A photograph of a library with bookshelves and students in a classroom setting. The background is filled with rows of books on wooden shelves. In the foreground, a young Black man in a light blue button-down shirt is seated at a desk, looking towards the right. He is holding a pen over a notebook. In front of him, the backs of two other students' heads are visible, one with brown hair and one with dark hair. The overall atmosphere is academic and focused.

HIGHLIGHTING BROWN'S DISTINCTION IN **INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

by Jill Kimball

Brown's scholars in international and public affairs are addressing inequality, convening conversations that move the needle on tough issues and connecting students with practitioners on the ground.



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New investments in research on global inequality. Conferences convening world leaders to confront critical geopolitical issues. Data informing policy and practice domestically and abroad. And amid all this, myriad opportunities for students working to become leaders in effecting social change globally.

Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs is building on these and other strengths as its reputation grows internationally as an esteemed policy center. Pursuing its mission of promoting a more just and peaceful world, with a growing focus on finding solutions to global inequality, the institute is addressing many of today's most pressing social challenges.

"Watson integrates and enhances work across the social sciences at Brown with an emphasis on first-rate scholarship that is relevant to policy-making," said director Edward Steinfeld. "As the institute is already demonstrating, Watson has the opportunity to become a leading center of knowledge and learning, fully calibrated to the needs of the 21st-century world."

Founded 28 years ago in the waning days of the Cold War, Watson's aim from inception was

to promote peace through international relations research and policy. Following a charge in Brown's strategic plan to invest in scholarship that helps to create peaceful, just and prosperous societies, the Watson Institute has been expanding since 2014 to support ever more interactions between scholars and practitioners, hands-on opportunities for students and research with a global reach.

While the institute has evolved considerably, its core goal remains—and now it extends even more broadly to teaching and public engagement. Home to 10 centers and initiatives, and uniting faculty from academic departments across campus, it is committed to conquering systemic issues that affect communities worldwide, from poverty and inequality to climate change and rapid urbanization.

"Now more than ever, our society needs what Watson has to offer," said University Provost Richard Locke, who led the institute from 2013 to 2015. "Factors that threaten the peace, prosperity and stability of our societies must be understood analytically so that they can be addressed in more effective and lasting ways. This is what Watson does."

Research to Inform Policy and Practice

With an increasing focus on research in support of the public good, Watson Institute faculty have successfully shed light on some of the most intractable challenges of inequality and injustice across the world. Their research helps give voice to the voiceless and representation to the underrepresented, efforts that have earned the attention of world leaders and sparked public discussion that at times leads to significant legislative and policy changes.

Watson-affiliated economists such as John Friedman and Emily Oster investigate differences in economic opportunity across the United States and connections between disease outbreaks and vaccination rates, respectively. Sociologist Jayanti Owens offers new insights on how the social contexts of schools, families and workplaces can lead to disparities in educational and economic outcomes. And public polls conducted by the institutes's Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy add to the public discourse on topics as diverse as the cost of living, the value of democracy and the price of security.

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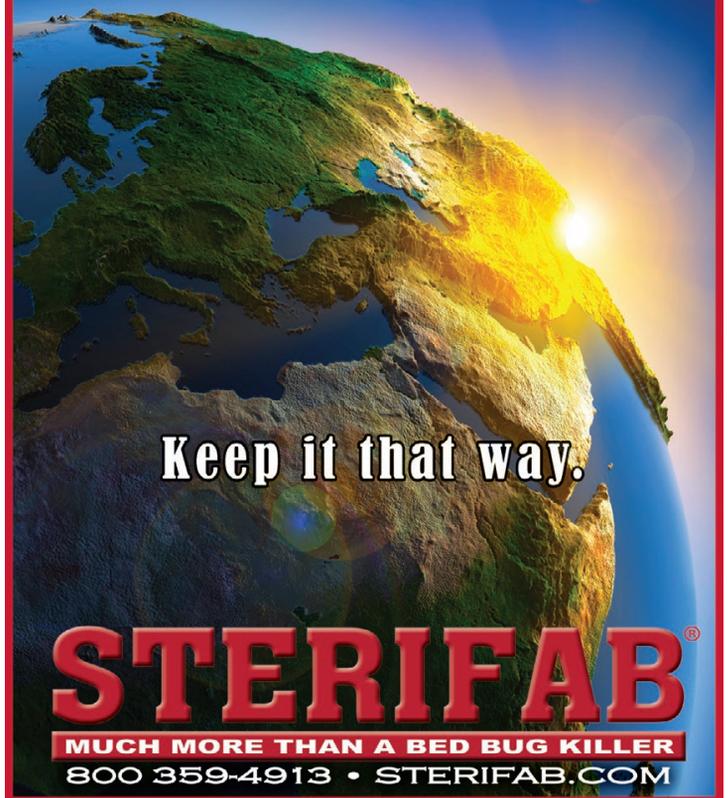
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Among the experts immersed in addressing inequality through research is Catherine Lutz, a professor of international studies and anthropology at Brown. Working with Boston University colleague Neta Crawford, she has identified a connection between war and the economic turbulence that leads to inequality.

