The United States government spends trillions annually on policies and programs to provide safety nets for individuals and families, improve infrastructure, protect consumers and workers, and safeguard other areas of society. The College of Human Ecology is home to a host of experts in economics and policy, whose research assesses the work of federal and state governments and translates into recommendations that have tangible, positive impacts on programs, policies, and laws.

For instance, economists are exploring topics ranging from the viability of Social Security to transportation funding. Health care experts are evaluating new medical technologies, the impact of disease prevention campaigns, and outcomes from health care reform. Nutritional science experts are helping to determine which nutrients to include in fortified foods and to establish food security in developing nations. All of these efforts by faculty, students, and staff lead to significant impacts on the policies and programs that shape our everyday lives.
engaging students

Matt Eisenberg arrived at Human Ecology with an interest in politics and a passion to help others. In his four years as a Policy Analysis and Management major, he found research was the most influential part of his education, providing a solid basis for developing policies to improve people’s lives.

Eisenberg completed an undergraduate thesis on the impact of weight-loss product advertisements on health behaviors. The project, funded in part by the National Cancer Institute, analyzed the effects of advertisements for over-the-counter weight-loss medicines. He found that exposure to the advertisements makes consumers more likely to purchase ineffective products, but also increases the likelihood they will control their diet and exercise.

“When you’re doing research, you really get to learn in a different way than you do in the classroom,” he said. “I’m able to use economics and sociological tools to attack different policy problems.” See more at http://bit.ly/14wAdoQ

Unraveling the complexities of the U.S. health care system

Understanding the economic and political relationships between the federal and state governments, private insurance companies, doctors, and hospitals is essential to improving quality, saving money, and ensuring that Americans receive the health care they need.

Human Ecology houses a cadre of experts on health policy. Among them is Sean Nicholson, an economist focused on the health care industry. His research quantifies the value of new medical technologies, measures the benefits of physician specialization, and examines whether physicians’ decisions depend on the profits they make.

Economist Donald Kenkel studies the economics of disease prevention and health promotion. He has investigated the economic impact of smoking and the effects of cigarette and food advertising. And economist William White studies the impact of managed care in hospital and physician markets, the design of health care reimbursement systems, and health care antitrust laws.
Understanding consumer economics

A community of economists in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management focus their research on the complex human and economic issues related to regulating financial markets and driving consumer spending patterns.

Sharon Tennyson focuses on the impact of government laws and regulation on consumers and financial institutions, particularly insurance markets. She also studies consumer literacy and attitudes on insurance, and the law and economics of women’s rights.

Economist Rick Geddes focuses his work on how regulatory policy impacts transportation and infrastructure funding. Together, Tennyson and Geddes lead a minor in regulatory policy that focuses on banking and financial markets.

And Rosemary Avery, chair of Policy Analysis and Management, studies how regulatory policy influences health care, specifically, the impact of advertising for pharmaceutical products on consumers’ health-related behavior.

Working toward healthy food for all

Faculty members in Human Ecology are working to ensure families across the globe receive proper nutrition.

Biochemist Patrick Stover, chair of the Division of Nutritional Sciences, investigates the biochemical and genetic mechanisms that impact the relationships between the B-vitamin folate and human disease including neural tube defects, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. His research has led to new national recommendations for folic intake.

Stover also serves as director of United Nations University Food and Nutrition Program for Human and Social Development, which aims to provide access to current food and nutrition information and help nutrition professionals apply that knowledge at a grassroots level across the globe.

And public health economist David Sahn conducts applied research that investigates issues of poverty, human resource development, and food and nutrition policy in developing countries and transition economies of Eastern Europe.
Training policy leaders of the future

Human Ecology faculty members are dedicated to training tomorrow’s leaders in two top-tier graduate programs: The Sloan Program for Health Administration and the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs.

The Sloan Program trains students to promote quality, access, efficiency, and innovation in health care delivery and financing. Faculty experts teach a broad range of topics including health care organization, management, policy, and public health. The Cornell Institute for Public Affairs (CIPA) educates the policy leaders of tomorrow through a flexible curriculum with options to focus on environmental policy, government or nonprofit organizations, science and technology, or international development.

Faculty members from CIPA and Human Ecology’s Department of Policy Analysis and Management are partnering with Cornell leaders to explore the possible development of a school of public policy to increase the visibility of the public policy field and promote more multidisciplinary collaboration.

a broad look into the future

Research into federal programs and policies designed to support our economy, communities, and families is essential to help policymakers make evidence-based decisions. At Cornell, a collaborative culture encourages faculty to work together to develop truly innovative solutions for promoting sound federal policies and programs.

