

JAMES M. AND CATHLEEN D. STONE

# CENTER ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

HOME TO THE US OFFICE OF LIS



September 1, 2016

Dear Friends and Colleagues;

Today, we launch the **James M. and Cathleen D. Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality**, which renames\*, expands, and strengthens the former Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Center, one of the official Centers here at the CUNY Graduate Center. I am deeply grateful to the Stones for their generous support, without which the launch of our expanded Center would not have been possible. Here, I share the news in some detail, explain our new name, and offer a preview of our activities and future goals.

### *The gift that launched our new Center:*

The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Center was formed in 2009, and since then we've had a lively run. At first, there was only one associated faculty member; that was me. Since then, the core group of professors linked to our Center has quadrupled, with the arrival of Branko Milanovic from the World Bank, Paul Krugman from Princeton, and, next January, Leslie McCall from Northwestern.

Starting in 2009, we also invited the Graduate Center's student body to work with us in a variety of ways. Since then, several dozen students have worked in, or collaborated with, our Center. Finally, we have joined forces with colleagues throughout the Graduate Center to design and co-host many popular public programs and educational events. Most of these were focused on economic inequality.

Yet, while the LIS Center has grown and thrived, it has done so on a shoe-string budget. During these seven years, we have patched together salaries for our small staff from an array of short-term funding sources. We have lacked the resources to support an adequate administrative team, to develop a strong social media operation, to fund in-house research projects, and to offer substantial research support for young scholars. Perhaps most significantly, we have been unable to plan our work for more than a year at a time.

With this extraordinarily generous gift of \$2,500,000 from Jim and Cathy Stone, we will convert the LIS Center into the larger and more ambitious Stone Center. Our new resources will allow us to expand the work of our Center in multiple ways. Ideas abound, and our team will spend the coming months assessing options, weighing alternatives, and designing a five-year plan. We are eager to maximize what we can achieve with these new resources. We are confident that this gift will enable new lines of research, will benefit the Graduate Center community as a whole, and will ultimately enhance public understanding of socio-economic inequality.

### *Our new name:*

The intellectual core of the expanded Center is our connection to LIS, the cross-national data archive and research center in Luxembourg. The LIS data have long been used to study a range of social and economic outcomes, mainly household income and labor market outcomes, and, more recently, wealth. Thousands of researchers have used the LIS data to assess variation in these outcomes across countries and over time. A central theme in this massive body of research has been inequality, and in particular disparities and gaps between and within groups of several kinds. Many scholars have used the LIS data to focus on the origins of the facets of inequality that they study.

We use the term "socio-economic inequality" to indicate that we understand the causes, nature, and consequences of inequality to be shaped by complex interactions among social and economic factors. Furthermore, one of the strengths of

our new Center is that our core faculty cuts across several disciplines, especially economics, sociology, and political science. We hope that our new name signals our collective commitment to bringing an interdisciplinary and multidimensional approach to the study of economic inequality. That interdisciplinary approach will be evident in the activities carried out in our Center involving the LIS data and a multitude of other data sources as well.

*Our expanded Center:*

Our expanded Center will have four main components.

First, the Center will house the US Office of LIS, the partner office to the Luxembourg Office of LIS. The two LIS offices will collaborate to fulfill the mission that LIS has been engaged in for over three decades.

Second, the Stone Center will host programs aimed at broadening public understanding of inequality. These programs will include three ongoing lecture series, frequent public lectures and conversations (co-hosted with the Graduate Center's Public Programs office), and academic conferences.

Third, the Center's core faculty – me, Leslie, Paul, and Branko – will, through our academic departments, teach an array of courses related to inequality, and we will host a one-week intensive inequality workshop each June that is targeted on young scholars.

Finally, we will expand our in-house research capacity, build upon our new series of Research and Policy Briefs, and continue to form ties with the inequality scholars who come to the Graduate Center, annually, as Distinguished Fellows hosted by the GC's Advanced Research Collaborative.

As the LIS Center, we established many of these courses, programs, and projects over the past several years. As the Stone Center, we will be able to solidify and strengthen them and branch out into new, important areas of research.

*Our goals, short-term and long-term:*

One of our short-term goals is to design and launch a new data-building and research project on high-end wealth inequality, with an initial phase focused on the United States. Jim and Cathy have urged us to pursue this topic of increasing interest to those concerned about growing economic inequality. The project that we are envisioning will take our team into new waters, extending both our substantive knowledge and our methodological experience. We are already in the early stages of planning this project, and we are eager to get started.

Our long-term goal is to build a Center that is widely recognized as a venue for first-rate, quantitative, data-driven, interdisciplinary, and policy-relevant work on inequality. We hope to continue to attract top-caliber faculty in the field, to expand the base of students at the Graduate Center working on inequality studies – at both the Masters and Ph.D. levels – and to secure our identity as a place that journalists and policymakers, in a range of settings, readily turn to for accessible, timely, high-quality information.

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As Director of the newly named Stone Center, I look forward to the years ahead, which I am confident will be productive and transformational.

Sincerely yours,



Janet C. Gornick  
Director, James M. and Cathleen D. Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality

\* An official step lies ahead. At CUNY, namings associated with physical space are subject to approval of the CUNY Board of Trustees; that step is scheduled to take place this autumn.