

The Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society aims to change the very nature of interdisciplinary research by breaking down barriers that have traditionally kept researchers in silos and by creating new possibilities for research focused on community change.

Break Down the Barriers Between Research and Reality

THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL election Berkeley professor **Hilary Hoynes** voted in was when Ronald Reagan won over incumbent Jimmy Carter. Two years after Reagan took office, Hoynes moved to Washington, DC to work for a public policy consulting firm — her first job after college.

It was around this time that Hoynes began noticing the inequality gap growing in the United States. “Living in Washington during this era was very eye opening for me,” Hoynes said. “I started to think about what the role of government should be and what we could or should do for the more disadvantaged populations.”

Nearly 35 years later, Hoynes is a well-known economist, a professor in the Goldman School of Public Policy at Berkeley whose research focuses on poverty, inequality, and the impacts of government tax and transfer programs on low-income families.

Although she has a number of titles, awards, and honors already under her belt, these days Hoynes is focused on turning her efforts into tangible social change. She was one of six economists invited to the White House in the spring of 2015 to an off-the-record meeting with President Obama, Vice President Biden, and a few senior staffers. President Obama wanted to hear from experts about inequality, stagnation in wages for low to moderate skill workers, and more broadly, the future of work.

“I was there to discuss the social safety net and what was and wasn’t working given these broader trends in the labor market,” Hoynes said. “I made the argument that the Earned Income Tax Credit

and the SNAP program are central to helping keep households afloat.”

Hoynes, who also serves as co-editor of the leading journal in economics, *American Economic Review*, wasn’t always interested in the field of economics. But while majoring in math at Colby College in Maine, she found that she was more interested in math as a tool rather than as a course of study. She began gravitating towards economics, “where the problems were more tangible and connected to the real world,” she said. Ultimately pursuing a Ph.D. in economics, Hoynes became a third generation economist (her father recently retired from Harvard University, and her grandfather was a professor at Wesleyan University).

Today, Hoynes is engaged in several new projects all focused on estimating the short- and long-term benefits of participation in the social safety net. Two of these projects use income supplements like the Earned Income Tax Credit to examine how the increased income in early life affects child cognitive outcomes and adult human capital outcomes. Other projects examine how the availability of supplemental nutrition assistance (SNAP, or what used to commonly be referred to as food stamps) in childhood affects adult health and economic outcomes.

Hoynes also serves as the distinguished chair of Berkeley’s **Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society’s Economic Disparities cluster** where she works to translate complex economic and public policy research into actionable policies. She is one of more than 90 University of California faculty affiliated with the Haas Institute, which is



(left to right): Jovan Lewis, Hilary Hoynes and John A. Powell — three of over 90 Berkeley faculty whose interdisciplinary research informs the work of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society

grouped into seven interdisciplinary research clusters focused on a full range of social equity issues including LGBTQ citizenship, disability studies, public health disparities, religious diversity, and race and educational disparities.

The Haas Institute is unique in its scope and reach, as evidenced by a policy event in Washington, DC in September 2014. Hoynes, along with two other Berkeley faculty — Haas Institute director John A. Powell and Michael Reich — joined national policymakers to discuss **Berkeley research-based policy solutions** to reduce economic and wealth inequality. Speakers included California Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Nevada Congressman Steven Horsford. The policies they presented were outlined in **“Responding to Rising Inequality: Policies Interventions That Ensure Opportunity for All.”** This policy brief delivered a roadmap to end extreme inequality and included, among other things, support for expanding the scope of the

Earned Income Tax Credit, a recommendation largely based on Hoynes’ own research.

Congresswoman Lee underscored the importance of the evidence presented by the Haas Institute research by opening the discussion with the remarks, “The Haas Institute’s brief shows just how entrenched the barriers to economic opportunity have become over the last several decades. It should really be required reading for every member of Congress.”

Haas Institute director John A. Powell added that the mission of the Haas Institute is to do “research that actually affects real people.”

“The idea of equality is enshrined in the US Declaration of Independence,” Powell said. “If we continue down this road of extreme inequality, it’s not just hurting Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, or poor whites — it’s hurting the entire country.”

Hoynes expanded on this theme when she discussed her research at the event. “The United States has a high rate of poverty,” she said. “But this is not an inevitability.”

Hoynes joined the Haas Institute not only for the opportunity to present her research to those in the highest realms of power, but also because she was excited about the possibility of working with other scholars from other disciplines across campus interested in similar problems.

“I share the Haas Institute’s goal of translating research to action,” she said. “That can be very hard for individual professors and scholars to do on their own. But the tools, staff, and experience of the Haas Institute can really help to achieve these goals. What is truly unique about the Institute, though, is the significant resources dedicated to faculty positions and endowed chairs to support this activity. That is transformative.”

The Catalyst Moment

Creating an interdisciplinary academic research center that works in collaboration with community partners, strategic communicators, and policymakers in order to effect change that transforms the lives of marginalized people.

Best Practices

- » **Develop a strong vision and focal points:** The Haas Institute helps translate academic research on societal inequalities into public policy development and community-based advocacy — real research for real people. The overarching theme for the Haas Institute research agenda is the broader issue of “Othering and Belonging.” This frame looks at the work of structures, geography, and mind science that affect how we live and who we are.
- » **Plan for endowed chairs** to support faculty salaries, faculty research, and graduate student research in addition to funding the work of interdisciplinary research and policy formation.

- » **Communicate broadly:** In spring 2015, the Haas Institute shared its work with over 700 scholars, practitioners, policy makers, and community organizers at the first national conference on Othering & Belonging.
- » **Partner strategically:** The network-based and deeply collaborative work of the institute and affiliated faculty has influenced a number of important spheres, from community-centered research to public discourse on the role of structures and systems in inclusion and marginality, to Supreme Court cases, to the creation of a new meta-narrative to influence social justice movements and policy outcomes.

Lessons Learned

- » The recruitment and hiring of new faculty members in the interdisciplinary research clusters has taken longer than expected, as competition is fierce for the high caliber of faculty that Berkeley requires.
- » Leading the interdisciplinary research agendas of the research clusters requires the time and commitment of faculty who have many demands on their attention. Having infrastructure support for the research clusters in the form of dedicated analytical staff and graduate students would help cluster faculty in developing policy briefs, speaker series, and convenings with community organizers, policy makers, and philanthropy.

Next Steps

- » Work on a meta-analysis and meta-narrative project to inform a new worldview centered on an effective, responsive, inclusive government and that directly confronts anxiety and marginalization around race and fear of the Other.
- » Work with the faculty research clusters will produce national and regional policy briefs, reports, journal articles, and other communication tools to amplify interdisciplinary research to address pressing issues of our time.
- » The institute will launch a journal on Othering & Belonging, a resource for scholars, community leaders, policy makers, and all those engaged in the work required for constructing a society centered on structural inclusion and belonging.