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May 2010

The University of Chicago Crime Lab
Successful innovation requires learning from experience

Each year around the world, around 500,000 people are murdered and millions more are the victims of other crimes. The social costs of crime in the U.S. alone may be on the order of $1 to $2 trillion per year, and affect every member of society, not just those who are directly victimized. Crime, particularly violent crime, disproportionately affects the poor, and exacerbates almost every other social problem by draining government resources, impairing economic development, and affecting children's school performance and their mental and physical health. Crime appears to be a consequence as well as a cause of many of these other social problems, particularly school failure – which is a major concern, given that data assembled by America's Promise Alliance shows that the four-year high school graduation rate in the 50 largest cities in the U.S. averages only around 50 percent.

Unfortunately, far too little is known about how best to reduce crime and these other closely-related social problems. For example, in 2005 a blue-ribbon panel commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences argued there is practically no good evidence about what works to reduce gun violence in America. Other National Academies reports have been similarly bleak about the state of knowledge in other crucial policy areas, including drug policy and even the basic question of whether mass incarceration deters crime. This is true despite the fact that for decades, cities and states all across the country have tried countless new pilot programs to reduce violence, crime, and school failure. Yet new programs are almost never implemented in a way that facilitates rigorous evaluation. The lack of feedback about results makes it difficult for policymakers to learn from experience and improve policy and practice over time.

The University of Chicago Crime Lab seeks to improve our understanding of how to reduce crime and violence by helping government agencies and non-profit organizations design, implement and evaluate new pilot programs to make them as informative as possible. Our goal is to generate new evidence about what works, for whom, and why, through the accumulation of evidence about the benefits and costs of different intervention strategies that would be as rigorous as any randomized clinical trial in the area of medicine. The ultimate goal is to enable policymakers to prioritize funding to the most cost-effective uses, and thereby maximize the social good that can be accomplished with available resources. The importance of paying attention to program benefits and costs is highlighted by experiments that have been carried out in the developing-world context, where, for example, the costs per extra child-year of primary education have been found to range from $6,000 per child-year from an intervention that pays families to send their children to school rather than to work, to $60 from hiring extra teachers to reduce class sizes, to $3.25 from providing poor children with de-worming medication.[1]

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[1] Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo (2008) "The experimental approach to development economics," Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 14467. (www.nber.org)

The Crime Lab began in April 2008 in partnership with the City of Chicago and has been made possible by generous seed funding from the Joyce Foundation, the Office of the Provost of the University of Chicago, the School of Social Service Administration, and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Crime Lab projects involve some of the world's leading experts from public policy, public health, economics, sociology, psychology, and criminology, from leading universities such as Harvard, Yale, Duke, University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, Berkeley, and NYU, in addition of course to the University of Chicago.

The Crime Lab research team and our affiliates have implemented a variety of experiments across the country, and are currently developing additional projects to add to this portfolio. Additionally we are providing pro bono technical assistance to various state agencies to structure new and existing programs so that they can be rigorously evaluated. A partial list of ongoing projects and those under development by the Crime Lab and its affiliates follows. More information about the Crime Lab can also be found at our website: http://crimelab.uchicago.edu or by contacting Crime Lab Executive Director Roseanna Ander at rander@uchicago.edu.

Crime Lab Projects

The Crime Lab is empirical rather than ideological in its perspective about what approaches are most effective, and cost-effective, in reducing crime and related social problems. Because criminal and violent events are complicated behavioral and social phenomena, which stem from a complex mix of causes, it seems unlikely that the solution will arrive in the form of a single "miracle cure." Our goal is to try to help society identify the most effective, and cost-effective, portfolio of intervention strategies. These strategies in principle could involve criminal justice approaches that try to deter crime through the threat or administration of punishment and monitoring. In addition they could include preventive or rehabilitative efforts that try to improve people's educational, socio-emotional, and self-regulation skills that previous research suggests are strongly predictive of anti-social behavior. Whenever possible we seek to use randomized control trial (RCT) research designs or their near-equivalents in order to generate "gold standard" evidence about program impacts. Because we believe in the value of benefit-cost analysis for guiding policy, all of our studies aspire to examine positive outcomes such as schooling and labor market involvement as well as changes in criminal behavior and recidivism.

