political representation of the poor, microeconomies across the globe, child soldiering, and city planning. >>>

A new graduate course

Comparative Perspectives in Poverty Reduction Policy

This new course sponsored by the Persistent Poverty and Upward Mobility Project will be offered in spring 2010 and aims to build student awareness and understanding of domestic and international poverty and of policies intended to reduce the incidence and persistence of poverty. The course exposes students to different disciplinary and geographic perspectives on poverty dynamics and socioeconomic mobility and to the evidence on different policy interventions.

They are also hosting two large conferences. On November 16 and 17, experts from across the nation examined the institutions and behaviors that lead to a culture of poverty. And in the spring, a second national conference will focus on intervention programs that invest in poor children.

There is a new poverty-related course being offered to graduate students and the opportunity to develop additional courses based on the group's work this year. Also, faculty members are committed to creating outreach programs that help educate political leaders and the public about the harsh realities of poverty in the United States.

"In complex problems, it's rare that a single investigator or even a team of investigators from a single discipline can come up with a convincing package of findings and present workable solutions," said Christopher Barrett, the Stephen B. and Janice G. Ashley Professor of Applied Economics and Management in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and director of the multidisciplinary project.

For more information: www.socialsciences.cornell.edu

Team members

Front, left to right:

Stephen Morgan, Sociology
Christine Olson, Nutritional Sciences
Daniel Lichter, Policy Analysis and Management and Sociology

Back, left to right:

David Sahn, Nutritional Sciences and Economics
Susan Christopherson, City and Regional Planning
Nic van de Walle, Government
Christopher Barrett, project director, Applied Economics and Management
Christopher Anderson, Government
Matthew Freedman, Labor Economics

Not pictured:

Jordan Matsudaira, Policy Analysis and Management



Calendar

January 26, 2010

Why Poor People Don't Vote: Income, Inequality, and Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective
Chris Anderson, Poverty Team Member and Professor of Government

February 2, 2010

Precarious Employment: Potential Consequences of the Economic Downturn
Susan Christopherson, Poverty Team Member and Professor of City and Regional Planning

February 9, 2010

Improving Job Access and Outcomes: The Ways to Work Program
Matthew Freedman, Poverty Team Member and Professor of Labor Economics

February 11–12, 2010

Moving out of Poverty: The Economic and Environmental Impacts of Programs Aimed at Mitigating Spatial Mismatch

Feb. 16, 2010

Stutter-Step Models of College Entry
Steven Morgan, Poverty Team Member and Professor of Sociology

February 23, 2010

Measuring Mobility with Repeated Cross-Sections
David McKenzie, Development Research Group, World Bank

March 2, 2010

Early Academic Performance, Grade Repetition, and School Attainment in Senegal: A Panel Data Analysis
David Sahn, Poverty Team Member and Professor of Economics in the Division of Nutritional Sciences

March 16, 2010

Democracy and the African Middle Class, in Comparative Perspective
Nic van de Walle, Poverty Team Member and Professor of Government

April 1, 2010

More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City
William Julius Wilson, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

