Summary

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread in the United States and abroad, members of the Diversity Scholars Network (DSN) are taking action and wielding their research and scholarly expertise to address critical diversity, equity, and inclusion issues related to the current crisis. The pandemic has not only created a new set of pressing social issues, but revealed and exacerbated existing inequities, both in the United States and globally. We asked DSN members to share with us their ongoing and forthcoming research addressing COVID-19. This research brief features some of the many contributions they are making, effectively demonstrating the critical role of research in constructing a more equitable society.

Visit this brief’s companion website, which is updated regularly to include emerging scholarship from DSN members: myumi.ch/K4GyE

This brief is part of a series of research briefs presented by the National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID). Click here to view our first brief, Diversity Scholars Address COVID-19: In The News (May 6, 2020).
**Educational Impact**

**Nate Brown**, Professor of Mathematics, Pennsylvania State University

Educational disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic impact everyone, but some students are hit harder than others. For instance, low socioeconomic status could compound stress through inadequate housing options or lack of access to high-speed internet. Students from multigenerational homes, where young children or grandparents cohabitate, may find boundaries difficult to maintain, and women are likely to take on additional domestic duties, compared to men, further decreasing time and energy for their studies. In this research we aim to map the complex landscape of challenges which disproportionately impact under-resourced and underrepresented STEM students, then measure said impacts with a large-scale survey study (N=1000).

“Over the next 12 months collaborators and I aim to map the vast landscape of challenges and measure their impacts on students traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields (women, students of color) and those of low socioeconomic status. My aim is to provide the evidence base upon which successful interventions can be built. As a single father of multiracial children, this work could hardly be more important to me.”

**Mayra L. López-Humphreys**, Associate Professor of Social Work, College of Staten Island

The nationwide move to distance education necessitated by the coronavirus crisis has served to spotlight disparities that stratify the higher education landscape. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, City University of New York (CUNY) students and faculty were told not to return to campus and were relegated to online instruction. Students and faculty report experiencing symptoms related to depression, anxiety, and insomnia due to this sudden change in the CUNY educational process coupled with the conflicting information regarding the effects of COVID-19 and the US response to those effects. This study examines the psychosocial burden among students, faculty, and staff within a public university system due to the unexpected and abrupt mandatory transition to remote instruction.
Ashley Cureton, Provost’s Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Education and Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University

English language learner (ELL) students and their families are more likely than others to have limited access to digital devices or the Internet, limited understanding of English, and the inability to work independently without support. Since health outcomes are so closely tied to educational level, it is essential to prevent the educational gap from widening between ELLs and other students during the COVID-19 crisis.

In partnership with Catholic Charities - Esperanza Center, a qualitative needs assessment will be conducted to focus on how adolescent English language learners attending Baltimore City Public Schools have accessed and adjusted to remote learning during the coronavirus outbreak. Through 30 in-depth interviews with ELL youth and their parents, this study will focus on identifying the types of resources and supports needed to thrive academically and socio-emotionally, informing the development of an online directory for families and local community partners.

“As a social work scholar who explores the educational and mental health needs and outcomes of refugee and migrant youth and their families, I am particularly concerned about the impact COVID-19 will have on their academic achievement and engagement in schools through learning at home. Remote learning poses particular challenges to ELL families, so this project provides an empirical opportunity to learn about ELL students firsthand experiences of online school during the coronavirus pandemic and to identify resources and supports to aid them and their families. Moreover, I hope this study is informative to school district leaders from Baltimore City Public Schools and other urban school districts throughout the country.”

Karla Loya, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership, University of Hartford

In a forthcoming book chapter, I present an autoethnography based on my reflexivity on my stance as an instructor before, during, and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic. Having always prided myself a learner-centered teacher, adjusting to the disruption presented mid-semester by the COVID-19 pandemic meant thinking about and transforming what it meant to be a learner, an instructor, a student. This in turn meant rethinking the values and roles of content, grades, and power. Using previous and current versions of my teaching philosophy statements, journals and memos, and course evaluation data for spring 2020 semester and summer 2020 term, I reflect on the experience of facing epistemic and pedagogical incongruence. In this chapter, I attempt to self-critique and transform my practice.

“I had always prided myself in being a learner-centered teaching, then the pandemic arrived and I had to question my role and responsibility as an instructor. I had to rethink what was important and how I could best support my students. My views of learning, teaching, and assessment were upended.”
Mauriell Amechi, Visiting Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations & Leadership, Old Dominion University

My research and advocacy center on issues of educational equity, intersectionality, college access, and persistence to degree completion among marginalized learners. My latest scholarship centers the voices and experiences of transition-age youth and young adults in or emancipated from foster care. The global health emergency fueled by COVID-19 has disrupted the lives of students from all backgrounds. However, for young people aging out of the foster care system, widespread school closures have had a severe and disproportionate impact, further pushing them to the margins of society. Early survey evidence suggests that rates of homelessness, food insecurity, unemployment, and mental health issues have soared among young people in or with history in foster care. In contrast to their peers who can quickly turn to familial support networks during a crisis, transition-age foster youth do not have access to these critical safety nets and social support. Read more.

