

Institute for the Study of Societal Issues (ISSI)
University of California, Berkeley

The Institute for the Study of Social Change was founded in 1976 as the first institute at UC Berkeley focused on stratification. In 2009, during a previous era of cost-cutting and consolidation, the university merged it with Survey Research Center to form the [Institute for the Study of Societal Issues](#), which has carried on the topical focus on inequality, stratification, and social change as well as the commitment to community-engaged scholarship and to supporting scholars of color as well as white scholars.

The strength of ISSI comes from combining this legacy and tradition with vibrant new initiatives that respond to the times and the interests of faculty and students. The institute stands as an enduring reminder that social justice scholarship belongs in the academy and that scholars from marginalized communities belong in the academy. Emerging scholars benefit from a sense of belonging to larger academic community and the networks of committed alumni. During this moment of a global pandemic, economic disruption, and renewed focus on systemic racism, ISSI has the potential to make great contributions, but the campus administration plans to close it, citing the dilapidated building, the campus and state budget problems, and the fact that UCB has “other units on campus that focus on race, social justice, and structural inequality.”

ISSI is housed in the historic Anna Head Building;¹ it is extremely run-down and not wheelchair accessible due to decades of neglect by the university. Having a physical space to create an intellectual interdisciplinary community has been a key feature of ISSI; but since the coronavirus pandemic started, we have adapted by creating new forms of community online via working groups, writing groups, events, and workshops. If we are evicted from the building, we are confident that we can adapt to that situation as well.

During the five-year period of 2015-20, ISSI brought in over \$4.3 million in extramural grants, contracts, and gifts. The campus administration received over \$1.1 million in fees from those grants, contracts, and gifts. During 2019-20, ISSI received \$350,000 in funding from the Vice Chancellor for Research.

ISSI is home to the [Graduate Fellows Program](#) (GFP), a two-year interdisciplinary training program for UC Berkeley graduate students in the social sciences and professional schools who are researching social inequality and social change. The key contribution of the GFP has been to ensure the retention and success of students of color along with white students in the completion of their doctorates and to assist them in securing tenure track jobs in the academy. This program has a 40-year track record of improving retention of URM PhD students and diversifying the professoriate in California and throughout the US. GFP alumni include 161 people of color who completed their doctorates (60 African American, 54 Latinx, 40 API, 7 Native American). Because the training program is embedded in a research unit that produces rigorous scholarship and advances a new model for the academy, students who have been marginalized gain practical skills and a sense of possibility for the future.

¹ The building is registered as a historic landmark on local, state, and national registries, thus the university has a legal responsibility to prevent “demolition by neglect.”

ISSI houses seven complementary centers. Each center promotes research, interdisciplinary writing and publication, graduate and undergraduate training, as well as conferences, colloquia, and other events. The focus of each center is briefly described below:

- Asian American Research Center [working title] is ISSI's newest center and is currently in formation.
- [Berkeley Center for Social Medicine](#) critically engages the intersection of social systems, social difference, health, and health care in the United States and across the globe.
- [Center for Ethnographic Research](#) (CER) promotes and supports interdisciplinary research on social issues using participant-observation and allied techniques. CER has a strong focus on training and offers workshops throughout the year which train students and faculty from around the world in the principles and techniques of ethnographic methodology. These workshops also generate revenue for CER and ISSI.
- [Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies](#) encourages and nurtures comparative scholarship on right-wing movements both in the U.S. and abroad during the 20th and 21st centuries. The Center houses an archive and offers mini-grants for student research.
- [Center for Research on Social Change](#) develops interdisciplinary research initiatives that examine the factors promoting and inhibiting social change in the U.S. and abroad.
- [Joseph A. Myers Center for Research on Native American Issues](#) provides the people of Indian country with pragmatic research products that can be employed to improve the quality of life on Indian reservations across the U.S. In addition to offering mini-grants and training for students, the Center sponsors the Native American Museum Studies Institute annually to train staff from tribal museums and cultural centers.
- [Latinx Research Center](#) (LRC) was founded in its previous iteration – the Center for Latino Policy Research – in 1989. Its mission has expanded as an interdisciplinary and transAmericas research center that produces scholarship and provides student and faculty research opportunities to address the social, cultural, economic, and political inequalities affecting the diverse Latinx population of the United States. Currently, the LRC operates semi-autonomously from ISSI, and it has a separate building. While there has been a plan to move LRC to a different unit, that plan has so far not worked.

ISSI also awards two endowed prizes annually: the [FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE: Thomas I. Yamashita Prize](#) and the [KIDS FIRST: David L. Kirp Prize](#).