Looking toward Cornell’s 2015 sesquicentennial, now more than ever, support for this type of interdisciplinary work is essential. With a plan in place to recruit more faculty, staff, and students, high-impact collaborative research will continue to yield important knowledge — fostering innovative policies and programs that help make life better for all.

You can find more information about the university’s campaign to support these efforts — called Cornell Now — at http://now.cornell.edu/.

Improving lives by exploring and shaping human connections to natural, social, and built environments

www.human.cornell.edu
Research into children, families, aging, and marriage is essential to helping us understand what happens in our communities. Developing evidence about how people interact with social forces helps policymakers cultivate healthy, prosperous communities.

Faculty, students, and staff at the College of Human Ecology are examining individuals and families throughout the lifespan to explain the forces that drive our daily lives. At the college, psychologists are investigating how children and teens learn and how childhood affects the transition to adulthood. Demographers are exploring how family patterns provide insight into child well-being, immigration, and other social trends. And, separately, social scientists from across the college are examining public policies that address the challenges faced by poor and disadvantaged groups.
Researching the modern family

Sociologists and demographers at Human Ecology are uncovering new knowledge about American families that paints a clearer picture of our society.

The research of sociologist Kelly Musick, of the Department of Policy Analysis and Management, focuses on how changes in marriage, cohabitation, and childbearing affect families and their social stratification. Her work has revealed there are strong links between poverty and family structure. She has also found that less educated women are more likely to have unintended pregnancies, and that more educated women face social barriers to parenthood.

Sociologist Sharon Sassler of Policy Analysis and Management is revealing new insights about how families form and change, and what that means for our well-being, careers, and the quality of our relationships. Her research has helped redefine the role that cohabitation plays in forming families and how young people transition from school and work to relationships and parenthood.

Using research to help families and communities

Social science research helps us understand the choices people make and trends in our society. But to improve lives and build prosperous communities, social scientists must translate those findings into real-life solutions. The college’s Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research (BCTR) is a hub for disseminating evidence-based practices and programs that help families and communities across the nation. The center is home to more than 50 projects that cover topics across the lifespan, including youth development and education, health care and nutrition, and aging.

One of those programs is Parenting in Context, a course designed to provide parents with evidence-based strategies for raising children. The program is based on the research of Rachel Dunifon, a social policy expert whose work explores the relationship between maternal employment conditions and children’s health and the role of grandparents in the lives of youth.

This type of translational research is the foundation for collaborations between Human Ecology faculty and researchers at Weill Cornell Medical College. Together, they work on a broad range of projects, including novel pain treatments for older adults, systems approaches to disease prevention, and social science-based interventions to combat obesity.

Human Ecology’s partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension provides an avenue for disseminating evidence-based programming to families and communities across the state of New York. Using these resources, the College of Human Ecology is well-equipped to move its discoveries into real-life settings. Learn more at about the center http://www.bctr.cornell.edu/ and about Parenting in Context at http://bit.ly/14d42DT
Cornell Population Center

The college serves as home to the Cornell Population Center — the intellectual hub for demographic research and training at Cornell. The center has 90 faculty affiliates from 24 departments and programs who specialize in population research on four core themes: families and children, health behaviors and disparities, immigration and diversity, and poverty and inequality. It functions as a one-stop shop for population researchers, providing assistance with grant proposals and management, training in cutting-edge statistical methods, support for data analysis and enhanced computing services, and grant programs to help fund promising projects and scholars.

Policy Analysis and Management Professor Daniel Lichter is the center’s director. His research focuses on children’s changing living arrangements and poverty, cohabitation and marriage among unwed mothers, and the effect of welfare incentives on families. Learn more at http://www.cpc.cornell.edu/.

Research into children, families, aging, and marriage is essential in helping policymakers and civic leaders cultivate healthy, prosperous communities. At Cornell, a collaborative culture encourages faculty across the social sciences to work together and develop truly innovative solutions for helping families and communities. To encourage even greater collaboration, Cornell is considering forming a School of Public Policy headquartered in the College of Human Ecology and led by Dean Alan Mathios.

Looking toward Cornell’s 2015 sesquicentennial, now more than ever, support for this type of interdisciplinary work is essential. With a plan in place to recruit more faculty, staff, and students, high-impact collaborative research will continue to yield important knowledge — fostering innovative research and revolutionary discoveries to improve life for all.

You can find more information about the university’s campaign to support these efforts — called Cornell Now — at http://now.cornell.edu/.
For centuries, humans have thought about design in terms of aesthetics and functionality — how things look and how they work. But new research shows that environmental factors — such as neighborhood layouts, the interior design of health facilities, and noise levels around schools, to name a few — influence human health.

