University of Illinois at Chicago’s Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Violence: Changing Systems to Prevent Violence in Chicago and Beyond

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Abstract
This article describes an interdisciplinary center at the University of Illinois at Chicago focused on collaborative research on violence. Our center is unique in its emphasis on developing infrastructure and distinctive processes for overcoming obstacles to interdisciplinary research; the involvement of outside policy makers, advocates, and service providers in jointly discussing and developing research proposals; the breadth of commitments from leading violence researchers and administrators across five colleges; and the innovativeness of proposed research projects that support interdisciplinary activity and show promise for funding. The center has developed an infrastructure to address violence-related issues in both research and teaching. This article discusses the challenges of implementation and boundary spanning in a university context and makes recommendations for sustainability.

Keywords
collaborative research, interdisciplinary, research center, violence

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Background

Violence continues to be a major challenge facing the United States, including Chicago. Assessments of the magnitude of the violence and trends in interpersonal violence indicate that violent behavior is a significant problem (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Homicide is the second leading cause of death among youth (15- to 24-year-olds), and the leading cause of death among African American youth (Anderson & Smith, 2001). Violence and associated injuries impose a major burden on our society. It is estimated that interpersonal violence costs society approximately US$1.8 billion per year in direct costs, including the cost of medical care, policing, incarceration, and legal services (U.S. Department of Justice, 1994). This figure soars to more than US$300 billion per year if the indirect costs of violence are included, such as lost earnings, lost productivity, and psychological pain and suffering (Miller, Fisher, & Cohen, 2001). Yet these fairly concrete figures of the outcomes of interpersonal violence only highlight the surface of the problem. Through coordinated scholarly research, we can advance our knowledge of this complex set of problems and develop evidence-based preventive strategies.

History of the Center

In 1995 a group of researchers began meeting intermittently at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) to discuss research findings and grant proposals, review research articles, and share ideas on topics related to interpersonal violence and violence prevention. Within that broad scope of interpersonal violence, the main research interests of the group included prevention and intervention with sexual assault, intimate partner violence, dating violence, youth violence, and children exposed to violence.

In 2005, an expanded version of this group applied for a UIC 2010 Interdisciplinary Seed Grant to formalize and expand their relationships; to take advantage of the wealth of expertise at UIC related to violence and its prevention; to share, synthesize, and increase resources devoted to violence prevention at UIC; to increase interdisciplinary collaboration; and to attract increased local, state, and federal funding. The primary objective of this collaboration was to develop an infrastructure dedicated to promoting the kinds of multidisciplinary investigations needed to address the causes, consequences, and prevention of violence in society.

Individually and collectively, the work of UIC researchers over the years has advanced scientific knowledge of violence and has resulted in numerous changes in policies, protocols, and practices in major systems in Chicago and Illinois (e.g., Chicago police department, Chicago public schools, Chicago Department of Public Health, Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence, Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and others). By working collaboratively with an interdisciplinary focus, the potential to impact violence in Chicago, in Illinois, and across the nation has been greatly enhanced. The Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Violence (the center) created a formalized network of violence
researchers on campus where scholarly activities could be focused. The center has worked to improve police and criminal justice responses to violence, the treatment of victims of violent crime, community responses to violence, the practices of social service agencies working to rehabilitate offenders and victims of violence, and the practices of agencies working to prevent violence.

The mission of UIC’s Center is to create a collaborative environment that promotes the interdisciplinary generation, diffusion, and utilization of knowledge in the study and prevention of violence. In pursuing its mission, the center has created an infrastructure to promote the kinds of interdisciplinary investigations that are needed to impact how the disciplinary fields of criminal justice, social work, psychology, psychiatry, public health, occupational therapy, African American studies, and gender studies can interact to prevent and respond to violence. The center represents a collaboration between 5 colleges and 10 distinct departments on the UIC campus and local and state agencies. The activities of the collaboration include facilitating interdisciplinary communication between faculty members, local practitioners, and policy makers on topics related to violence and violence prevention; developing a mentoring/training program for UIC students, post-docs, and new faculty; developing interdisciplinary coursework and a graduate concentration in violence studies; synthesizing existing UIC investigators’ data on violence; developing strategies to overcome obstacles to building and maintaining interdisciplinary collaborations on campus; and developing interdisciplinary proposals for external funding.

This article describes the collaborative activities that resulted from the interdisciplinary focus, some of the challenges endemic to constructing an interdisciplinary center, and recommendations for sustainability of a collaborative infrastructure.

The Center Vision

The vision for creating the center was to increase UIC’s excellence and access in the area of violence research. Our work together as an interdisciplinary group provides an opportunity not only to support and build on each other’s work but also to create new opportunities for collaborative research to increase the center’s local, state, and national impact.