April 13, 2010

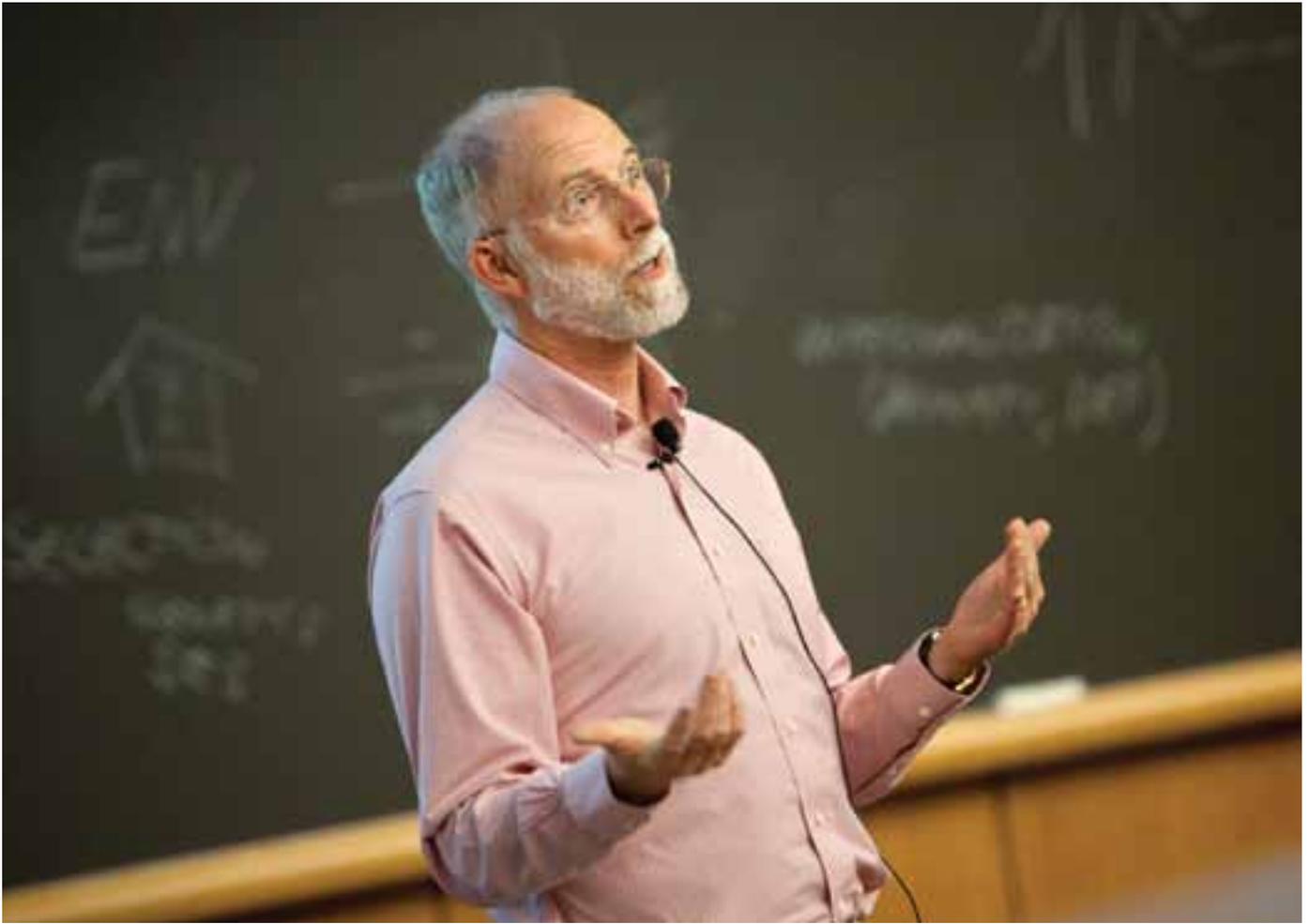
The Wealth Gap between High and Low Castes in India
Seema Jayachandran, Economics, Stanford University

April 20, 2010

Poster Session
Student Research Grant Presentations: Part I

April 27, 2010

Poster Session
Student Research Grant Presentations: Part II



Teaching Students How to Combat Poverty

Professor Gary Evans has given his talk “Why Poverty Is Bad for Kids” to dozens of Human Ecology classes over the past 10 years. A psychologist by training, his research focuses on how poverty and its associated physical environments impact child development.

In the lecture, Evans offers students dozens of statistics showing how socioeconomic status impacts children’s lives. And he presents them in a way designed to force students to think differently about poverty. “The poorer you are, the sicker you are,” he told a class recently. “And that is a linear gradient. Think about what that means. Most likely, Donald Trump has better health than your parents.”

For Evans, the Elizabeth Lee Vincent Professor of Human Development and Design and Environmental Analysis, teaching Human Ecology students about poverty is one very powerful way to combat the problem. “If we really want to change the world, maybe the way we do it is through our undergraduates,” he said.

