Recruiting the Next Generation of Scholars into Population Research

October 2025

Background and motivation. Guided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) mission "to lead research and training to understand human development, improve reproductive health, enhance the lives of children and adolescents, and optimize abilities for all," population research addresses the social and behavioral factors that shape human health. Students trained in demography/population science are well-equipped to pursue careers across academic, government, and applied research settings to support health, development, and well-being.

Program to date. Funded by NICHD grant #R25HD105602 (2021-2026), *NextGenPop* is a collaborative training program across five universities designed to bring young scholars into the field of population research by focusing on the undergraduate years, a critical period for shaping academic and professional trajectories. The cohort-based program includes a two-week summer experience on campus, subsequent virtual components throughout the academic year on research and professional development, and opportunities for mentorship and networking at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America (PAA), the nation's leading professional association for population scholars.

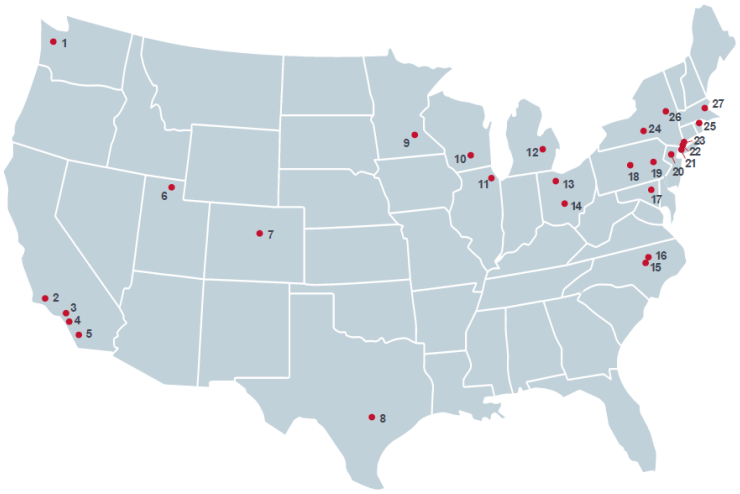
Across the five universities, common core content on population perspectives, research methods, and professional development is covered each summer, along with material that reflects cutting-edge research themes and expertise at each host institution. A hands-on research component provides data analysis tools and training, as well as experience with developing and presenting research ideas. In addition to faculty, the program draws in and supports 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.

Over the first four years (summers 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025), the *NextGenPop* summer residential program was hosted by Wisconsin, Cornell, Duke, and UC-Irvine, respectively. The 5th year will be hosted by Minnesota in June 2026. Rotating the program across institutions has facilitated participation by individuals across regions of the country. The first four *NextGenPop* cohorts include 76 fellows from colleges and universities across the U.S. In program evaluations, participants attest to the positive impact of *NextGenPop* on their achievements out of college. Among the first two cohorts (many in the latest cohorts are just completing their undergraduate degrees), already 15 are pursuing population-related graduate study, and others are in a range of research- and policy-related positions in population and allied fields, many with an eye toward graduate school in the coming years.

NextGenPop in the next five years. We aim to extend the NextGenPop program for five additional years, rotating the summer research experience across Wisconsin, Cornell, Johns Hopkins,

Minnesota, and UCLA (we have a renewal application under review by NICHD). We will build on the success of the current structure, which draws support from the broader field of population, including a large consortium of population centers and close collaboration with PAA. *NextGenPop* is integrated within a consortium of 27 population research centers from universities across the U.S. and is administratively supported by the Population Association of America. 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).

Figure 1. Consortium of *NextGenPop* Population Research Centers



1. University of Washington
2. University of California, Santa Barbara
3. University of California, Los Angeles
4. University of California, Irvine
5. University of California, San Diego
6. Utah State University
7. University of Colorado at Boulder
8. University of Texas at Austin
9. University of Minnesota
10. University of Wisconsin-Madison
11. University Chicago
12. University of Michigan
13. Bowling Green State University
14. The Ohio State University
15. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
16. Duke University
17. Johns Hopkins University
18. The Pennsylvania State University
19. University of Pennsylvania
20. Princeton University
21. Guttmacher Institute
22. City University of New York
23. Columbia University
24. Cornell University
25. Brown University
26. The University at Albany
27. Harvard University

NextGenPop fellows from the first three cohorts of the program attended the 2025 PAA Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., April 10-13, including twenty who presented their research in poster and oral sessions.