Increasing Excellence

We began with the premise that sharing resources and expertise among disciplines, sharing data sets, sharing ideas, and developing interdisciplinary seminars and coursework would greatly enhance our contributions to the scientific community, improve and expand our usefulness to community partners and practitioners, and create funding opportunities. For example, by sharing expertise and data among violence researchers across disciplines, collaborative groups are able to develop interdisciplinary projects to address problems of violence more effectively and to target interventions at individual, group, and community levels in an integrated fashion. Second, by coming together as a group and joining with community partners and practitioners, we are able to develop creative solutions useful to
practitioners working on the front lines to deal with violence because they will be informed by a broader range of experience and expertise than is usually available in the single researcher-practitioner collaborations that more typically characterize the field. Third, funders are increasingly attuned to the need for multilevel interventions to effectively attack social problems such as violence. With a multidisciplinary team of investigators, we can develop studies integrating factors at multiple levels (e.g., individual, group, societal) that will attract external funding.

**Increasing Access**

Faculty from our center have a long-standing tradition of involvement with the agencies and institutions providing services and sanctions to the victims and perpetrators of violence and have been instrumental in bringing these agencies and institutions into the university to help educate our students about violence prevention “on the ground.” These agencies and institutions are the laboratories where our violence researchers apply science to service, but equally important are the classrooms where community practitioners help shape the foci of future science, send their staff for both education and continuing education, and advise our researchers about existing projects.

The UIC campus was built around Hull House, the progressive-era settlement house founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Star in 1889 to help poor urban residents of Chicago, including many immigrants, manage the fallout from industrialization and live more fulfilling lives. A core element of the Hull House experience was a tradition of “town-gown” collaborations, creating a community of university faculty and residents to work on local problems using research-informed social action and socially informed research. Ironically, most of Hull House was destroyed in the 1960s to make way for the new Chicago campus of the University of Illinois. Although only two of the original Hull House buildings remain as a National Historic Landmark and a museum, our Hull House tradition of town-gown collaboration continues. UIC is widely recognized in both the Chicago and larger Illinois violence prevention community as a source of collaborative research between the university and the community, enhancing both our future research opportunities and our ability to influence public policy. The center both formalizes and expands these existing relationships. The interdisciplinary nature of our center also greatly increases the links available for individual researchers working with communities, but who can now also benefit from collaboration between other faculty–community partnerships.

**Goals**

The initial goals and objectives of the Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Violence were (a) to develop an infrastructure to promote interdisciplinary collaboration in violence research on the UIC campus, (b) to identify obstacles to collaborating between departments and colleges on campus and develop strategies to address these obstacles to promote future interdisciplinary collaborative work, and (c) to develop two to three interdisciplinary proposals for external funding each year.
The Plan

The center was created to better understand and address the problems that violence creates for individuals, families, and communities. The center explores violence from an ecological perspective, focusing on systems’ responses (e.g., police protocols, criminal and domestic violence court policies, legislation, social service practices) and community factors (e.g., community cohesion, race, poverty, housing, economic opportunity) relevant to both the maintenance and prevention of violence. The ecological perspective is based on the interdisciplinary study of the reciprocal interaction between persons and various aspects of their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner referred to the different aspects of environments as the social ecology. The center uses the ecological perspective to examine risk and protective factors as a set of nested influences, where individual influences are nested within relationship influences that are nested within community influences that are nested within societal influences. In contrast to an individual approach, an ecological approach to understanding human behavior, at its core, takes into account individuals’ reciprocal relationships with their environment and provides a framework for exploring our environment from a broader systems perspective.

The ecological perspective is broad enough to encompass the different theoretical approaches currently used by center members while also allowing for the broadening of perspectives. To this end, the mission of the center is to create a truly collaborative environment that promotes the interdisciplinary generation, diffusion, and utilization of knowledge in the study and prevention of violence. In pursuing its mission, the center has undertaken several projects that together create an infrastructure to promote the kinds of interdisciplinary investigations that are needed to have an impact on the fields of criminal justice, social work, psychology, public health, occupational therapy, African American studies, gender studies, health care, and other fields as they relate to violence and its prevention.

Center-Related Activities

Center-related activities are directed toward achieving the center’s mission and goals of creating and sustaining the infrastructure needed for the interdisciplinary work of the center. These activities include facilitating interdisciplinary communication, developing a mentoring/training program, developing interdisciplinary coursework, synthesizing existing UIC data, overcoming obstacles to interdisciplinary collaboration on campus, and developing interdisciplinary proposals for external funding. In what follows, each of these activities is described in more detail.

