

2021
WATSON
UNDERGRADUATE
THESIS CONFERENCE



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
-
PUBLIC POLICY

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Watson Undergraduate Programs

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Ivan Arreguín-Toft, Director IR Program
Tony Levitas, Director PLCY Program
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Susan Moffitt—Political Science, Watson Institute
Jayanti Owens—Sociology, Watson Institute
Margaret Weir—Political Science, Watson Institute
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Alla Baranovsky—Harvard University, Watson Institute
Jonathan Collins—Education
Robert Hackey—Watson Institute
Tyler Jost—Political Science, Watson Institute
Michael Moffitt—University of Oregon
Susan Moffitt—Political Science, Watson Institute
Faatimah Muhammad—U.S. Dept of Education
Jayanti Owens—Sociology, Watson Institute
Reid Pauly—Political Science
Dan Smith—Anthropology, Watson Institute
Margaret Weir—Political Science, Watson Institute

11:00 Welcome Remarks

Edward Steinfeld

Director Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Professor of Political Science

11:15 PANEL I: Policy Across Borders [Moderator: Claudia Elliott]

Provocations as Engagement: The Foreign Policy Strategy of North Korea in 2017

Elaina Kim (IR)

Constituting Arenas of Great Power Competition: Policymaking Narratives and the Globalization of US-China Competition

Emma Kumleben (IR)

Do the International Monetary Fund's Mistakes Fuel Learning? An Examination of the IMF in South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire

Alexandra Reice (IR)

The Price of Liberty: Implications of Digital Contact Tracing for Privacy, Public Health, and the Economy

Emily Skahill (PLCY)

Q & A

12:45 PANEL II: Policy the “American Way” [Moderator: Bob Hackey]

Holding States Accountable: The Politics of Open Records Laws at the Subnational Level

Audrey Kim (PLCY)

Private Wealth for Public Good? A Critical Examination of The Role of Philanthropic Foundations in American Democracy

Lucia Winton (PLCY)

Recasting the Iron Triangle Fails to Serve our Nation’s Veterans: Partial Privatization of the VHA under the Veterans Choice and VA MISSION Acts

Grace Banfield (PLCY)

Defensive Medicine: An Elusive Beast

Viknesh Kasthuri (PLCY)

Q & A

SCHEDULE

- 2:15-2:30 BREAK -

2:30 PANEL III: Exclusion, Inclusion and Equity in Education [Moderator: Tony Levitas]

Desegregating Suburban School Districts: Understanding Challenges and Evaluating Practices for Effective Policy Implementation

Isabelle Belleza (PLCY)

A Nation of Growth and Decline: Charter Schools and the Broken Promise for Efficiency and Equity in American Public Education

Katherine Bennett (PLCY)

Innovation in Practice: A Program Evaluation of Young Entrepreneurs of Providence (YEP!)

Audrey Shapiro (PLCY)

The Invisibility Problem: A Study of the Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act using Two State Case Studies

Mandana Vakil (PLCY)

Q & A

4:00 Closing Remarks

Ivan Arreguín-Toft

Director IR Program

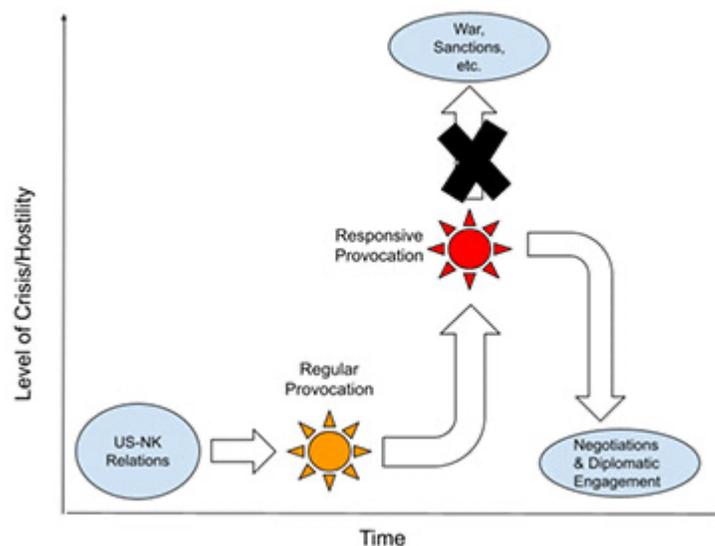
Provocations as Engagement: The Foreign Policy Strategy of North Korea in 2017

