The Department of Population Science and Policy (PSP) is an interdisciplinary department at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield. The Department works to understand the challenges of people in central and southern Illinois and provides innovative, sustainable solutions to improve health in rural and underserved communities. The Department is divided into three divisions working together to improve health outcomes: Human and Community Development (HCD), Epidemiology and Biostatistics (E&B), and Health System Science (HSS). While our Department is located in Springfield, we have projects throughout our 66 county region, including Alton, Hillsboro and Carbondale.

PSP is seeking doctoral graduate students to assist with projects in all divisions within the Department. Human and Community Development focuses on a community-based participatory approach, mixed methods research, and implementation science to address the health needs of communities. Epidemiology and Biostatistics is a more traditional, hypothesis-driven division which collects, examines, and analyzes quantitative data concerning health outcomes. Health System Science focuses on forming and analyzing policy recommendations around health disparities in Illinois.

HCD is most interested in students from the following disciplines: Anthropology, Mathematics, Psychology, Qualitative Methods Education, and Sociology. Anyone with demonstrated knowledge in statistics, quantitative data analysis, and research involving youth or community-based experience would be a good fit. Graduate students in Political Science, Workforce Education and Development and Environmental Resources & Policy would be strong candidates for HSS. Students interested in health policy with any legislative or policy experience are welcome. E&B is most interested in students from Mathematics, Psychology, Qualitative Methods Education, and Sociology.

Project Summaries:
HCD priorities include youth mental health, nutrition, child-friendly communities, and community health needs assessments. HCD is working with rural communities and school districts to assess and recommend evidence-based programs focused on the identified youth risk and protective factors and evaluating those programs. Faculty are working in Alton, IL with a non-profit to transform the community into one that prioritizes youth and children using the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Initiative. HCD also works with hospitals and health departments to complete their community health needs assessment using a framework that promotes community engagement and participation from representatives from all of the community.

HSS works on health policies focusing on rural health disparities. This includes writing policy briefs, providing talking points to SIUSOM leadership, and providing policy education events.

E&B priorities include people who use drugs, cancer, sexual gender minorities, and sexually transmitted diseases. E&B also works with state agencies in implementation and evaluation of federally-funded health programs. A new and exciting areas of focus for E&B is a collection of projects assessing risks to good health and barriers to healthcare that people living in rural IL may face – especially as it may relate to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Our goal is to better understand the nature of these risks and barriers, and perhaps how they may be addressed. Much of this work is done in the Delta Region.

Learn more at www.siumed.edu/popscipolicy. Please contact Amanda Fogleman (afogleman@siumed.edu) or Allison Spenner (aspenner@siumed.edu) for more information or to schedule a conversation.

January 2022