Beth Tarasawa, Executive Vice President of Research, NWEA

With 55 million students in the United States out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic, education systems are scrambling to meet the needs of schools and families, including planning how best to approach instruction in the fall given students may be farther behind than in a typical year. Yet, education leaders have little data on how much learning has been impacted by school closures. While the COVID-19 learning interruptions are unprecedented in modern times, existing research on the impacts of missing school (due to absenteeism, regular summer breaks, and school closures) on learning can nonetheless inform projections of potential learning loss due to the pandemic. In this study, we produce a series of projections of COVID-19-related learning loss and its potential effect on test scores in the 2020-21 school year based on (a) estimates from prior literature and (b) analyses of typical summer learning patterns of five million students. Under these projections, students are likely to return in fall 2020 with approximately 63-68% of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year and with 37-50% of the learning gains in math. However, we estimate that losing ground during the COVID-19 school closures would not be universal, with the top third of students potentially making gains in reading. Thus, in preparing for fall 2020, educators will likely need to consider ways to support students who are academically behind and further differentiate instruction.

“Taken together, these forecasts parallel many education leaders’ fears: missing school for a prolonged period will likely have major impacts on student achievement come fall. The COVID-19 crisis is a call to action for practitioners and policy makers alike. We must be prepared to support students, many of whom will likely be behind academically.”
**Societal Impact**

**C. Aujean Lee, Assistant Professor of Regional and City Planning, University of Oklahoma**

The handling of and messaging surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an uptick in anti-Asian discrimination and violence in the United States. This project examines differing government responses to COVID-19-related discrimination and stigma that have targeted Asian Americans. Through an analysis of government websites and statements, we analyze how government agencies understand and/or racialize the discrimination.

Our work highlights how government agencies are not well-equipped or well-informed to talk about racialized events. When governments choose to ignore when a group is being targeted, their responses uphold colorblindness, presenting these incidents as isolated rather than connected to systematic racism. This project is in collaboration with John Arroyo, assistant professor at the University of Oregon.

**Stacey Doan, Associate Professor of Psychology, Claremont McKenna College**

For families, the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a major life stressor that is accompanied by heightened daily hassles, including lack of childcare, altered work expectations or uncertain job security, and social distancing, compounded by pressing concerns about the direct and indirect impacts of the disease on family members’ health.

By capitalizing on data we have already collected as part of an ongoing longitudinal study of stress and adaptation in families of young children, this study will address fundamental questions about effects of a chronic stressor on health outcomes as well as the biological mechanisms by which stress affects health. We will test theories of the biological embedding of stress and competing hypotheses regarding risk and resilience factors on the stress physiology and psychological adjustment of parents and children.

Our goal is to identify family characteristics that promote children’s well-being, focusing on those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who are most impacted by these unprecedented threats to health and social stability.

“One of the things the pandemic has really highlighted for me is the relevance and practical applications of my research. I think, many if not most scholars, want our work to matter, to have an impact .... It dawned on me that we can learn something about what is happening right now. So we launched this study with two goals: 1) to generate data that might be useful for families dealing with a chronic stressor but also 2) to give space and a voice for families from disadvantaged backgrounds to share their stories.”
Anthony Burrow, Associate Professor of Human Development, Cornell University

Psychological research suggests a sense of purpose in life is a coveted asset, with well-established linkages to well-being and healthy functioning. But how do individuals preserve this sense when previously reliable settings - and the opportunities they afford - are profoundly disrupted? The current moment provides a formidable test of this question, as widespread transmission of COVID-19 and intense efforts to slow it drastically transform our environment. In our study, we consider how the experience of purpose may be impacted by disruptions in three key person-environment interactions: how we engage with work, how we engage in education, and how we manage physical proximity. We hope to motivate critical thinking about how this pandemic, and our collective responses to it, influence the experience of purpose and delineate a research agenda that may inform how individuals can preserve a sense of engagement and contribution.