Research

Center faculty have a wide variety of research interests. These interests include child maltreatment, parenting, bullying, teen dating violence, sexual assault, domestic violence, childhood exposure to violence, gang violence, youth violence, PTSD (posttraumatic stress
disorder), substance abuse, homicide, female offenders, incarcerated mothers, nonviolent social action, homelessness, and police responses to violence. In addition, there are several members who have an interest in cultivating resiliency and developing protective factors for at-risk populations. The research activities occur in the courts, prisons, police departments, neighborhoods, social service agencies, homes, classrooms, and online.

**Develop proposals for external funding.** The center regularly submits interdisciplinary research and/or training grant proposals for external private and government funding. The model for facilitating applications for external funding includes all center activities described above: networking and information sharing among center faculty and affiliates; mentoring among more senior faculty and students, post-docs, and junior faculty; interdisciplinary coursework that allows for the critical appraisal and integration of disparate violence-related topics; and finally the synthesis of center faculty data to generate new research questions that can only be identified through the thoughtful and critical appraisal of individual data by those from different disciplines and perspectives. In other words, each activity at the center challenges investigators to look at their data and research interests in new ways, through the lenses of other disciplines, which yields new perspectives and questions for solving problems of violence. In the first 3 years of the center’s existence, its affiliates submitted more than 31 proposals for more than US$25 million and received more than US$4 million in external funding.

**Facilitate Interdisciplinary Communication**

The center facilitates interdisciplinary communication and the sharing of ideas among faculty members, local practitioners, and policy makers on topics related to violence and violence prevention. We began with the premise that dialogue must be enhanced not only across disciplinary lines but also across research-practice lines. Work toward this goal includes general meetings of all collaborating partners, subcommittee meetings, email listservs, and the creation of a website (http://www.uic.edu/orgs/violencecenter/). Each semester a schedule of monthly center meetings is developed. Each of these meetings has the dual focus/purpose of conducting center business and sharing information. Center business is comprised primarily of subcommittee reports. Subcommittees were formed around each of the center’s major activities, namely, mentoring/training, coursework, synthesizing data, overcoming obstacles to interdisciplinary collaboration, and developing proposals for external funding. Each committee chairperson reports on recent work by the committee and future action needed to reach subcommittee goals.

In addition to subcommittee reports, center investigators take turns facilitating discussions on topics of their choosing. The intent of these discussions is to provide the investigators with interdisciplinary feedback and opportunities to collaborate with other investigators or community partners. Investigators are encouraged to share information on existing data sets (see description below), to share updates on existing projects and funding proposals (see description below), or to present on other topics of mutual interest to center investigators and community partners. Depending on the discussion topic and agenda, specific community members, practitioners, and policy makers are invited to attend and participate in
the information-sharing portion of the center’s meetings. In other instances, executive directors and department heads attend, including executives from settings such as the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, Illinois Center for Violence Prevention, Chicago Police Department, Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence, Chicago Department of Public Health Office of Violence Prevention, Cook County Courts Department of Probation, Illinois Department of Human Services Bureau of Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention, and the Illinois attorney general. Other regular members are from nonprofit social service agencies and membership organizations such as the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network. These partners are invited to share their ideas about research that is needed to advance the field. The center research assistants record minutes of these meetings and distribute them to center affiliates via the center’s email listserv. The listserv has also been used to distribute manuscripts, funding announcements, and research ideas and to conduct other center business as appropriate. The website http://www.uic.edu/orgs/violencecenter/ was developed by the center director and is maintained by research assistants. The purpose of the website is to aid in the dissemination of information related to center projects, to inform the wider UIC and Chicago area scholarly communities about events taking place at UIC related to violence research and practice, and to provide information that may enhance our ability to attract potential funders and donors who wish to contribute to the center’s mission to prevent violence.

In addition to the monthly meetings, the website, and the listserv, the center hosts interdisciplinary seminars that are designed with a larger audience of UIC students, faculty, and community partners in mind. For example, one seminar covered the topic of conducting research with vulnerable populations. This seminar involved discussions of the ethical and practical difficulties of conducting research with children, prisoners, and other vulnerable populations and covered issues of access, equity, power, compensation, informed consent, and other relevant topics. We worked with UIC’s Office of Protection of Research Subjects to provide IRB continuing education credits to seminar participants.

