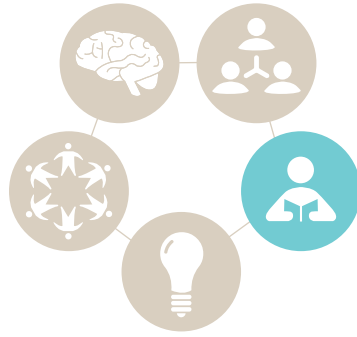


# EHD



## Bass Connections: Crossing the Disciplines to Enact Change



**T**he Bass Connections experience is not a traditional research experience. Its vision—to create a distinctive model for education by exploring societal and cultural challenges through collaborative, problem-centered learning—invites the kind of interdisciplinary investigation that connects students at all levels with faculty around applied research.

Undergraduate students participate in all aspects of a project alongside graduate students, professional students, and faculty members. As a result, they are able to help shape their research team in ways they otherwise might not be able to. For instance, students may interview study participants, conduct statistical analysis, and help write research papers.

For the Education and Human Development (EHD) theme, one of five research themes within Bass Connections, participants come from a variety of backgrounds across campus and contribute to the vitality of the projects through their diverse approaches.

“Bass Connections in Education and Human Development plays an important role in fostering interdisciplinary research collaborations across campus,” said EHD Theme Administrator Cecily Hardaway. “It gives faculty the chance to engage in innovative projects that may not

have emerged without Bass Connections [and] provides a unique opportunity for students to get involved in research that is focused on solving real world problems.”

A quick glance at some of the individuals involved with EHD Bass, led by SSRI Director Thomas Nechyba, reveals economists, engineers, computer scientists, photographers, and ethnographers all working together on challenges related to education and human development.

This interdisciplinary reach also encourages different interpretations of its key terms, hosting projects that explore issues ranging from early childhood through adulthood. Education extends beyond formal K-12 schooling to include learning in families and through social channels.

Human development, likewise, is broadly defined as encompassing life outcomes across ages including health, social and familial connections, happiness, income, and employment.

EHD Bass encourages projects that are within at least one of four project priority areas. They are state and local community engagement; higher education and the transition to adulthood; educational inequality; and child mental health, physical health and social adjustment.

The eleven EHD Bass teams currently include Responding to the Educational and Psychological Needs of Children and Families in Durham’s Transitional Housing, Nutrition and Cognition, and Studying the Real Slums of Bangalore, to name but a few.

### Fostering Research with EHDi

The Education and Human Development Incubator (EHDi) exists within SSRI and is home to EHD Bass. EHDi supports EHD Bass by connecting with project teams, providing additional funding for projects within the four priority areas, and offering research support to teams.

EHDi also promotes EHD scholarship through its new EHD graduate scholars program and by providing resources to researchers beyond Bass Connections. Another key focus is to connect researchers at Duke with one another and with partners beyond Duke.

“There is so much expertise in education and human development across disciplines at Duke,” said SSRI’s Associate Director for Education Research and Engagement Carol Ripple. “Our purpose is to spark new and grow existing collaborations among researchers and find ways to support and extend their work to benefit the larger community.”



In addition to fostering scholarship, EHDi offers program evaluation and data management services. “Our data management and analytics team provides expertise to support EHD research and our evaluation projects. Because we’re part of SSRI we’re especially well positioned to work with sensitive data in SSRI’s Protected Research Data Network,” Ripple explained.

Navigating the many resources available to EHD Bass teams can be a daunting task at times, but Ripple’s team aims to be a resource for students doing just that.

### The Real Slums of Bangalore

With its global footprint, the Real Slums of Bangalore team exemplifies the EHD Bass vision of translating human development research into positive life outcomes.

Led by Professor of Public Policy and Political Science Anirudh Krishna and Professor of Political Science Erik Wibbels, the team has two objectives. The first is “to refine a satellite-based methodology for identifying slums and slum types,” according to the project’s literature. The second is “to understand how political networks and distributive politics impact the security of property rights, access to public services and human well-being in slums.” With nearly twenty student researchers in the field in the last five

years, this project’s work highlights the ways EHD Bass Connections teams confront societal challenges head on.

Team member Tara Bansal spent the summer working in Bangalore, India conducting research and speaking—with the help of translators—to members of the communities there. Over the summer the team conducted thousands of surveys, but not without some friction.

“In many of these communities, my presence was, at best, a spectacle and at worst, highly suspicious,” Bansal said in a recent interview. Named the grand prize winner of the Sanford School of Public Policy’s #PolicyInAction photography contest in late September, her photo was chosen because it “candidly captures the messy reality of public policy research,” according to the contest judges.

This messy reality is something the team embraces, with the full understanding that their research is sensitively positioned. The fieldwork, while not for the feint of heart, exposes students to a part of society that needs to be confronted and confronted with research-backed solutions. “Ultimately, this research will be used to better identify the political network that controls how government goods and services are distributed in the slums of Bangalore,” Bansal said.

From left: Mounesh, Hemanth, Mariyamma (with her baby), and Bhimarao are residents of the Srinivasa settlement who migrated from a rural village in order to move closer to a hospital; The Srinivasa Colony is composed of migrant workers like them who provide cheap labor for real estate investors responding to rapid urbanization. Residents inhabit very different buildings made from found materials, and face growing threats of eviction from the surrounding neighborhood, neighbors who often restrict their access to public services like water and electricity; Tara Bansal interviews a community leader as members of his political entourage look on warily.

Through EHD Bass Connections, fieldwork like Bansal’s can affect real change. While slums continue to expand across the developing world, her team’s work can help illuminate why they spread so rapidly, and, more importantly, what can be done to prevent it. “Each and every student has contributed so much in their own particular way, whether it be through photo narratives, field work, statistical modeling, or human management,” said Professor Wibbels. “Without Bass Connections, we would be years behind in this project.”

Learn more: [sites.duke.edu/ehdbassconnections/](https://sites.duke.edu/ehdbassconnections/)