



# College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

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# CALS Social Scientists Study the Interactions between People and between People and Their Social and Natural Environments

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) is acknowledged as one of the best colleges of its kind in the nation, if not the world. While much of the spotlight has traditionally been on the college's achievements in biological-based research in agriculture and the life sciences, another group of scientists has been quietly making waves in the social sciences. It is a little known fact that one in five CALS faculty members is a social scientist. Most of these are applied economists or sociologists, but they also include faculty trained in the fields of communication and education.

In CALS, scientists are not defined by whether they wear white coats but by their ability to employ scholarship to address society's needs and improve the quality of human lives, domestically and internationally. These are the fundamental goals that drive the land-grant mission of the college.

Social scientists study human behavior, the interactions between people and with their social and natural environments, and how planned or unplanned events and actions impact behavior and well-being. The social sciences make easy and important connections to agricultural and food systems and the natural environments, which are core interests of the college, as well as complementing the more basic investigations in the life sciences.

The four primary social science departments in CALS are Applied Economics and Management (AEM), Communication, Education, and Rural Sociology. Social science research and education also takes place in the Department of Natural Resources.

## Economic Development, Poverty, and Inequality

A central concept in the college's land-grant mission is the application of science and knowledge to practical outcomes that improve the human condition. Fostering domestic and foreign economic vitality is a major interest among faculty.

A signal feature of social science research in CALS is its emphasis on issues of economic well-being and the distribution of wealth and income.

Development is uneven across the U.S. For example, the payoff of an educational degree in a rural area is not the same as its payoff in an urban area. David L. Brown, Rural Sociology, studies how processes of uneven national development shape the opportunity structures and life chances of people living in various areas. In his studies, Brown uses space and locality as contingent social structures that effect social behavior and modify basic social relationships. He is currently investigating the determinants and consequences of rural-urban migration in the U.S. and in Eastern Europe. One study, in collaboration with Nina Glasgow, Rural Sociology, focuses on the social integration and well-being of older immigrants to nonmetropolitan retirement communities, while another examines how population change affects the organization of rural communities.

Thomas A. Hirschl, Rural Sociology, shows that 40 percent of the elderly will experience poverty, while the majority of Americans will experience at least one year below the poverty level and will use a means-tested welfare program sometime during their adult life course. Hirschl's research dispels the common belief that events of poverty and welfare reciprocity occur only within a circumscribed minority of the American population and that the elderly are especially well protected from risk.

Richard N. Boisvert and Christine K. Ranney, Applied Economics and Management, investigate the implications and effectiveness of food and income policies on the well-being of the rural poor. In a recent study, they contrasted the effectiveness of government programs on reducing the poverty gap in rural and urban communities. Results from the research suggest that working-poor, single mothers from urban and rural locations respond similarly to government programs and that their needs may be more congruent than conventionally believed.

Charles Harrington/CU



Thomas Lyson, Rural Sociology, investigates how the agriculture and food sector of an economy can serve as an engine of community development.

Robert Barker/CU



David Ng, Applied Economics and Management, studies the behavior of international markets.

Robert Barker/CU



Geri Gay, Communication, studies the impact of technology on education.

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Nicola Kountoupes/CU



David Brown, Rural Sociology, studies uneven development across the U.S.

Nicola Kountoupes/CU



Christine K. Ranney and Richard N. Boisvert (not pictured), Applied Economics and Management, contrast the effectiveness of various government programs on reducing the poverty gap in rural and urban communities.

Frank DiMeo/CU



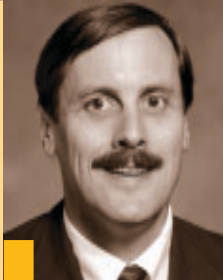
Christopher Barrett, Applied Economics and Management, examines the effects of food aid to impoverished countries on food security, sustainable development, and international trade.

Robert Barker/CU



Duane Chapman, Applied Economics and Management, studies forest management and social values.

Frank DiMeo/CU



Harry Kaiser, Applied Economics and Management, studies generic promotion of food products.

Frank DiMeo/CU





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In another study, Christopher Barrett, Applied Economics and Management, looked at the effects of food aid to impoverished countries on food security, sustainable development, and international trade. He found evidence suggesting that food aid, while perhaps modestly progressive in its distribution, fails to stabilize food availability in recipient economies in the regular course of development. His research reveals that both increased domestic food production and commercial international trade appear more effective than food aid in increasing and stabilizing food availability per capita in low-income economies.

### Environmental and Natural Resources

The focal point for social science-based research in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which hosts the Human Dimensions Research Unit (HDRU), is clearly the environment and natural resources. HDRU aims to understand the human behavioral aspects of natural resource management and policy. These areas are also major topics for the Environmental and Resource Economics Group in AEM. Faculty members in Rural Sociology are also engaged in environmental sociology.

HDRU leader, Tommy L. Brown, works to improve public involvement in the decision-making processes for natural resource management. Fish and wildlife resources across the country provide ecological benefits and support multibillion dollar recreational industries, but they also cause millions of dollars in nuisance and damage problems for human communities. Increasingly, natural resource management agencies seek to incorporate a broad array of stakeholder perspectives in their decision-making processes. This is to ensure appropriate attention is paid to both perceived benefits and costs associated with these resources. Results from Brown's studies have been applied extensively in the design and implementation of public involvement approaches in the Bureau of Wildlife, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).