**Education and Training**

A second aim of the center is to engage in capacity building in the Chicago violence research community. The center aspires to train scholars who are strongly grounded in scientifically rigorous collaborative methodology and who can communicate effectively with both researchers and practitioners across multiple disciplines. Increasingly, the problems of violence are complex, and their solutions require a broad set of skills. The ecological approach to understanding violence requires scholars who are broadly trained to work effectively in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary groups. Traditional discipline-specific methods of training are insufficient to produce the effective, collaborative scholars needed to achieve a well-integrated understanding of the complex problems of violence. Currently, there are few training programs that can produce scholars with the skills necessary to meet these challenges. To this end, the center has developed activities that focus on training the next generation of scholars in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches
to understanding violence. These activities include development of a National Science Foundation (NSF) Interdisciplinary Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT) proposal to bridge traditional discipline boundaries and provide the next generation of scholars with the skills commensurate with the new challenges associated with interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research on violence, development of an interdepartmental graduate concentration in violence studies, and creation of a highly successful undergraduate research mentoring program.

**Interdisciplinary Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT).** The center’s proposal to the National Science Foundation has three central goals: (1) preparing doctoral trainees to conduct bioecological, globally engaged, interdisciplinary research related to the epidemiology, etiology, consequences, and prevention of violence in the world’s cities and the global networks they influence; (2) preparing trainees to collaborate with community and scholarly partners in the generation, translation, and diffusion of scientific knowledge related to violence in the world’s cities; and (3) testing and subsequently disseminating what is learned about approaches for catalyzing an intensely interdisciplinary culture among trainees and faculty.

Recognizing that much innovative science now occurs at the boundaries of traditional disciplines, the project team in the proposal includes 21 collaborating UIC faculty from 10 departments in 5 colleges, as well as international collaborators. The center, therefore, has made a commitment to explorations of the mechanisms underlying relationships at different levels of the social ecology, going beyond constructing lists of predictors to develop models emerging from contemporary bioecological and dynamic systems theories. IGERT trainees will be fully funded during the first 3 years of their doctoral studies, after which they will be supported on faculty research projects. The traineeship will provide coursework, research assistantships, interdisciplinary mentorship, student–faculty roundtables, conference support, participation in international projects, placement support, and other experiences to ensure a rich, deeply interdisciplinary preparation for interdisciplinary research. Although this project has not yet been funded, with each application round we have been able to further refine and enrich our proposal in response to the reviews, increasing the likelihood of funding in the future.

**Graduate concentration in violence studies.** Across campus, UIC faculty conduct research and teach on a variety of topics related to violence. The Interdepartmental Graduate Concentration in Violence Studies created by the center provides graduate students with an opportunity to explore violence through different paradigms and disciplinary lenses. For example, students can examine the etiologies of violence through the lenses of criminology, public health, psychology, psychiatry, and social work, and the institutional and programmatic responses to violence through criminal justice, social work, occupational therapy, psychology, and public health. This concentration complements the requirements of a student’s primary graduate program. The concentration requires 10 credit hours chosen from a list of courses related to violence offered in any of the participating colleges and departments with permission of the instructor and the violence studies graduate student advisor.

**Undergraduate mentoring.** Faculty members mentor undergraduate students in developing research skills at all stages of the research process. Mentors use a developmental
approach to guide undergraduate student research activities that integrate classroom learning, critical analyses, and laboratory research. After an introduction to the ongoing research projects in the lab, students indicate what skills they have particular interest in developing. Mentors balance student interest with a three-semester program for developing foundational research skills. All undergraduate students begin their experience completing human protections training and learning data entry and the properties of variables (e.g., continuous, categorical, numeric, string) relevant for database creation and management. Weekly lab meetings provide an hour of didactic instruction focused on different aspects of the research process. These meetings cover topics such as conducting literature searches, writing an introduction, research design, statistical analyses, and APA format. After two semesters in the lab students are encouraged to choose an independent research project using archival data. Students become familiar with their selected data set, develop a research question, conduct a literature review, conduct analyses, and write up their results. Mentors work closely with the undergraduate students to code and analyze their data so that students understand how to use statistical methods flexibly (e.g., knowing which statistical methods to use based on properties of the variables and research design). Students are encouraged to present a research poster at a local conference. Many students have used their independent projects to complete honors college requirements. Several of our students have won competitive research awards through UIC and Psi Chi (the National Psychology Honors program). Some undergraduate students are currently working on preparing manuscripts of their independent projects for publication.

**Synthesize Existing UIC Data on Violence**

As a group, Violence Center investigators and affiliated faculty have made major contributions to understanding the etiology, effects, prevention, and treatment of violence. One aim of our center is to gather and synthesize existing data sets of UIC violence researchers. To facilitate the synthesis of existing data, investigators complete a description of each of their existing data sets that are relevant to violence. The data synthesis subcommittee identifies areas of overlap that might lead to new analyses of existing data from a different perspective, joint publication of combined data sets, meta-analytic studies, or that might simply raise additional research questions. For example, one project might focus on synthesizing data on race and class from the investigator’s previous research on violence. Although violence crosses all ethnic, racial, and class boundaries, the prevalence of public violence among people of color, particularly low-income people of color, is disproportionately high and the criminal justice response has been disproportionately directed at men and women of color.