Elaina Kim (IR)

Advisors: Claudia Elliott, Reid Pauly

What motivated North Korea to conduct numerous missile provocations in 2017—an escalation from previous years—despite its political and economic weaknesses? As a newly introduced concept, provocations have been examined in terms of their social-psychological mechanisms and their connections to inadvertent war. However, there has been little research into how provocations could be undertaken as a deliberate strategy. Drawing from scholarship on crisis and conflict, I examine six explanations for escalating tensions with the uses of provocations: type and psychology of leadership, need for unavailable resources, internal instability, international prestige, external security, and diplomacy and engagement. Examining the

case of North Korea, I take a three-part, mixed-methods approach: word frequency tests of missile-related media (content analysis), inspection of US-North Korea events prior to missiles (event analysis), and examination of official test announcements for motivations (discourse analysis). I find that external security is by far North Korea’s greatest motivation for provocations, and that there are two strategic types of provocations that introduce and balance escalation: regular and responsive. Finally, North Korea uses provocations first to elicit attention and then to de-escalate into diplomacy. This strategic use of provocations has implications for US-North Korean foreign policy as well as conflict and crisis studies.



Constituting Arenas of Great Power Competition: Policymaking Narratives and the Globalization of US-China Competition

Emma Kumleben (IR)

Advisors: Claudia Elliott, Tyler Jost

All policymaking implicitly relies on an understanding of the problem at hand: a narrative about what exactly is going on that demands a policy response. In the case of great power competition, certain issues and regions are constituted as facets of that competition in the eyes of the competing powers. How does this constitution take place, and with what implications for resulting policy? Existing theory centers the narrative constitution of identities, but fails to fully account for their multiplicity, ambiguity, and contextual integration into policymaking situations at varying degrees of specificity. To address these insufficiencies, I synthesize insights from literary theory, symbolic-interactionist social psychology, IR

role theory, and post-structuralist discourse theory to create a framework for analysis of narratives of great power competition in tertiary regions. I apply my framework through an interpretative narrative analysis of US discussion of “China in Africa” in policymaking contexts from 2017-2019. I illustrate the existence of a dominant narrative in US policymaking that structures the interpretation of China-Africa relations with the outcome of positioning Africa as a terrain for great power competition. This study has implications for the utility of narrative as a lens for approaching constitutive questions in IR, and for policymaking practices.



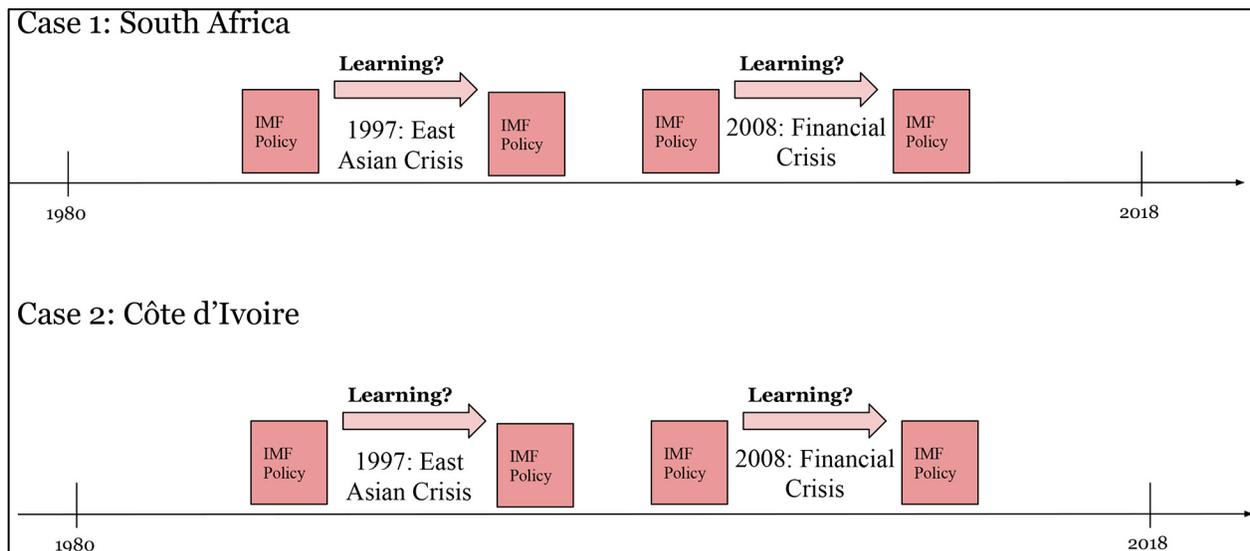
Do the International Monetary Fund's Mistakes Fuel Learning? An Examination of the IMF in South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire

Alexandra Reice (IR)

Advisors: Mark Blyth, Dan Smith

Has the International Monetary Fund (IMF) exhibited an ability to learn? This thesis examines the extent of the IMF's institutional learning capabilities with respect to its policy recommendations to South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire. Using these two cases, I investigate IMF intervention through two critical junctures in IMF history — the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the 2008 financial crisis — by analyzing annual IMF Article IV consultation staff reports. In this investigation the extent of IMF institutional learning serves as my dependent variable. My independent variables are the aforementioned critical junctures. I find that IMF staff recommendations do change over time.

Staff recommendations both reflected and took into account the countries' economic, social and political contexts. In the case of South Africa, I find second-order policy change in relation to the two crises in terms of a change in Fund advice regarding financial sector regulation and government spending measures, specifically post-2008. With Côte d'Ivoire, I find that the country's political unrest impacted the course of IMF recommendations more significantly than the two critical junctures. However, I do find evidence of first and second-order change in terms of staff's increased prioritization of spending in social sectors, financial regulation and inclusive economic growth.



The Price of Liberty: Implications of Digital Contact Tracing for Privacy, Public Health, and the Economy

Emily Skahill (PLCY)

Advisors: Timothy Edgar, Robert Hackey

Public health emergencies have always generated a tension between personal privacy and the need for public health authorities to gather sensitive information to track the spread of infectious diseases. Developments in technology have made it possible to trace people's whereabouts and contacts in a way that was unprecedented just a decade ago, elevating this tension between privacy and public health. While several countries seized on the opportunity to harness these advancements in surveillance technologies to conduct digital

contact tracing, leading to fewer deaths and relief from mass lockdowns, other countries – the United States in particular – missed an opportunity to leverage the power of this promising technology due to privacy concerns. This thesis surveys uses of digital contact tracing technologies in China, South Korea, Israel, Singapore, the European Union, and the United States in order to better understand the ethical, legal, and policy implications of digital disease surveillance.



Holding States Accountable: The Politics of Open Records Laws at the Subnational Level

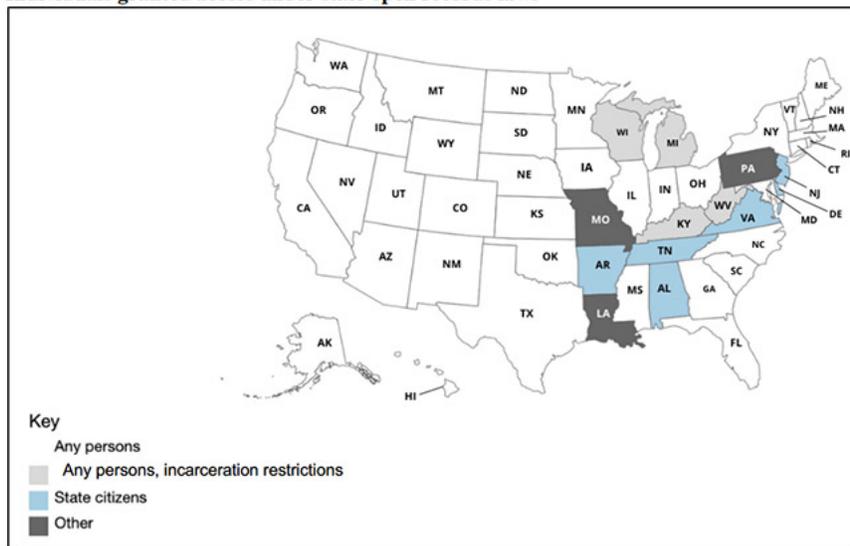
Audrey Kim (PLCY)