Students explore the challenges of poverty and inequality in many subject areas taught at the college, including health,

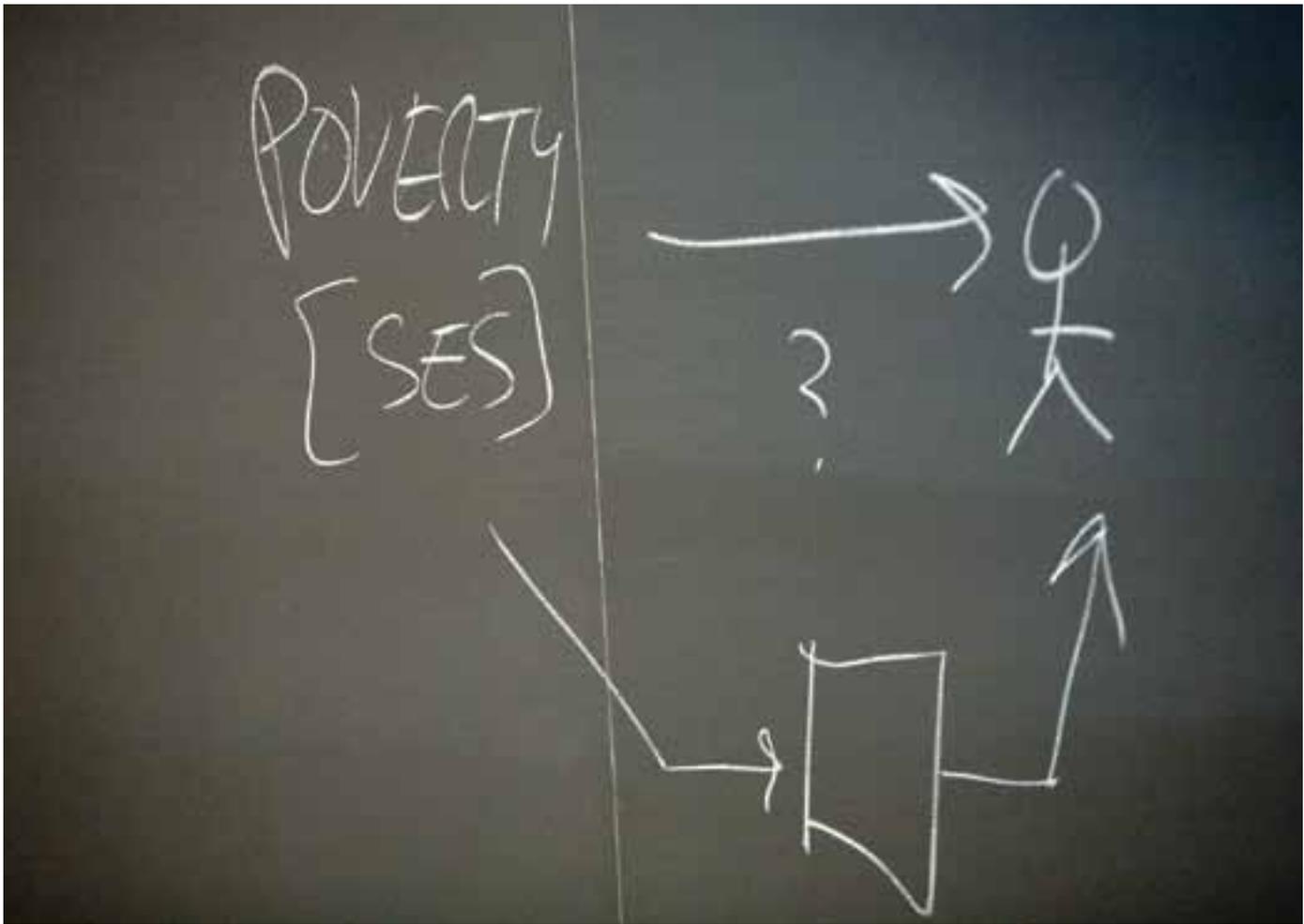
human development across the life course, public policy, economics, sociology, and demography.

Something as complex, systemic, and multifaceted as poverty is best addressed through the multidisciplinary approach to problem solving that Human Ecology is known for, said Alan Mathios, the Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean.

“We want to ensure that our students gain a broad understanding of any problem and how to go about solving it,” Mathios said. “So we investigate the problem and potential solutions within and across different disciplines. This fosters the development of critical and analytical skills that will serve graduates on any path they choose in life.”

One major component of the college’s academic offerings on poverty is the minor in Global Health. The minor is managed by the Global Health Program, a joint collaboration between the Division of Nutritional Sciences and Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City.

It is designed around three specific educational objectives for students: to learn more about the problems of global



health in a classroom setting; to experience the issues in global health first-hand in a field setting; and to see the full career pathway to work in global health. A key component of the program is field experience, in which students live and work abroad in a resource-poor setting.