Faculty, students, and staff at the College of Human Ecology are working at the forefront of this exciting field and making connections between the built environment and psychology, health care outcomes, child development, and aging. Their research is helping to create environments that promote physical activity, encourage dementia patients to interact with loved ones, support learning for children, and improve hospital patients’ experiences.
Uncovering environmental factors in health problems

Associate Professor Nancy Wells, of the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis, studies people’s relationships with their environments, including the impact of nature on cognitive functioning, the influence of neighborhood design on physical activity, and the effects of housing quality on psychological well-being.

Her work has found that many health problems affecting the U.S. population today — from psychological distress, to heart disease, to diabetes — have significant environmental causes.

As part of the Engaged Learning + Research Faculty Fellowship Program — a universitywide initiative to help faculty members engage the Ithaca community — Wells is launching a course where students will partner with community organizations to improve public health.

A design perspective for the next generation of health care leaders

The Sloan Program in Health Administration — a graduate program that prepares students to become the next generation of health care leaders — incorporates design in its curriculum, a unique attribute that sets the program apart from other health management degrees. Sloan students have the opportunity to take classes on health facility design and apply these emerging concepts in real-life settings.

Brooke Hollis, executive director of the program, teaches “Fundamentals of Health Facilities Planning for Managers and Entrepreneurs” and design professor Franklin Becker teaches “Planning and Managing the Workplace: The Ecology of the Healthcare Environment.”

Students also work on design and facility improvement projects at Cayuga Medical Center in Ithaca and Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York City.
Promoting health and wellness is key to improving lives and cultivating prosperous communities. Understanding the variety of factors that influence our health — the intricate workings of the human body, policies that impact lifestyle choices, and how environments affect wellness — is essential to helping people across the globe improve their lives.

Faculty, students, and staff at the College of Human Ecology are engaged in each of these areas. At the college, molecular biologists are investigating how microscopic proteins influence disease. Sociologists and physicians are partnering to improve pain management for older adults. Nutritionists are designing intervention programs that encourage healthy eating and exercise among disadvantaged populations. Economists are looking into the causes and consequences of obesity. And psychologists are developing the best methods for translating medical research into policies and practices that help people.

public health and nutrition

at the college of human ecology

Cornell University
Finding ways to help people make healthier choices

Over the past century, the leading causes of death in the U.S. have shifted from contractible diseases to conditions stemming from poor health decisions about smoking, diet, and exercise. Research at Human Ecology is helping to explain the implications of this trend for individuals and society.

Health economist John Cawley in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management uses economic analysis to provide insights into the causes and consequences of obesity, and the cost effectiveness of policies designed to reduce it.

Other faculty members are tackling obesity on other fronts. They are developing models to help people make better food choices and investigating whether electronic communications can encourage healthy behavior among pregnant women. They have created programs to teach low-income mothers about nutrition, worked with employers to improve fitness and diet options in workplaces, and partnered with rural communities to develop more opportunities for exercise.

Helping older adults cope with pain

More than 40 percent of senior citizens in the U.S. suffer from chronic pain. Cornell has launched an interdisciplinary center called the Translational Research Institute on Pain in Later Life that brings together physicians, sociologists, psychologists, and gerontologists looking for ways reduce chronic pain among the elderly.

Gerontologist Karl Pillemer, Human Ecology’s associate dean for extension and outreach, is a principal investigator for the center, which funds research on pain prevention, management, treatments, and interventions. The center puts its new discoveries into practice at senior centers, retirement communities, and long-term care facilities in New York City. Learn more at http://tripll.org/.
Translating research into reality

Research helps us develop new treatments for disease, promote lifestyle change, and encourage wellness. But to improve lives and build healthier communities, scientists must translate those findings into real-life measures.

Faculty members are experts in translational research. More than half of the college’s community-based research projects are based on a model designed to move findings to the public — and many are translated into Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) programs that help New York residents.

In New York City alone, more than 22,000 low-income families attend nutritional education sessions through CCE to learn about food safety and portion size. CCE also builds on Human Ecology research to educate New Yorkers about energy efficiency in their homes, household budgets, and quality child care. Through its partnership with CCE, the college is well-equipped to move discoveries into real-life settings. Learn more at [http://cce.cornell.edu/](http://cce.cornell.edu/).

a broad look into the future

At Cornell, a collaborative culture encourages faculty members to partner in developing innovative solutions for improving health and eradicating disease.

Looking toward Cornell’s 2015 sesquicentennial, now more than ever, support for this type of interdisciplinary work is essential. With a plan in place to recruit more faculty, staff, and students, high-impact collaborative research will continue to yield important knowledge — fostering innovative research and revolutionary discoveries to improve life for all.

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