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The College of Liberal Arts Research Academy (CLARA)

CLARA Awardees Showcase



Highlighting the funded projects of the 2025-2026 CLARA faculty awardees

- Evelina Akimova
- Hyesun Choung
- Andrew Flachs
- Seungyoon Lee
- Aaron Mendon-Plasek
- Daniel Schiff
- Swati Srivastava

Monday, March 30, 2026
3:30–5:00 p.m.
HSSE Library (Stewart Center)
Chris & Michelle White Cornerstone Reading Room (First Floor)

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH ACADEMY | College of Liberal Arts

Evelina Akimova

Sociology



Dr. Akimova's website

Instrumental Variable GWAS (IV-GWAS): Disentangling Direct Genetic Effects from Environmental Confounding

Complex diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and neuropsychiatric disorders continue to exert a profound toll on public health, driven by multifactorial etiologies that span genetic, environmental, and behavioral domains. Over the past two decades, genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified thousands of loci associated with complex traits, yet the biological interpretation of these findings remains limited. Many loci reside in non-coding regions and exhibit pleiotropy or lack clear mechanistic pathways. This gap is exacerbated by the complex interplay between genetic and environmental factors which introduce endogeneity into statistical models and obscure causal inference. Traditional GWAS frameworks are ill-equipped to separate these dependencies, leading to biased heritability estimates and ambiguous genetic correlations. Recent advances in computational genomics and data science, including high-dimensional modeling, causal inference techniques, and integrative multi-omics approaches, provide new opportunities to address these limitations, yet scalable, generalizable methods for disentangling intertwined genetic and environmental effects remain elusive. My preliminary work suggests that leveraging structured environmental data alongside genomic and transcriptomic profiles reveal latent patterns that are invisible to conventional models. These insights point toward the need for a new analytical approach that reconceptualizes GWAS as a context-aware discovery framework, capable of capturing the converging architecture of complex traits.

Andrew Flachs

Anthropology



Dr. Flachs's website

Agriculture as Social Reproduction

If the ecology of colonial capitalism is a hierarchical plantation, then the ecology of mutual aid is a dense garden that grows gifts to repay intimate debts. Social reproduction theory offers a lens to explore how the material and social fabrics of society are formed, illuminating value that is otherwise externalized in capitalist accounting. While social reproduction theory offers a robust vocabulary for describing how class, identity, and other ways of being in society are formed, this approach rarely links lived experiences within broader political ecologies. Through a combination of historical and ethnographic analyses, we consider not only how social reproduction work reproduces socioeconomic conditions and class relations, but also how this work reproduces physical landscapes that generate future possibilities for organizing life. Agriculture is a particularly illuminating site to describe how work reproduces social relationships while continually creating a landscape in which diverse life can thrive or suffer. We advance agriculture as a case of social-ecological reproduction. In producing agricultural commodities, farming reproduces relations between humans, structures the conditions of life, and continually recreates a farm ecology.

Hyesun Choung

Brian Lamb School of Communication



Dr. Choung's website

Examining Trust in Communicative AI: Conceptual and Measurement Foundations

As AI systems increasingly mediate how people seek information, make sense of complex issues, and communicate knowledge, understanding trust in these systems has become a central concern. This project examines trust in communicative AI by developing a multilevel and multidimensional conceptual and measurement framework. A central component of the project is the development of a trust in communicative AI scale that captures both the dimensions of trust and the levels at which trust is evaluated. Conceptually, the project distinguishes among functional or competence-based trust, relational or human-like trust, and neutrality-based trust that reflects AI's non-human qualities. It also differentiates between individual-level trust directed toward the AI agent itself and system-level trust directed toward the organizations, infrastructures, and design practices behind the AI. Together, this approach reflects how users evaluate AI as both an interaction partner and a sociotechnical system. The project has completed a comprehensive literature review, conceptual refinement, item development, and IRB preparation during the summer, followed by focus group interviews conducted during the fall semester. Ongoing work includes expert review and psychometric testing to assess content validity and dimensional structure. In parallel, this work informed the submission of an NSF CAREER proposal that examines AI systems as emerging epistemic agents that shape how knowledge is produced, interpreted, and relied upon across contexts. By linking scale development with this broader theoretical agenda, the project contributes to a research program that connects individual trust judgments to questions of epistemic authority and human–AI communication.