“There is a lot of cross-cultural learning, as well as experiencing first-hand what it means to live and work in a low-income country,” said Rebecca Stoltzfus, professor of nutritional sciences and co-director of the Global Health Program. This summer, Stoltzfus taught the new Global Health Summer Session Program in Tanzania, which combines academic work with an internship at Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College.

“It’s a very realistic program because if you want to do public health and policy work, you’re going to be working with international students and international policy makers, and having that appreciation early on and the challenges that entails are really important,” said Brenna McGuire ’10, who participated in the Tanzania Summer Session this year.

Many opportunities to learn

In addition to the Global Health Minor, the college offers a wide range of courses that deal with poverty. They include:

Nutritional Sciences

- 2600 Introduction to Global Health
- 3060 Nutrition Problems of Developing Nations
- 4570 Health, Poverty, and Inequality: A Global Perspective

- 4600 Explorations in Global Health
- 6420 Globalization, Food Security, and Nutrition
- 6850 Empirical Methods for the Analysis of Household Survey Data: Applications to Nutrition, Health, and Poverty

Policy Analysis and Management

- 2000 Intermediate Microeconomics
- 3350 Families, Poverty, and Public Policy
- 3360 Evolving Families: Challenges to Public Policy
- 4380 Economics of Public Health
- 4460 Economics of Social Security

Human Development

- 3530 Risk and Opportunity Factors in Childhood and Adolescence
- 3570 Social Inequalities in Physical and Mental Health
- 4570 Health and Social Behavior
- 6910 Poverty, the Life Course, and Public Policy

Design and Environmental Analysis

- 1500 Introduction to Human–Environment Relations ● ● ●

Childhood Poverty Leads to Brain Impairments



Chronic stress from growing up in poverty has a physiological impact on children's brains, impairing their working memory and diminishing their ability to develop language, reading, and problem-solving skills, according to a study by Professor Gary Evans, the Elizabeth Lee Vincent Professor of Human Ecology in the Departments of Human Development and of Design and Environmental Analysis.

The study is one of the first to look at cognitive responses to physiological stress in children who live in poverty. It was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

"There is a lot of evidence that low-income families are under tremendous amounts of stress, and we already know that stress has many implications," Evans said. "What these data raise is the possibility that stress is also related to cognitive development."

Evans and Michele A. Schamber '08, who worked with

Evans as an undergraduate, have been gathering detailed data about 195 children from rural households above and below the poverty line for 14 years. They quantified the level of physiological stress each child experienced at ages 9 and 13 using a "stress score" called allostatic load, which combines measures of the stress hormones cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine with blood pressure and body mass index.

At age 17, the subjects also underwent tests to measure their working memory, which is the ability to remember information in the short term. Working memory is crucial for everyday activities as well as for forming long-term memories.

Evans found that children who lived in impoverished environments for longer periods showed higher "stress scores" and suffered greater impairments in working memory as young adults. Those who spent their entire childhood in poverty scored about 20 percent lower on working memory than those who were never poor.

"When you are poor, when it rains it pours," Evans explained. "You may have housing problems. You may have more conflict in the family. There's a lot more pressure in paying the bills. You'll probably end up moving more often. We know that produces stress in families, including on the children," he said. "We put these things together and can say one reason we get this link between poverty and deficits in working memory may be from this chronic elevated stress."

The findings suggest that government policies and programs that aim to reduce the income-performance gap should consider the stress children are experiencing at home.

"It's not enough just to take our kids to the library," Evans said. "We need to also take into account that chronic stress takes a toll on their cognitive functioning." ● ● ●

Afterword

Investigating Disparities: The North Brooklyn Latino Oral History Project

BY SAM BECK

Through the use of experiential pedagogy, Sam Beck, director of the Urban Semester Program, teaches students ethnographic research methods as they analyze their own internships, medical rotations, and participation in the North Brooklyn Latino Oral History Project. Among other outcomes, this project will develop an archive of audio-visual interviews to preserve the Latino experience in North Brooklyn. The research process is also used to assist partners in community and youth development. Over the course of 15 years, Professor Beck developed partnerships with Churches United for Fair Housing, the Roman Catholic Order of Passionists at Montserrat Church, and Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, who encouraged the project.