Advisors: Susan Moffitt, Michael Moffitt

State governments have grown substantially since the mid-1900s, prompting the question: how are they kept democratically accountable? One potential pathway exists within transparency policies, such as open records laws. All fifty states passed open records laws inspired by the federal Freedom of Information Act of 1966, abetting public access to government records. State open records laws remain under-researched despite their potential importance to state accountability. This thesis aims to: 1) provide an account of how state open records laws operate and 2) suggest future areas of promising

research, including further study of how state agencies’ designs bear on the operation of open records laws. First, this thesis describes how state open records laws vary and operate. Second, it tests whether aspects of states’ institutional design bear on how state open records laws operate. Third, it generates hypotheses about the relationship between agency design and the operation of open records laws through a comparative case study. My results highlight the importance of institutional design and pave the way for future research on abetting state accountability through state open records laws.

Figure 3.1
Individuals granted access under state open records laws



Source: Data from “Status of Requester,” The Open Government Guide (The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, 2019), <https://www.rcfp.org/open-government-sections/1-status-of-requester/>.

Private Wealth for Public Good? A Critical Examination of The Role of Philanthropic Foundations in American Democracy

Lucia Winton (PLCY)

Advisors: Benjamin Armstrong, William Allen

America is experiencing unprecedented levels of inequality. In reckoning with fundamental social problems, Americans have turned to the venerated field of charity: donating private funds towards public ends. Meanwhile, political scientists are skeptical of seemingly elitist foundations, which play a pivotal role in funding the U.S. nonprofit sector. Critiques of such institutions contend that foundations are inherently unaccountable and unable to solve the root causes of social problems. This thesis addresses the question: how can publicly

subsidized institutions of philanthropy—private foundations—best pursue social progress while aligning with American ideals of democracy, equality of opportunity, and justice? Through a historical analysis of American philanthropy, an examination of modern-day critiques, and a case study of the Ford Foundation, this thesis delineates how foundations can successfully navigate their role in financing social change. This thesis imparts a broader understanding of the complexities and propriety of using private wealth to fund social programs.



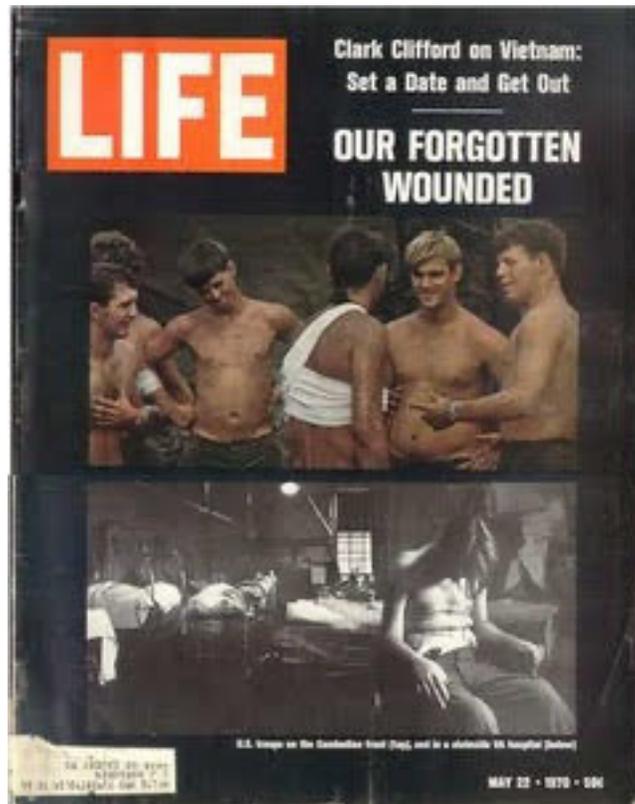
Recasting the Iron Triangle Fails to Serve our Nation's Veterans: Partial Privatization of the VHA under the Veterans Choice and VA MISSION Acts

Grace Banfield (PLCY)

