

Introduction

The Behavioral Interventions Scholars (BIS) grant program supports dissertation research by advanced graduate students who are applying a behavioral economics or behavioral science lens to specific research questions relevant to social services programs and policies and other issues facing low-income and vulnerable families in the United States. As part of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation’s [Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency research portfolio](#), these grants are intended to facilitate the completion of high-quality research projects that will add to the growing body of knowledge on effective behavioral interventions for Administration for Children and Families programs and populations. BIS also aims to build capacity in the research field to use behavioral science approaches in this area and to foster mentoring relationships between high-quality doctoral students and faculty members.

Eleven grants have been awarded since the program began in 2017, including three new grantees who received awards in 2020 as part of the fourth round of funding. Current projects (active in 2020-2021) are summarized in the below chart.

BIS Grants Summary Chart

2019 Cohort					
GRANTEE INFORMATION			PROJECT INFORMATION		
BIS Grantee	Project Title	Key Staff	Key Research Questions or Project Goals	Primary Methods	Partner(s)
Cornell University <i>SC Johnson College of Business</i>	Evaluating Behavioral Effects of Sliding Scale Mechanisms on Participation in Assistance Programs: The Case of Meals on Wheels	Scholar: Anne Byrne Advisor: Dr. David Just	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Will an individual’s reservation price for Meals on Wheels services be impacted by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Whether or not the individual reports his or her income to the provider? Whether or not the individual is presented a price in the context of a sliding scale? Whether or not the individual is presented a price in the context of a sliding scale where he or she is placed in the lowest category, indicating that he or she has been grouped with the poorest individuals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study will use Qualtrics to survey a national sample, with balanced representation of the Meals on Wheels target demographic: low-income seniors and disabled persons. The survey will include two stages: (1) an experimental portion and (2) general questions about barriers to access, including questions regarding price, stigma, access to transportation, and perceptions of quality. A survey disseminated in year 1 is expected to collect approximately 2,000 responses. Additional surveys may be disseminated in year 2. 	Foodnet Meals on Wheels, Tompkins County, NY
Harvard University <i>Graduate School of Education</i>	A Novel Approach to Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers	Scholar: Emily Hanno Advisor: Dr. Stephanie Jones	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Early Learning Study at Harvard (ELS@H) Bits intervention influence educator and caregiver knowledge, beliefs, or practices related to two potential high-impact dimensions of quality (i.e., making transitions meaningful learning times and encouraging children’s language)? Does the efficacy of ELS@H Bits vary based on characteristics of the educator and caregiver or the early education and care setting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ELS@H Bits intervention is a randomly assigned, longitudinal study. The efficacy of ELS@H Bits will be assessed using data from detailed observations conducted in early education and care settings. A follow-up survey will collect information on educator and caregiver knowledge and beliefs related to the targeted practices. 	Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative
University of Minnesota <i>Humphrey School of Public Affairs</i>	Using Behavioral and Design Science to Reduce Administrative Burdens: Evidence from Minneapolis Public Housing	Scholar: Weston Merrick Advisor: Dr. Jodi Sandfort	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In the case of Minneapolis Public Housing, what features of the social context contributed to the a) current organizational choice architecture and b) resident cognitive biases that are associated with negative housing outcomes? How do modifications to the choice architecture emerge and evolve over time through the application of a design-based approach? What impact did the design-based intervention(s) have on eviction actions in Minneapolis Public Housing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This research used a design-based, mixed-method approach to identify, refine, implement, and evaluate behaviorally informed interventions in Minneapolis Public Housing. A survey, observation, interviews, and design labs with residents and staff helped understand behavioral bottlenecks. Two nudge experiments tested the impact on use of automatic withdrawal for rent payment (n=5,500) and simplification of late payment letters (n=2,400). 	Minneapolis Public Housing Authority

2020 Cohort					
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University of Miami <i>Department of Psychology</i>	Optimizing Amount and Type of Practitioner Nudges in Online Relationship Education for Low-Income Couples	Scholar: S. Gabe Hatch Advisor: Dr. Brian D. Doss	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the most important characteristics of the individual or couple that determine the intensity and method of “nudge” that they will require to complete and benefit from the OurRelationship program? 2. After accounting for all the variables identified in the first research question, how well can one predict program completion and resulting gains? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data for this study come from a large (N=1,250 couples; N = 2,500 individuals) web-based randomized controlled trial with a Sequential Multiple Assignment Randomized Trial (SMART) design. • SMART design will allow the right nudges (i.e., method and intensity of coaching) to be matched to the right couple. • To be eligible for participation, couples had to be married, engaged, or living together for at least six months and report a household income less than 200% of the Federal poverty line. Couples were excluded if they reported severe intimate partner violence within the past six months. 	OurRelationship and ePREP
Massachusetts Institute of Technology <i>Department of Economics</i>	Mindfulness and Behavioral Economics: Evaluating the Effects of Meditation on Wellbeing and Decision-Making	Scholar: Pierre-Luc Vautrey Advisor: Dr. Frank Schilbach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can mindfulness meditation improve attention and its control? 2. Does it impact how people respond to default effects? 3. Can psychometric research on attention and mindfulness illuminate how behavioral economics and behavioral scientists think about and measure attention and behavior? 4. Can mindfulness meditation affect interference of emotions and decision-making? 5. Does it impact how people process self-relevant, unpleasant information and seek more such information? 6. Can mindfulness meditation affect people’s understanding of their goals and what they perceive about their preferences? 7. Can app-based mindfulness meditation improve mental health, especially in a changing world (COVID-19, social movements)? 8. Is mindfulness meditation a practice worth pursuing as part of social programs, either for its direct effects on mental wellbeing, or for its potential to improve individuals’ economic decision-making? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be randomized into 4 groups, with an over-sampling of low-income individuals. Participants in group 1 will not receive any further treatment, but will be told that they will be re-contacted for follow-up surveys. Participants in group 2 will additionally receive daily generic tips about wellness, with no tips specifically recommending meditation. Participants in group 3 will receive an invitation and voucher code to start a premium license for the app for free. In addition to the free license, participants in group 4 will frequently receive reminders to use this app from the research project email account. • Two weeks post-randomization, a first outcome measure will be assessed by emailing participants with a link to an online survey module. A randomly selected subset of group 3 will be required to complete a meditation before completing the survey module. Two months post-randomization, a second outcome measure will be assessed in the same manner. 	Headspace

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University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy	The Effects of Automating Welfare Services on Program Enrollment and Well-Being: Evidence from Indiana	Scholar: Derek Wu Advisor: Dr. Bruce D. Meyer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the quantitative impacts of the Indiana automation effort of welfare services on the changes in welfare take-up, and what types of individuals and families were most affected? 2. What longer-term impacts did the automation effort have on incomes, financial solvency, material and emotional well-being, and health? 3. What lessons can be learned from this case study to inform the design of automated welfare services – both to reduce cognitive biases on the part of applicants and recertifiers and make these programs most accessible to those needing them the most? 	<p>Using administrative and survey data sources and employing two empirical strategies, this research aims to assess the causal effects of Indiana’s 2007 automation effort of welfare services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first and primary strategy uses a difference-in-differences design to exploit the natural assignment of counties in Indiana to treatment groups (i.e., those receiving the automated system) and non-treatment groups, to analyze the causal effects of the automated system on program enrollment and wellbeing. • A second empirical strategy is a spatial regression discontinuity design that compares the outcomes of individuals living on one side of a county border (without the policy change) to those of individuals living on the other side of a county border (with the policy change). 	

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