Bruce Pietykowski, Professor of Economics, University of Michigan-Dearborn

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large segment of the workforce is now being recognized as performing essential labor. Some of this work is low-wage and is often portrayed as low-skilled labor. These jobs are frequently performed by women and people of color. My previous research focused on care work and the way in which care worker skills are valued, and very often devalued, in the economy. My current research extends this analysis to the economic conditions facing low-wage essential workers. By examining occupational skills along with the racial and gender composition of essential work, I plan to estimate the economic returns to essential worker skills, identify any wage penalty/premium associated with particular skills, evaluate the relative standing of these workers in the wage distribution, and discuss policies to improve the economic well-being of essential workers.
Many families are using remote technologies for connection as a result of COVID-19. Social distancing has the potential to have a critical impact on those at-risk for social isolation. Prior work shows how social isolation increases with age and social isolation can have negative effects on one’s health. In this study, we explore meaningful connection with others and technology use. Specifically, we survey older adults on their use of technology while social distancing to understand how their relationship with people has changed through the use of remote technologies.

“I am inspired to do this work from connecting with my own family members while social distancing. Being unable to leave the home is very frustrating for many of them, where the alternative could be sitting at home alone. Now is when researchers like myself can use our privilege to help communities that feel the most invisible during this time.”
Yan Ciupak, Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Northern Michigan

My present quasi-experiment examines the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on well-being and self-efficacy as well as the effects of a positive psychology intervention on mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on well-being. The experimental group consists of 20 undergraduate students and the control group of 25, all enrolled in a Michigan public university. For 6 weeks, the experimental group participated in a planner-aided, mindfulness-based positive psychology intervention that aimed to improve well-being and self-regulation. Both groups took the pre-test at the beginning of February 2020 before the novel coronavirus emerged as a global pandemic. They took the post-test at the beginning of April during the state’s “Stay Home, Stay Safe” order. The instruments measured the participants’ well-being, self-efficacy, planning and mindfulness practices. The post-test contained additional questions on COVID-19-related experiences and strategies. We hypothesized a decrease in well-being and self-efficacy in both groups. In addition, we predicted that the experimental group would have higher levels of well-being and self-efficacy compared to the control group. Initial data analysis supports both hypotheses.

“I was leading my research class students conducting a quasi-experimental research on the effects of planning and mindfulness practices on well-being and self-efficacy at the beginning of winter 2020 semester. Then COVID-19 happened, which caused some interruption, and students were asking whether we would continue with our project. I said of course, COVID-19 and our pre- post- test design provide a unique opportunity to measure the impacts of COVID-19 on well-being and self-efficacy and possible interventions and strategies to combat its effects!”

Shan-Jan Sarah Liu, Assistant Professor of Social and Political Science

Our research investigates questions of public health, media and communication among residents of Edinburgh and the Lothians in Scotland in relation to COVID-19. The project draws on individuals’ personal accounts of the pandemic, in the form of video diary data recorded during or shortly following the UK stay-at-home order. The intimate, immediate, and spontaneous nature of video diaries makes them a unique data resource for assessing drivers of individual experience, including (1) acceptance, uptake, and adherence to public health measures, (2) impacts on mental health, and (3) drivers of fears, anxieties, rumours and stigma. Video diaries represent time-sensitive data of individuals’ raw experiences, and are context-sensitive to aspects of identity, demographics, and background. This research is made possible by an interdisciplinary research team from the University of Edinburgh: Dr. Lauren Hall-Lew (PI), Dr. Sarah Liu, Dr. Claire Cowie, Dr. Catherine Lai, Dr Beatrice Alex, Dr. Nini Fang, and Dr. Clare Llewellyn.
Low income and minority men have some of the worst health profiles in the U.S. and disproportionately suffer premature death and significantly higher incidence of several common diseases. Research consistently demonstrates that these groups of men are more likely to experience undiagnosed and sub-optimally managed chronic conditions such as diabetes. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, a focus on better understanding the health needs of this population, and ways to increase their engagement with care, is critical. Each year the Michigan Men’s Health Foundation holds a Men’s Health Event in Ford Field for over 1300 low-income men residing in Metro Detroit offering free health services. However, to date, no studies have examined the impact of attending such a rigorous free health event on short and long-term health behaviors and outcomes. The goals of this project are 1) to evaluate the impact of a free men’s health event on help-seeking and health behaviors in low income men and 2) to assess help-seeking, health behavior, and health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on low-income men who have been directly and indirectly impacted by COVID-19. This study will allow the Michigan Men’s Health Foundation and other health care professionals to better meet the needs of this at-risk group. “During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have seen communities, academics, for-profit and nonprofit agencies, and health care systems come together and mobilize to flatten the curve in a powerful and transformative way. It will be critical for us to preserve and utilize this network—out of chaos and sorrow, perhaps we can bring about some meaningful change.”
About the Diversity Scholars Network
This research brief was compiled from scholarly contributions by members of the NCID’s Diversity Scholars Network (DSN), an international scholarly community committed to advancing understandings of historical and contemporary social issues related to identity, difference, culture, representation, power, oppression, and inequality — as they occur and affect individuals, groups, communities, and institutions.

For more information on joining the DSN, email diversityscholars@umich.edu.