

NextGenPop: Recruiting the Next Generation of Scholars into Population Research

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Background and Motivation. Guided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) mission “to ensure the health, productivity, independence, and well-being of all people,” demographic research provides foundational information about the health and well-being of individuals, families and groups, and the changing composition of the broader populations that they comprise. This research sheds light on the large-scale patterns and processes that shape our world and the individuals living in it. Students trained in population science are well-equipped to pursue careers across academic, government, and applied research settings, where they can work toward enhancing human health, development and well-being.

While the field of population research has continued to grow in numbers, there remains a **striking lack of racial and ethnic diversity among scholars of population**. For example, only 12% of earned doctorates within the social sciences (where demographers typically get their training) were awarded to Black and Hispanic candidates in 2019. Within the Population Association of America (PAA)—the leading professional organization for demographic research—only 15% of current members identify as Black or Hispanic, which is about half their combined proportion (32%) in the general population. These numbers show that we are not sufficiently recruiting, training, and retaining scholars from a range of backgrounds. This is important both in terms of providing opportunities for groups of individuals that have been historically disadvantaged and also for generating a body of demographic knowledge that fully reflects the diversity of human populations today.

Population research offers a range of professional career opportunities and yields important research findings that influence policy and practice to enhance human wellbeing. We need to do more to **build a pipeline into demography for undergraduate students** who have been historically underrepresented in this field. The undergraduate years are a critical period for shaping the course of future academic and professional trajectories and present a key opportunity for drawing promising researchers from diverse backgrounds into population science. Undergraduate demography training is relatively uncommon, however, particularly outside of elite research universities.

NextGenPop. To expand demographic training for undergraduates, we are developing a brief but intensive, collaborative summer program that uses pressing contemporary issues as a lens for studying population composition and change, for example, on race and income inequality, health disparities, immigration, and family change. Funded by an NICHD R25 grant (#HD105602), this new initiative aims to increase the diversity of the population field and nurture the next generation of population scientists. *NextGenPop* will be coordinated by a new consortium of 27 population research centers from universities across the U.S. and will be closely linked with and administratively supported by the Population Association of America (PAA). Population centers in the consortium include: Albany, Bowling Green, Brown, Chicago, Colorado, Columbia, Cornell, CUNY, Duke, Guttmacher, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio State, Penn, Penn State, Princeton, UC-Irvine, UCLA, UCSB, UCSD, UNC, Utah State, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin (see map below).

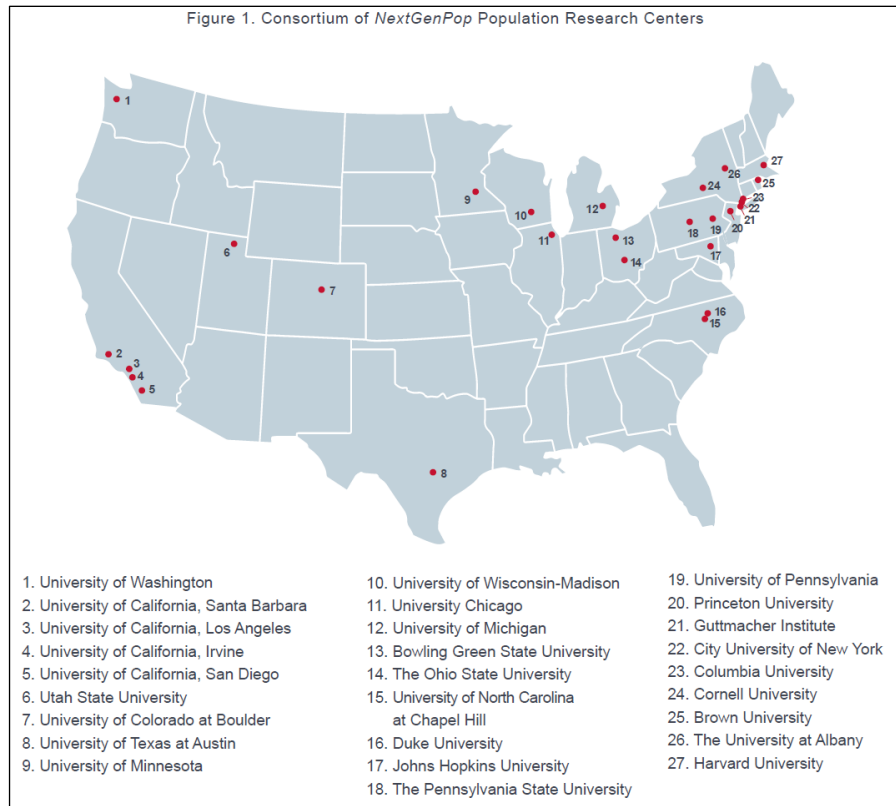
Over the five years of the program (summers 2022-2026), *NextGenPop* will be successively hosted (in chronological order) by: Wisconsin, Cornell, Duke, UC-Irvine, and Minnesota. The goal is that by hosting it across institutions, we can make it regionally accessible to students in various geographic locations.

Program Structure. The program will include two weeks of in-person programming on campus over the summer. The summer residential experience will be supplemented by subsequent virtual components focused

on research and professional development, as well as opportunities for mentorship and networking at the PAA annual meetings. Across the five universities, common core content on population perspectives, research methods, and professional development will be covered each summer, along with material that reflects cutting-edge research themes and expertise at each host institution. A hands-on research component will be integral to the program, including faculty-student research collaborations and small-group tutorials. In addition to faculty, the program will draw in and support graduate students and postdocs in mentoring roles with program participants, providing critical training opportunities to graduate and postdoctoral affiliates and extending the reach of the program.

Recruitment and Institutional Support. Host institutions will work with regional partners, including HBCUs and other schools and colleges closely connected to the target population of underrepresented minorities and first-generation college students. Regional partners will also contribute faculty and graduate students to help with the curriculum and guide hands-on research projects. PAA will play a coordinating role for the program, including developing a website to provide program information, processing applications, arranging travel, and connecting with potential partners. Critically, PAA will work with us to bring the *NextGenPop* participants to the PAA annual meetings in the years following the summer program, providing ongoing engagement with other *NextGenPop* fellows and scholars from the broader field.

For population science to fully reflect the diversity of human populations today, we need to increase racial and ethnic diversity among scholars in the field. **The *NextGenPop* program will address this critical challenge with a collaborative summer program for undergraduates** across multiple U.S. universities. It promises to have significant and sustained impact by building a more diverse pipeline into the population field and nurturing the next generation of population scientists.



For more information, please feel free to contact the *NextGenPop* PIs/site leaders:

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