Swati Srivastava

Political Science



Dr. Srivastava's website

From Frontline Defenders to Rights Indifferent: New Data on Big Tech's Private Governance on Human Rights

This research note examines whether and how Big Tech engages in global human rights governance. Introducing an original Big Tech Human Rights Transparency Database of 755 documents from Amazon, Apple, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Snap, and Twitter, we combine qualitative content analysis and computational topic modeling to extend theories of private governance on discursive legitimation and regulatory evasion. Our analysis reveals meaningful variation in disclosure intensity, where some firms produce hundreds of documents while others have fewer than ten, which signals differential seeking of discursive legitimation through rights governance across leading tech firms. Microsoft and Meta position themselves as "frontline defenders" against government overreach with extensive due diligence disclosures, while Amazon, Google, and Twitter appear "rights indifferent." Big Tech also references its own private governance initiatives five and a half times more than international human rights frameworks. Companies respond to external scrutiny events, but primarily through performative disclosure rather than necessarily changed practices, consistent with regulatory evasion. Finally, we also infer different private governance portfolios, with Meta seeking external validation for reputational repair, Microsoft pursuing networked capacity-building, and Apple exhibiting solo governance in core operations. Our database serves as an important archive for research on private governance, technology, and corporate power.

Aaron Mendon-Plasek

History



Dr. Mendon-Plasek's website

Making Artificial Intelligence into Machine Learning, Catalyst Research Programs, and the Narrating of Progress

Popular and professional histories of artificial intelligence often explain the ubiquity of machine learning as a consequence of its better performance on benchmark datasets. These parochial stories foreground consensus around empirical results. They narrate the reconfiguration of AI around particular forms of machine learning as a story in which a few research communities (and their attendant funding agencies) compelled pervasive agreement about which research questions and criteria of judgment merited attention. Yet even cursory historical investigation challenges such accounts: by the mid-1980s at least five distinct conceptions of "machine learning" had been articulated within various communities of practice spanned a dizzying array of disciplines, including artificial intelligence, pattern recognition, engineering, statistics, physics, and computer science. Computing communities benefited from the disunity of "machine learnings" by repurposing the methods and techniques of seemingly unrelated fields. Such "repurposing" can be difficult to reconstruct, however, since "repurposing" may appear indistinguishable from creative invention when only a small selection of research communities are examined. This talk discusses efforts to narrate the history of AI that center productive disagreement. By examining adjacent research literatures outside of what has traditionally constituted "AI," this talk explores a few historical examples where such epistemic "repurposing" appears to have reconfigured the field of AI.

Seungyoon Lee

Brian Lamb School of Communication



Dr. Lee's website

Network Improvisation and Community Resource Coordination during Disaster Response

Recent extreme weather events show that a significant portion of relief and recovery efforts come from grassroots and community-driven coordination. Improvisation, which relies on altered roles and structures which are not formally prescribed, is at the center of such emergent coordination. Despite the benefits of a loose structure, two key challenges exist in the process: making resources visible among involved entities and residents and optimizing the spatial and temporal mobilization of dormant nodes and ties with little prior planning. This project offers theoretical and analytical frameworks and tools for planning improvisation, thus supporting coordinated responses to risks.

This project achieves two major tasks. First, leveraging network science theories accompanied by socio-spatial network analysis tools and large language models, we analyze the structure of improvised coordination networks in recent disasters. The prototypes identify groups or entities which were critical in bridging relief activities and identify network evolution patterns involving added, rewired, or repurposed ties. Second, informed by these prototypes, the project will implement agent-based modeling to simulate temporal improvisation processes. The simulation will identify how resources may be coordinated and reach population groups under various disaster scenarios.

The project will translate into practical guidelines for enhancing local community infrastructure that can be leveraged in future disasters, as well as the design of analytic techniques and data curation platforms for more effective resource mobilization and allocation during post-disaster response.

Daniel Schiff

Political Science



Dr. Schiff's website

AI SHARE: Building a Public Infrastructure for AI Attitudes Research

As AI systems become embedded across governance, labor, and public services, stakeholders across the public, private, and non-governmental sectors consistently call for public input to guide responsible design and regulation. Yet research on AI attitudes remains highly fragmented, methodologically inconsistent, and difficult to synthesize across studies and contexts. AI SHARE (the AI Survey Hub for Attitudes and Research Exchange) aims to address this gap by building a shared, open research infrastructure for organizing and analyzing global survey data on AI governance, ethics, trust, and social impact. During the CLARA award period, our team has focused on establishing data standards and collaborative research workflows, building the project team, and pursuing grant opportunities. We have assembled an initial dataset of more than 9,000 AI-related survey questions drawn from approximately 1,000 studies, developed coding protocols and documentation practices, and begun designing a public-facing portal intended to support search, comparison, and reuse. In parallel, we have expanded our interdisciplinary research team and used these early efforts to buttress several external grant applications. This presentation will motivate the AI SHARE project, explain the current dataset, and provide an update on how AI SHARE is being positioned for advancement.