Max J. Pfeffer, Rural Sociology, researches the relationship between conflicts of interests and values in modern society, especially those between rural and urban communities regarding natural resources and the environment. He has ongoing research projects at sites in the U.S. and in Central America. In one study of the New York City watershed system, Pfeffer and J. Mayone Stycos, Rural Sociology, found that while rural and urban residents share a common concern for the environment, they felt very differently about the quality of the same water supply. The findings also debunked the stereotype of city dwellers as wasteful of water resources.

Duane Chapman, Applied Economics and Management, investigates the economics of timber harvesting vis-à-vis non-timber benefits such as recreation and endangered species protection. As the recognition of social values for non-timber benefits, and the understanding of natural forest processes and their response to disturbances, have evolved, so too have forestry management models evolved from managing individual stands to the spatial management of entire forests. Chapman created a conceptual methodology for optimal ecosystem management behavior that recognizes timber, aesthetic, wildlife protection, and hunting values, and uses multiple management strategies. His research provides an objective rationale for results that may parallel on-the-ground forest management in today's world of both conflicting and complementary values.

### Agriculture and Food Systems

Given the historic mission of CALS, it is no surprise that agriculture and food systems is a major nexus of the social science work in the college. Areas of research include the management of agricultural and food businesses, marketing of agricultural and food products, organization and performance in the agricultural sector, policy impact analysis, and technology adoption and implications. Much of the research done in these areas is applied, and directly benefits local, national, and international agricultural communities.

Faced with immense competition and an increasingly diversified market, educators and members of the New York State fruit, vegetable, and landscape horticulture industries recognize that marketing is a critical issue to stay competitive. AEM faculty, including Gerald B. White and Bruce L. Anderson, and senior extension associates Wen-fei Uva and Brian M. Henahan, have conducted various applied research and extension projects aimed at assisting producers. They analyzed the New York State apple industry, and identified factors impacting its competitiveness as well as strategies for improving production and marketing performance.

Effective generic promotion—such as “Milk Moustache” and “Got Milk?”—can slow per capita sales decline in mature product markets and stimulate category sales, according to Harry M. Kaiser, Applied Economics and Management. Kaiser is engaged in an ongoing program to help producers make wise decisions about the allocation of funds used to generically promote food products, including nationally recognized campaigns.

Thomas A. Lyson, Rural Sociology, investigates how the agriculture and food sector of an economy can serve as an engine of community development. He has identified various components of “civic agriculture,” which are the food and agriculture systems that sustain and strengthen farm families, local communities, and natural resources. These include community-supported agriculture, farmers’ markets, community kitchens, local agricultural districts, small-scale food processors, producer and consumer cooperatives, and food banks.

## Business

The general economy and business sector provide fertile ground for social science-based research, particularly for the faculty of AEM. Topics range from finance and marketing to corporate ethics and social responsibility.

David T. Ng, Applied Economics and Management, studies the behavior of international capital markets, with a current focus on the determinants of the cost of capital. He employs concepts of country risk and dynamic asset pricing to understand how measures of conventional business performance are modified by factors such as political corruption. Results from a recent study show that firms from more corrupt countries trade at significantly lower market multiples, and vice versa; Ng concludes that corruption has a significant economic consequence on shareholder value.

Strategies for foreign market entry intrigue James M. Hagen, Applied Economics and Management. Businesses participate in foreign markets in numerous ways, including straightforward exporting or direct investment in foreign production. In a study of corporate performance in foreign markets, Hagen found that entry into a foreign market through joint ventures with local partners provides no clear advantage for future growth, compared to firms that establish wholly owned foreign subsidiaries for initial market entry. Instead, Hagen suggests that there is no universal best market entry mode, but that firms look for efficient institutional forms for their international ventures, and choose a variety of forms depending on the options they are offered.

## Science, Technology, and Society

Faculty in the Departments of Education and Communication share an interest in scholarly themes related to people and technology. Approaches range from how individuals learn or how curricula and other educational structures impact cognition and learning, to how mass media and alternative communication strategies affect public opinion and attitudes.

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Geraldine K. Gay, Communication, designed an experiment to learn more about the impacts of technology on education, with the goal to improve learning experiences for students. Seeking possibilities, Gay used wireless technologies in the classroom in order to explore the impact of mobile computing technologies on the process of instruction, interaction, and learning. She engaged the students to address and solve the problems they faced. The study resulted in suggestions for the effective design of mobile technologies for education and remote collaboration, and the efficient organization, management, and communication of online information.

Dawn E. Schrader, Education, investigates the state of morality in society. She examines the ways in which people become aware of moral problems, issues of personal responsibility, personal decision making and reflective judgment, and the relationship between what one thinks about and what one actually does or should do in situations of conflict. Schrader's work documents psychological approaches to how people think about the ethical issues that they experience in their everyday lives.

Schrader has developed a model in which moral thought and action interact dynamically with reflective thought to bring about higher levels of moral thinking, moral sensitivity, and more conscious reflection on acting morally. Her theories and approaches have been used by teachers to modify antisocial behavior in classrooms, and they allow students to feel proud of acting in "morally responsible ways." This project promotes the incremental steps in bringing about moral awareness, changing moral cognition, stimulating reflective thought on actions, then creating a stimulus for acting morally in personal and community relationships.

The social sciences are a major dimension of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, providing an important perspective on topical themes throughout the college. As scholars, this group of applied social scientists contributes to the richness of the social science community across the Cornell campus. The multidisciplinary nature of CALS also affords many opportunities for social and life scientists to collaborate and provide a better understanding of the social impacts of applied biological research.

*Andrew M. Novakovic*

E. V. Baker Professor of Agricultural Economics and  
Chair, Applied Economics and Management



**For more information:**

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences  
260 Roberts Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853  
(607) 255-2241, Fax: (607) 255-3803  
<http://www.cals.cornell.edu>