**Develop Strategies to Overcome Obstacles to Interdisciplinary Collaboration on Campus**

One of the first research initiatives undertaken by center faculty was to assess the status of interdisciplinary research (IDR) on campus and provide a roadmap of potential obstacles
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(Rosenbaum, Schuck, Mattaini, & Adams, 2007). The study was undertaken with three primary objectives. The first objective was to measure the IDR climate and level of interest on the UIC campus. The second objective was to identify the institutional and academic obstacles to interdisciplinary work. The third objective was to make policy recommendations to facilitate IDR. In April and May of 2006, an online survey of UIC faculty and research professionals was conducted. A total of 457 UIC employees completed the online survey. The research team focused on the 325 respondents (71.1%) who were faculty members and administrators. To adjust for known biases in patterns of nonresponse, the sample was weighted by gender and college counts to reflect their true representation in the UIC faculty population. The results indicate that about 8 out of 10 respondents (78%) are affiliated with a unit that is currently involved in IDR activities, and a similar percentage claimed to have been personally involved in IDR (81%).

UIC’s “general supportiveness of IDR” was measured using an 11-point scale employed in previous research by the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine (2005). Universities and associations surveyed in those studies yielded average scores of approximately 7 on the 0-to-10 scale, where 10 indicates that your institution is very “IDR friendly.” UIC faculty tended to rate UIC supportiveness or friendliness for IDR in the range of approximately 5.5 on the same scale. As might be expected, UIC administrators gave UIC slightly higher than average ratings on IDR friendliness, whereas UIC center directors, who “live and breathe” research, gave UIC slightly lower than average ratings. Although these early data suggest that the IDR climate at UIC may not be quite as favorable as the climate in other universities across the nation (perhaps because senior administrators were overrepresented in other survey samples), UIC faculty and administrators were nonetheless very enthusiastic about the potential benefits of IDR. More than 9 out of 10 respondents felt that IDR holds considerable promise for advancing our understanding of complex phenomena and for solving pressing societal problems. Furthermore, UIC faculty members were strongly supportive of creating a more IDR-friendly environment.

Institutional barriers to interdisciplinary research on campus. The survey identified numerous barriers to full-scale transformation to an IDR-friendly environment. The top five institutional barriers identified by faculty were the following: (1) a lack of incentives for units or faculty to get involved in IDR, (2) different cultures within traditional disciplines that hinder cooperation between units, (3) lack of administrative and budgetary support for IDR activity, (4) different customs about sharing indirect costs that hinder cooperation between units, and (5) lack of IDR structures to support IDR activity.

The online survey included a few open-ended questions about IDR to provide more detailed responses about experiences (both positive and negative) with IDR on campus. Respondents were asked to give examples of IDR problems they were able to successfully overcome and others in which they were unsuccessful. The most common problem they had successfully addressed was building collaborative relationships, despite numerous obstacles to cooperation. The most common IDR problem respondents had been unable to overcome was finding adequate budgetary or financial support for their efforts. When
Table 1. Top 10 Recommendations From the IDR survey

1. UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago) should foster a collaborative environment that supports IDR (interdisciplinary research).
2. UIC should support interdisciplinary education and training for graduate students.
3. UIC should provide seed money for IDR projects.
4. Principal investigators should build networks with researchers in other disciplines.
5. UIC should support flexible cost-sharing policies that support IDR.
6. Departments should recognize and reward faculty for IDR work.
7. Funding agencies should provide more support for IDR.
8. Professional societies should promote a mutual understanding of disciplinary methods, languages, and cultures.
9. Instructors should develop curricula that incorporate interdisciplinary concepts.
10. Graduate students should explore ways to broaden their experiences by gaining requisite knowledge in one or more fields outside their primary field.

asked to think of a noteworthy IDR success story on campus, the most common response was the creation of new IDR research centers and teams.

Barriers to professional development. Faculty and administrators also expressed their opinions about possible barriers to professional development at UIC for those who are interested in pursuing IDR. The top five barriers identified were as follows: (1) joint hires having to serve two bosses and doing “double duty,” (2) IDR applicants for tenure-track positions having difficulty finding departments where they “belong,” (3) inadequate mentoring of junior IDR faculty, (4) home units being unqualified to evaluate the scholarship of IDR faculty, and (5) inadequate training for IDR grad students and post-docs.