In 2010, as the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks loomed, Lutz and Crawford realized that much information on the consequences of the ensuing American military conflicts was missing. With the aim of stimulating public discourse and encouraging better-informed policymaking, the two launched the Costs of War project to provide the fullest possible account of the human, economic and political costs of these wars.

"It's not dollars and cents alone, nor is it only blood," Crawford said. "It's the ripple effects in the economy. We want to help people understand that the effects of war don't end when the war terminates or when troops are withdrawn."

Costs of War research has earned massive national and international news coverage and has catalyzed countless conversations in Congress

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about financial, social and political costs of military spending on wars. Most recently, lawmakers referred to a map of every current conflict in which the U.S. is engaged, which was created by Watson Institute research associate Stephanie Savell.

"It's fundamentally about accountability," Steinfeld said of the Costs of War project. "It's the accountability of policymakers, the accountability of societies. You need to have data and evidence for real accountability."

Not all high-impact, evidence-based scholarship at Watson is data-driven, a point exemplified by Nadjie Al-Ali, a professor of international studies, anthropology and Middle East

studies. Al-Ali's research on women, feminism and gender-based violence in the Middle East is qualitative: She engages with feminist activists, ordinary women and community leaders, observing and participating in their activities, listening to and recording their life stories and asking them specific questions relative to her research.

Al-Ali's published work, which draws from field research in Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon, demonstrates that when societies see an increase in militarization—owing to foreign occupation, internal conflict or a regime change—they also see a rise in gender-based violence. In 2018, when the Carnegie

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Foundation invited Al-Ali to present in New York and Washington, she had a chance to confront world leaders with the research, urging them to take gender into account when considering strategies to combat violence.

But Al-Ali notes that the power of her research has, on occasions, been even greater in the hands of the very women she studies. In the early 2000s, while in Iraq, Al-Ali met women activists who knew gender-based violence had increased in their country but were fearful of sharing details of the incidents, given the country's conservative social standards. So Al-Ali gathered the activists for workshops on conducting qualitative research.

"My workshops taught them to use research methods to gather evidence of increases in gender-based violence and other instances of gender-based discrimination," she said. "They were able to use that research as evidence for policy recommendations they presented to the Iraqi government and international organizations."

Another illustration of Brown's strength in international and public affairs lies in its many international partnerships. Faculty members

Ashutosh Varshney and Patrick Heller, for example, developed a long-term partnership with the Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy in India to study the connection between civic engagement and access to basic services, such as clean water, in India's cities.

Drawing on data from a large household survey in Bangalore, the pair concluded in a 2017 study that lower-income families, while very politically active, constituted the least civically active income group yet stood to gain the most from civic and political participation.

Varshney said Brown's partnership with Janaagraha has allowed his academic work to have a practical impact. Armed with proof that increased civic participation could give India's poor improved access to basic necessities, the NGO has increased its focus on encouraging city residents to vote and participate in civic life.

"If academic researchers and practitioners can come together, practitioners can understand how knowledge production works, and academics can understand not only how that knowledge implemented on the ground but also how their research can benefit from ground-level practice," Varshney said.

Open Discussion on the Most Difficult Topics

In recent years, the Watson Institute has reinforced its commitment to hosting scholars and practitioners with a wide variety of experiences, political persuasions and perspectives.

From presentations by the likes of Jim Yong Kim, former head of the World Bank, to discussions between political leaders from opposing parties, to conferences that confront contentious global issues, Watson has become an important forum for conversations that have the potential to change perspectives and shape policy. Its new home for landmark events like these is the sleek, state-of-the-art Stephen Robert '62 Hall, the completion of which last year added more than 30,000 square feet of physical space to keep pace with the institute's programmatic growth.

"We have a responsibility, given our position in the world, to bring people together who wouldn't otherwise speak to each other," Steinfeld says. "If you want to solve the world's problems, you've got to get together people who don't agree with each other and get them to talk."

The Brazil Initiative at the institute has received international attention for convening diverse voices, from Brazilian politicians like Salvador city councilman Silvio Humberto to artist-activists like the award-winning tropicalia musician Tom Zé. In April 2019, the initiative hosted a two-day conference where Brazilian and American scholars, LGBTQ activists, and indigenous and Afro-Brazilian citizens discussed the fate of democracy in Brazil in the context of policy changes proposed by President Jair Bolsonaro's, the leader of the republic as of January 2019.

The conference, hosted in collaboration with Harvard University, not only drew attention to Brazil's most underrepresented communities but also stoked worldwide conversations about racism in the country, said James Green, director of the Brazil Initiative. Green noted that the event also communicated to the country's marginalized residents that they were not alone.

"Many in Brazil are feeling demoralized about the state of democracy in Brazil and are trying to figure out what to do," Green said. "When we speak about these issues here at Brown, people in Brazil are listening, and they no longer feel isolated."