Advisors: Robert Hackey, Margaret Weir

In 2014, The Department of Veterans Affairs became the center of scandal when a series of deaths in Phoenix were tied to exorbitantly long wait times for care. The scandal, in combination with a specific set of political conditions, led to the partial privatization of the VHA under the Veterans Choice Act. The legislation recast the iron triangle governing veterans' healthcare by introducing private market interests as a key stakeholder in the policy space. Four years later, a desire to appease traditional stakeholders and new private market interests led to the passage of the VA

MISSION Act to liberalize eligibility requirements and provide access to private care for 3.7 million veterans. The divergence of interests within the new issue network has driven sky rocketing costs as legislators have sought to fully fund both traditional and private VHA care. The paired funding approach is unsustainable in the long-run and has served to deteriorate quality of care in the short-run. Partial privatization, as legislated by the Veterans Choice Act and VA MISSION Act, is not in service of our nation's veterans.



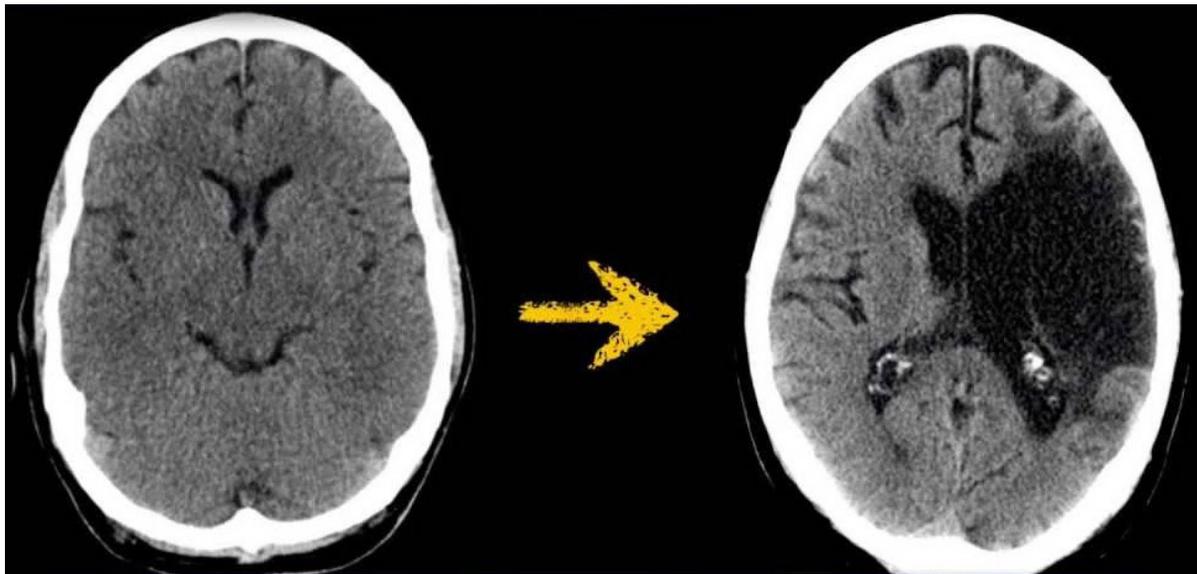
Defensive Medicine: An Elusive Beast

Viknesh Kasthuri (PLCY)

Advisors: John Friedman, Susan Moffitt

In this thesis, I investigate the role of medical malpractice pressure on the practice of positive defensive medicine. I exploit variations in the size of the rise in medical malpractice premiums between 2000-05 to identify the intensity of medical malpractice pressure on physicians. I apply this novel identification strategy to investigate defensive medicine practices surrounding three medical conditions: Bell's Palsy, ischemic stroke, and acute myocardial infarction (AMI). I compare the results of my

identification strategy to those of the literature standard, the passage of caps on noneconomic damages. Overall, I find that there is little evidence of defensive medicine in the care of patients with Bell's Palsy and AMI. I do find evidence of defensive medicine in stroke care, but my two main identification strategies find contradictory results. These findings suggest that medical malpractice reform should not be motivated by its potential to reduce the practice of defensive medicine.