The overall picture that emerges from this UIC campus-wide survey is that IDR is a pervasive practice that has already touched the lives of most UIC faculty in one way or another and that faculty members across all colleges strongly support the idea of interdisciplinary research and would like to see more of it. Despite their support for IDR, the survey respondents also identified a number of serious obstacles and challenges to the full-scale adoption of IDR as a way of doing business on campus and endorsed a number of suggestions and models for exemplary practice. Their top 10 recommendations are listed in Table 1. Each recommendation has the support of at least 80% of the faculty. These recommendations are at a relatively abstract level and could be implemented in a variety of ways across the units of the university.

Actions taken. Since the completion of the survey, center affiliates have attempted to address these recommendations in a number of ways. In some cases, actions were under the direct control of faculty affiliated with the center. In other cases, actions at the departmental, college, and university level were, or will be, required.

After completing our report, center affiliates met with the provost and chancellor to discuss the findings. We encouraged UIC administrators to begin a formal dialogue about the recommendations and possible mechanisms for supporting IDR on campus.
Table 2. A Sample of Current Violence Center Research Projects

1. Center faculty recently received NIH funding for a 5-year longitudinal study of risk and protective factors for revictimization in a community sample of women and how social support processes are associated with sexual assault victimization recovery outcomes of PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) and problem drinking.

2. The center participates as one of several international partners on a UNESCO Chair project on Emerging Social Challenges, along with Akershus University (Oslo), the National University of Colombia (Bogota), the University of North Texas (Denton), and the University of Guadalajara. The team is initiating a demonstration project to construct Sculptures of Peace in schools in Ceilândia, a suburb of Brazil, and is adapting the PEACE POWER strategy developed by Dr. Mark Mattaini and colleagues. Using a developmental research approach in partnership with the local community, the ultimate goal is to fully develop this model and widely disseminate it throughout Brazil.

3. Center members participate in a SAMHSA supplement to expand services at the Great Lakes Addiction Technology Transfer Center to develop an online educational product targeted at substance abuse counselors called Addiction Recovery and Intimate Violence Educational System (ARIVES). This web-based cross-training tool addresses sexual assault and intimate partner violence in the military in addition to addiction issues.

4. Center members participate in an Illinois Violence Prevention Authority–funded evaluation of community-based services for children and their caregivers exposed to violence.

5. In another collaborative effort, center members are participating in the evaluation of a strengths-based parenting program designed to prevent child maltreatment through informal systems of care by partnering with faith-based partners in low-income inner-city neighborhoods.

6. The center also has two projects funded through the Liberal Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research initiative at UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago). These student projects are examining the impact of perpetrator proximity on emotional and behavioral problems in children exposed to violence and sex differences in response to rape prevention programming.

Recommendation 3 was already in place: the UIC decision to support this center and other centers with seed money. We responded to Recommendations 2 and 10 by proposing a graduate certificate program addressing research on violence. The center was recently successful in getting an Interdepartmental Graduate Concentration in Violence Studies added as a certificate program at UIC. This concentration is intended to attract high-quality graduate students from multiple fields and to provide multidisciplinary training in the understanding and prevention of violence for the next generation of researchers.

Organizational Infrastructure

The organizational and administrative structure of the center was designed to model the type of interdisciplinary collaboration expected in future UIC research projects on violence. The center began with three principal investigators, two codirectors, and six committee heads organized around major center initiatives. The three principal investigators
were Sarah Ullman (LAS), Larry Bennett (Social Work), and Christine Helfrich (Applied Health Sciences). The original principal investigators were chosen because each represented different colleges and different approaches to the problem of violence. The codirectors were Paul Schewe (criminology, law, and justice) and Carl Bell (psychiatry). As the center matured, the infrastructure drifted away from the concept of “principal investigators” and is now comprised of codirectors, committee heads, UIC faculty, students, and community partners (these are largely staff from social service agencies and governmental organizations). Center affiliation is open to anyone who shares an interest in research to prevent violence.

Committee heads were chosen on the basis of their expertise, interest, and willingness to focus on one of the center’s objectives: to facilitate interdisciplinary communication, to develop a mentoring/training program, to develop interdisciplinary coursework, to synthesize existing UIC data, to overcome obstacles to interdisciplinary collaboration on campus, and to develop interdisciplinary proposals for external funding. The codirectors work with graduate students, investigators, and subcommittees to complete these tasks. Local practitioners participate on selected subcommittees to keep researchers grounded in the real-world dimensions of the violence problem and to provide new perspectives for understanding observed behavioral patterns. Annual reports to UIC’s Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research summarize our progress toward each of the center’s objectives, address obstacles to interdisciplinary research on campus, and make recommendations for improvement, such as how to increase incentives and reduce disincentives to faculty and other researchers for engaging in interdisciplinary research on campus. The team of UIC collaborators that developed the initial center proposal believes that advancing knowledge through collaborative work will facilitate cross-campus and cross-community voices for expanding our research, practice, and policies to respond to and end violence.