The withdrawal of manufacturing and the out-migration of earlier white ethnic populations created the opportunity for the repopulation of North Brooklyn by Latinos (first by Puerto Ricans), post-Holocaust ultra-Orthodox Jews (the Hasidim), and, more recently, Hipsters and luxury housing settlers. This repopulation brought about a new vibrancy in this area of Brooklyn that New York City government virtually abandoned in the 1970s, only to start revitalization in the 1990s.

This process is never merely a movement of a people from one place to another; it most often results in social and cultural demise. Moreover, ethnic neighborhood replacement and community loss generates amnesia of a former group's presence, influence, and impact. Ultimately, the costs of displacement are never determined.

It is easy to focus on the negatives and deficits of low-income communities of color, the norm of inner-city research. It is less common to focus on their assets and the gifts they bring to their community.

Ethnographic research means taking theoretically informed descriptions of socio-cultural processes and phenomena. Within this project is embedded an understanding of Critical Public Anthropology, whose early icon, Margaret Mead, is representative, using ethnographic research methods; ethnographic research with a purpose, to work with vulnerable populations to improve their lives, as Sol Tax from the University of Chicago would have it.

This kind of research facilitates a process by which people raise to the surface their gifts, assets, and visions of the future. They establish strategies for improving their life conditions by identifying the circumstances that stand in their way and developing strategies for eliminating or reducing the disparities caused by these circumstances, a form of socioeconomic, cultural, and political literacy ala Paolo Freire.

Cornell students in the Urban Semester Program incorporate this methodology into a rigorous, 15-credit academic program with a disparities focus. Hence its subtitle, Multicultural Issues in Urban Affairs.

In the process, they gain firsthand exposure and learn about the nature of poverty and the costs that those with low income bear as they are displaced. They discover that kin, family, and neighborhood

networks are interrupted or dissolved, that physical and mental health conditions are exacerbated, and that their continuity of care with health providers is lost.

In the process of getting to know people from North Brooklyn and in their exchange of information and ideas, students reduce and eliminate the irrationality of fearing differences, whether based on ideas about poor people or people of color. They learn that poverty is not a choice that people make, but that it is a condition foisted upon them. They come to realize that under-resourcing neighborhoods is one cause of the social ills found in North Brooklyn.

Through the use of ethnographic methods, the students become conscious of another reality—that poor people have the same desires for decent housing, stable home lives, well-remunerated employment, non-toxic environments, safe communities, and educational opportunities that may lead to social and economic mobility, good health care, and so on.

Students learn that government policies can both harm and improve neighborhoods and either support or undermine communities. They see that some parts of New York City are underdeveloped and underserved as a matter of policy, not just the workings of the supply and demand of an unregulated marketplace. Similarly, they reach an understanding that development, manifested by gentrification, is a result of government policies.

Most importantly, students are able to exercise authentic relationships across differences by directly engaging people in North Brooklyn. They learn to respect people for their willingness to fight for the maintenance of community by organizing efforts and taking their place in civil society. As they interact with people from North Brooklyn, students come to recognize the importance of facilitating a process through which people may lay claim to their own wisdom, community, and neighborhood. ● ● ●





#8

Roller, Ave-Dumra 1959 -60

(7) Mother _____ Father's Macoye

Home: Hosp. Nat. Home, O., Del. by _____

7. Children of _____

8. Age eldest child _____ Age youngest child _____

Date obtained at each visit:

9. Date	June 30, 1960	Aug 1, 1960	Oct 1, 1960	Nov 1, 1960	
10. Age	27 mos	28 mos	30 mos	31 mos	
11. Ht. lbs.	27	33	33	38.6	
12. Ht. cm.	80	85	81	87.6	
13. Chest	43	45.5	47		
14. Head	47	48	48		
15. IC diam.	18	18.5	19		
16. IB	53	55	57		
17. Foods given	DFON	DFON	DFON	DFON	DFON
18. G.Milk					
19. Jm					

Human ECOLOGY

NOTE:

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Cornell nutrition expert Hazel Hauck recorded children's weights, heights, and body measurements for a nutrition study in Africa in the late 1950s. By that time, Cornell home economists were active in many countries, engaging in cooperative teaching and research. Cornell nutritionists used studies such as this one by Hauck to improve the dietary conditions of people in developing nations. In another African study, it was found that by changing the type of flour the women used to peanut flour, which is cheap and readily accessible, they could dramatically increase the protein content of their meals. Methods such as this, which reached out to the older generation and did not conflict with traditional and cultural norms, had a lasting impact.