PANEL III: Exclusion, Inclusion, and Equity in Education

Desegregating Suburban School Districts: Understanding Challenges and Evaluating Practices for Effective Policy Implementation

Isabelle Belleza (PLCY)

Advisors: Kenneth Wong, Jonathan Collins

Rapid demographic change is reshaping the suburbs, yet the implications of these changes on segregation in suburban school districts remain understudied. This thesis examines the challenges faced by policymakers in implementing desegregation policies within the context of demographically changing suburbs. By comparing desegregation efforts and equity reforms across four suburban school districts, this thesis concludes that competing policy priorities and community politics are the primary impediments to the implementation of desegregation policies.

The findings from the comparative analysis inform recommendations for effective strategies at two levels. At the policymaking level, school boards should develop a unified commitment to integration to ensure focused attention on integration and the longevity of policy, create policies with specific integration targets, and consider varied implementation strategies. At the community level, districts should build support for integration through consistent engagement, an incremental policy implementation approach, and an emphasis on the collective benefits of integration.



A Nation of Growth and Decline: Charter Schools and the Broken Promise for Efficiency and Equity in American Public Education

Katherine Bennett (PLCY)

Advisors: Margaret Weir, Jayanti Owens

Long a mainstay of the school choice movement, charter school proponents have advanced these public schools as a market-oriented mechanism for improving educational quality and outcomes. For many states, this improvement as a policy goal has centered on the educational outcomes of historically underserved students, including students of color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Backed by a diverse coalition of supporters, charter school enrollments have grown substantially across the country over the last 20 years. However, the ability of these schools to achieve better academic results and create greater educational equity has been a long-contested topic. In contributing to this discussion, this thesis examines charter school enrollments nationwide from 2000 to the present, identifying separate trends of both growth and decline across various states. Using these trends, this thesis then

creates a novel analysis of both charter school enrollment growth and decline, focusing on two case study states, Nevada and Ohio, to explore the drivers and impacts of charter school enrollment changes over the past ten years. Ultimately, this thesis presents several results: (i) In both case study states, charter schools tend to enroll disproportionately large shares of high SES students, reinforcing the claims of the “white flight” hypothesis. (ii) In many districts, charter schools tend to reinforce segregation along racial and ethnic lines. (iii) On average, charter schools tend to underperform traditional public schools along academic metrics. (iv) For states experiencing charter enrollment declines, the poor quality of these charter programs appears to be an important factor in both reducing the number of charter schools operating as well as actively driving students out of the charter system.



Innovation in Practice: A Program Evaluation of Young Entrepreneurs of Providence (YEP!)

Audrey Shapiro (PLCY)

Advisors: Jayanti Owens, Alla Baranovsky

With wealth inequality at an all-time high and social mobility at an all-time low, there is a dire need for interventions to spur economic activity in under-resourced communities. The vast imbalance in wealth in America is exemplified by the high poverty rates of communities surrounding universities and contentious town-gown relations. Young Entrepreneurs of Providence (YEP!), a high school entrepreneurship incubator hosted at Brown University, aims to develop capable

entrepreneurs who are empowered to grow the wealth of their communities. In doing so, YEP! seeks to grow the confidence of its participants and heal town-gown relations. In order to investigate whether YEP! can achieve these three goals, this study presents findings from interviews conducted with 40% of YEP!'s alumni. While there are limitations to the results of this study due to its nature and limited sample size, the results suggest that YEP! has made demonstrable gains on all three fronts.



The Invisibility Problem: A Study of the Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act using Two State Case Studies

Mandana Vakil (PLCY)

Advisors: Matthew Kraft, Faatimah Muhammad

This thesis investigates the effectiveness of the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVHAA) through case studies of New York and Pennsylvania. The MVHAA mandates that states reduce homeless students' barriers to accessing an equitable education. To analyze the act, I compared a high-performing state (New York) to a low performing state (Pennsylvania) using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitatively, I analyzed homeless student identification and staffing patterns in both states. I conducted semi-structured interviews with policy advocates, program administrators, and homeless

liaisons. New York more effectively implements the MVHAA because, independent of the act itself, it dedicates more resources, infrastructure, and attention to homeless students than Pennsylvania. The key barriers to improving the identification of homeless students and implementation of the MVHAA are underfunding, limited capacity of homeless liaisons, and lack of community awareness. Based on these findings, I provide policy recommendations regarding the implementation of the MVHAA in state EHCY programs.