In its initial proposal, the center had the support of key local and state agencies involved in violence research or practice. By tapping a wide range of service providers, administrators, and policy makers, both inside and outside the criminal justice system, we hope to advance our own thinking about the nature and causes of violence, as well as our understanding of how individuals, communities, organizations, and government agencies respond to acts of violence. Historically, violence researchers, like researchers in many fields, have viewed the nonresearch community simply as a subject population (or gate keepers), not as collaborators. In contrast, we see our external partners as experts with exceptional experiential knowledge of the violence problem and the ability to help us gain new perspectives that will challenge our (sometimes rigid) academic paradigms. Practitioners and policy makers in the violence arena are expected to enrich our measurement plans, provide new ideas about data analysis, and help us interpret findings that do not fit conventional theories.

On a track that runs parallel to our plan to create an interdisciplinary research program, agencies that work on the violence problem have moved strongly in the direction of building interagency partnerships and community collaborations to increase their effectiveness (see Rosenbaum, 2002). This work has given practitioners considerable insight into new collaborative models of violence intervention that can inform our work. On the other
hand, collaborations between fields (e.g., between the domestic violence field and the gang violence field) have generally not occurred, leading to what Richard Gelles has labeled the “balkanization” of violence prevention activities. The UIC Center for Research on Violence affords a unique opportunity for practitioners and administrators in disparate agencies and institutions to explore their commonalities and develop new perspectives.

Financial Operations
The center was initially supported by a US$200,000 seed grant from UIC. The initial budget proposed using this money to fund small portions of the codirectors’ salaries, to fund graduate research assistants to support center-related activities, and to buy food for monthly noon meetings with center faculty, students, and community partners. In practice, the codirectors never drew salaries, so the seed money was able to support more graduate assistants for longer periods of time than originally budgeted. Since the initial funds were drawn down, the center has been largely supported by in-kind efforts by its members, indirect costs from funded grant applications, funds from consulting work by center members, and by awards received from UIC’s LAS Undergraduate Research Initiative program.

Summary
Each of the activities delineated in the creation of this center were designed to further our understanding of violence prevention and intervention that is needed in the “real-life” contexts of communities. The uniqueness of our center lies in the emphasis on developing an infrastructure and distinctive processes for overcoming foreseeable obstacles to interdisciplinary research; the involvement of outside policy makers, managers, and service providers in the violence dialogue and subsequent proposals; the breadth of commitments from leading violence researchers and administrators across five colleges; and the innovativeness of proposed research projects that specifically support interdisciplinary activity and show promise for funding. We were seeking to create an environment on campus where interdisciplinary research on violence is the norm rather than the exception and where UIC will be internationally recognized as the premier place where students and faculty come to learn, share, and advance violence-related knowledge and practice.

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References


Bios

Paul Schewe, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Criminology, Law, and Justice in the College of LAS at UIC. He has served as the director of UIC’s Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Violence. He is a clinical/community psychologist whose work ranges from basic research identifying factors associated with the perpetration of interpersonal violence, to developing preventive interventions, to using evaluation and dissemination strategies to further develop existing violence prevention programs for agencies, communities, and statewide networks of service providers. The focus of his research includes sexual assault, teen dating violence, domestic violence, and early childhood interventions to promote positive social-emotional development.

Carl C. Bell, MD, is president and CEO of the Community Mental Health Council (CMHC) & Foundation, Inc. in Chicago. CMHC is a large multimillion dollar comprehensive community mental health center employing 390 social service geniuses. He is also clinical professor of psychiatry & public health, and director of the Institute for Juvenile Research (IJR) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). IJR is a century-old, multimillion dollar academic institute providing child and family research, training, and service, employing 257 academic faculty and support staff.

Larry Bennett, PhD, is professor of social work at UIC. Prior to joining the UIC faculty in 1988, he worked for 15 years in mental health and family service settings. His research focuses
on the co-occurrence of substance abuse and domestic violence and on the coordination and evaluation of services designed to interrupt these conditions. He currently serves as principal investigator of the Great Lakes Addiction Technology Transfer Center. He is licensed as a clinical social worker and is a diplomat of the Professional Academy of Custody Evaluators.

Paul J. Goldstein, PhD, is professor emeritus in the Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Public Health, at UIC. He is trained as a sociologist. He was previously deputy director of Narcotics and Drug Research, Inc., in New York City. He was also employed by the New York State Office of Crime Control Planning and the New York State Division of Substance Abuse Services. His research interests include violence, substance use and trafficking, and especially the nexus between these phenomena. Another interest is health care issues involving incarcerated populations. His research was continuously funded for more than two decades, primarily by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the National Institute of Justice, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. He has published numerous articles, books, chapters, and technical reports.