The conference also saw the official launch of the U.S. Network for Democracy in Brazil, an English-language website that documents recent political events in the country and

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provides a venue for discussion about how American scholars and activists can defend democracy in the country.

“The Network for Democracy can, for example, work with Congress on open letters about the situation in Brazil, which can spur members of Congress to debate and raise questions about deforestation and the rights of women, indigenous people, Afro-Brazilians and the LGBTQ community,” Green said. “When people in power in Brazil see that politicians elsewhere are questioning their policies, that can affect their behavior.”

Other recent galvanizing events include “50 Years Since ‘68,” a symposium exploring the impacts of major events in 1968 on today’s social and political movements; “Opioids and Public Health,” which brought together policymakers, medical professionals and public health experts to identify promising directions for both research and practice; and “Nicaragua 1979-2019: The Sandinista Revolution After 40 Years,” which convened conversations between formerly bitter rivals in the historic Nicaraguan conflict and a new generation of national political leaders.

Unique Opportunities for Students

One of Watson’s strengths is its introduction of new thinking and fresh perspectives to critical research and discussion on international and public affairs. Often, students at Brown—both undergraduate and graduate—are changing the conversation or initiating new scholarship. The unique, hands-on learning opportunities students have at Watson prepare them for lives and leadership careers in policymaking, international relations and security, where they can help bring about social change.

Recently, students participated in a course that unpacked how democracies fail—the curriculum created in large part by Brown political scientist Robert Blair and a course so successful that it was adapted for use by 19 other universities. In a 2018 public policy course taught by Watson postdoctoral fellow Adaner Usmani, students created proposals for criminal justice reform. Last spring, students organized a teach-in on the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide alongside Watson senior fellow Stephen Kinzer, the award-winning foreign correspondent.

Ethan Shire, who graduated from Brown in 2019, said he was grateful for the unique opportunity to study with Democratic National Committee Chair Tom Perez and former Republican National Committee Chair Michael Steele in 2018.

“I’ve studied Congress, I’ve studied the executive branch and I’ve learned how legislation gets made,” Shire said. “But I hadn’t been able to conceive of how things really get done in the trenches until I heard from both Perez and Steele, who were directly involved in creating public policy.”

Watson’s study groups invite small groups of students to spend time with leaders in international and public affairs, where they delve deeply into topics and apply theory and research to real-world challenges. The advice Shire heard from Perez, Steele and other experts about the many different entry points into public service convinced him to pursue a career in the private sector before delving into national security or foreign policy, spheres in which he aspires to eventually work.

For Angela Blanchard, a senior fellow at the Watson Institute and a globally recognized community development expert, giving students the tools to make the biggest impact is her primary goal.



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"I'm here to make better and more effective leaders who can chase challenges that are affecting all of us," Blanchard said. "I'm here to foster and nurture, to encourage bold thinkers and doers. I want them examining issues that are unfolding right now all over the world, not only studying history."

In Blanchard's spring 2019 course titled Disaster, Displacement and Response, students working toward a master's degree in public affairs studied and responded to real-world disasters. Some examined the economic and political crisis in Venezuela, while others dug into current issues at the Mexico-Texas border or the effects of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. After bringing in a set of disaster-response experts to speak as guests, Blanchard tasked students with creating a response plan for their respective crises.

"In the arena of disaster and displacement response, you're constantly searching for what's available and learning how to improvise," Blanchard said. "Students at Brown tend to have that talent; they look around and notice assets and resources others don't. I'm teaching them how to harness that strength, because I think it can be useful in policymaking."

Practical, student-centered classes like Blanchard's—along with consultancies, conferences and study groups facilitated by the Watson Institute—prepare graduates who are currently solving domestic and global challenges as analysts, researchers and managerial professionals involved in making, analyzing or implementing public policy, whether in government and nonprofit organizations or at consulting firms in the private sector.

Recent master of public affairs (MPA) graduate April Yee, who did a consultancy at the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University and conducted research on urban geopolitics and redistribution with Brown political scientist Margaret Weir, is now working on a statewide education pilot project at Research Improving People's Lives in Providence. William Wang, an MPA grad who participated in Michael Steele's study group along with Shire, was accepted to the competitive Leadership Fellows Program at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, where his first rotation will be in the Office of Continuous Improvement.

Undergraduate alumni have advanced into roles conducting policy and global partnership work at the United Nations and to research policy positions at federal agencies and major universities.

"Across the Watson Institute, people are working on big, global issues in security, economic development, climate change and more—and at the center of all that work is a social consciousness, a desire to improve equality everywhere," Locke said. "This interplay between academic expertise, on-the-ground research and applied education, all focused on important issues, gives Watson and Brown distinctive capabilities and insights that simply do not exist elsewhere."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jill Kimball is the writer for the humanities and social sciences at Brown University. She studied journalism at the University of Oregon and has previously been a reporter, arts administrator and public relations officer.



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