Rebecca Gordon, EdD, is the director of the Women’s Leadership and Resource Center and Campus Advocacy Network at UIC and a member of UIC’s Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Violence. She is a licensed clinical psychologist whose work on campus addresses interpersonal violence prevention as well as administrative, criminal, and civil advocacy for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. She led efforts to establish a coordinated campus response for victims of interpersonal violence, prevention education for students, and training of Clery campus security authorities. She is currently the campus representative on the Illinois Commission for Crime Victims.

Mark Mattaini, MSW, DSW, is an associate professor at the Jane Addams College of Social Work, UIC, an affiliated investigator at the Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Violence, and editor of the interdisciplinary journal, Behavior and Social Issues. His current research focuses on elaborating cultural analytic principles underlying effective nonviolent struggle and resistance and development of the PEACE POWER strategy for reducing violence in schools and communities. He is actively involved in related projects in the United States, Brazil, and Colombia, including an affiliation with the UNESCO Chair on Emerging Social Challenges, Instituto de Educação Superior de Brasília (IESB).

Patricia O’Brien, PhD, is an associate professor in the Jane Addams College of Social Work at UIC. Her scholarship focuses on the nexus of conditions, specifically substance use and the experiences of violence that affect women involved with the criminal justice system. Funded studies include integrated service responses to battered women who use alcohol and/or drugs and feasibility to intervention studies of the needs of women exiting prison and the caregivers of their minor children. She is the author of Making it in the Free World and multiple publications on women’s postprison needs.
Stephanie Riger, PhD, is the recipient of the American Psychological Association’s Division 27 award for Distinguished Contributions to Research and Theory, and a two-time winner of the Association for Women in Psychology’s Distinguished Publication Award. Her book on women’s fear of rape was awarded the Choice Outstanding Academic Book Award. In 2000, UIC named her a University Scholar, its most prestigious research award. She is coauthor of Evaluating Services for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (Sage, 2002) and author of Transforming Psychology: Gender in Theory and Practice (Oxford, 2000) as well as six other books and numerous articles and book chapters. Her current research focuses on how social policies affect violence against women.

Heather J. Risser, PhD, is visiting assistant research professor with the Office of Social Science Research at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She received a PhD in clinical psychology with a specialization in child development and family violence. She has had extensive experience working with parents and families involved with child protective services in multiple mental health agencies. Her research focuses on parenting and family risk and protective factors related to child maltreatment and children’s exposure to violence. Her previous clinical experience providing mental health services to children exposed to violence and their families provides a foundation for understanding the link between research and direct services. She is also involved in the evaluation of services designed to prevent children’s exposure to violence and program development, training, and implementation of policy and practice to prevent children’s exposure to violence.

Dennis P. Rosenbaum, PhD, is professor of criminology, law and justice and director of the Center for Research in Law and Justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research interests include police organizational behavior, the life course of police officers, police–community interactions, and the prevention of violence and drug abuse. His publications have focused on community policing, community crime prevention, school-based drug prevention, and antiviolence partnerships. He is the principal investigator for the National Police Research Platform, a project funded by the National Institute of Justice to advance the state of measurement, knowledge, and practice in American policing.

Amie M. Schuck, PhD, is an associate professor and head of the Department of Criminology, Law, and Justice in the College of LAS at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Her areas of research include the impact of technology on public safety, policing, and quantitative methodology.

Barbara Simmons, PhD, RN, is an assistant clinical professor in the College of Nursing at UIC. She has a 30-year history of clinical nursing practice and teaching throughout the Chicagoland area. She coordinates the Advanced Practice Forensic Nursing Certificate (APFN) program that was developed through a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration. The APFN program is in its fourth year with 10 graduate students who have completed the program and 20 additional students in coursework. The APFN program sponsored the 2nd Annual Forensic Health Conference on September 10, 2010, and continues to
offer monthly educational forensic grand rounds during the academic year. She is active in numerous committees throughout campus, but her greatest interest is in violence prevention and caring for victims of violence and their families.

Sarah E. Ullman, PhD, is a professor of criminology, law, and justice at University of Illinois at Chicago and director of the Office of Social Science Research. She is a social psychologist whose research concerns the impact of sexual assault and traumatic life events on women’s health and substance abuse outcomes and rape avoidance/prevention. Her book *Talking About Sexual Assault: Society’s Response to Survivors* was published by the American Psychological Association in 2010 and she is conducting a NIADA-funded longitudinal study of risk and protective factors in sexual assault survivors related to risk of revictimization, mental health, substance abuse, and posttraumatic growth outcomes.