Human Capital Development

The Chicago Initiative to Reduce Gun Violence Among School Age Youth tests the hypothesis suggested by non-experimental studies in psychology that it is possible to prevent impulsive violent events by teaching youth self-regulation and social skills to help them deal more adaptively with their environment. With $1 million in support from the Joyce, MacArthur, McCormick, Polk and Spencer foundations, as well as the Chicago Community Trust, Exelon and NICHD, this intervention is currently being delivered to over 700 adolescent boys in 15 Chicago Public Schools (with a comparable sized control group) by a partnership between Youth Guidance and World Sport Chicago. The evaluation is being led by Crime Lab co-director Harold Pollack, Roseanna Ander and Jens Ludwig of the University of Chicago.

Chicago Truancy Intervention seeks to learn more about how to prevent school dropout in our nation's most disadvantaged urban school districts, with $3.2 million in support from a pending award from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences (IES). In partnership with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) the goal will be to test the effectiveness of a structured mentoring intervention that would work with both 2nd and 9th graders. Most of the current policy and research attention on dropout has focused on the dropout decision itself, even though dropout is more likely to be simply the end point of a longer-term developmental process.

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This experiment would seek to learn more about the relative effectiveness of preventing dropout by intervening early vs. late, and the relative value of devoting intervention resources to working directly with students vs. working with parents and family processes. This project is being led by Jonathan Guryan of the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business in collaboration with Duke professor Philip Cook and Crime Lab co-director Jens Ludwig.

Milwaukee Truancy Intervention is a project that is in development and designed to learn more about how to prevent dropout by increasing school attendance and engagement among elementary school students in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), through a partnership with the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD), the Milwaukee Municipal Courts, and a local community group (Boys and Girls Club). The goal of the project is to determine whether to measure whether criminal justice leverage can "nudge" parents into modifying their children's school attendance, which should in turn help to divert the juveniles off of the path to school dropout and delinquency. Funding is being requested through a revised and resubmitted proposal to NICHD. The project is led by Jonathan Guryan, Philip Cook, and Jens Ludwig, together with the director of the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission, Mallory O'Brien, and University of Chicago economics professor John List.

Correctional and Re-Entry Interventions

Cook County Jail Day Reporting Center Evaluation seeks to learn more about the ability of a jail diversion program to improve schooling attainment and reduce criminal behavior, by providing a combination of computer-assisted education, related support services (including substance abuse treatment), and monitoring and the threat of sanctions for non-compliance. The project is being carried out pro bono and is being led by Jens Ludwig and Dave Olsen at Loyola.

The Effects of CBT in Juvenile Detention Evaluation involves working with the Office of the Temporary Administrator of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC), a 500 bed facility, to evaluate the impact of a major transformation underway to provide juvenile detainees with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) that helps youth improve their socio-emotional and behavioral skills and reduce impulsivity. The project is being led by Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig and Sara Heller with David Roush at Michigan State University. Funding requests are pending at the Smith Richardson Foundation and the National Institute of Justice.

Juvenile Probation Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Intervention involves a partnership between the Crime Lab and the Juvenile Probation and Court Services Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County to provide cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to juvenile probationers to help them better learn how to self-regulate their emotions and their behavior. The project also involves the use of conditional cash transfers (payments conditional on participation in the CBT treatment and in schooling) that are intended to enhance CBT program participation and completion rates among high-risk youth. The project is being led by Michael McCloskey at Temple University in collaboration with Ken Dodge of Duke, as well as Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig and Harold Pollack of the University of Chicago. A funding request is pending through a revise and resubmit proposal to the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA).

Illinois Juvenile Second Chance Re-Entry Initiative, is the Illinois Department of Human Services and Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice's Second Chance Juvenile Re-entry Application to the U.S. Department of Justice. Should the state receive the grant, the Crime Lab would conduct a randomized control trial of the Family Integrated Transitions (F.I.T.) program, pro bono. The program, modeled after a pilot that has had promising results in Washington State, will offer family therapy for 50 juveniles coming upon the end of their sentence and upon re-entering their community. This project is being led by Roseanna Ander and Harold Pollack.

Illinois Adult Second Chance Re-Entry Initiative, is the Illinois Department of Corrections'

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Adult re-entry application to the U.S. Department of Justice's Second Chance grant program. Should the state receive the grant, The Crime Lab would conduct a randomized control trial and evaluation, pro bono, of re-entry services that would be provided to 100 men and 100 women returning to three Illinois counties. This project is led by Roseanna Ander and Harold Pollack.

Milwaukee's Safe Streets Prisoner Re-entry evaluation is a partnership between the Crime Lab and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections to carry out a randomized controlled trial of an intensive re-entry initiative for prisoners with a history of violence and/or gang involvement. Recidivism rates are highest for re-entering prisoners directly after prison release, and yet many follow-up social programs only start serving ex-inmates with some delay. One innovation of the intervention itself, which is being funded by an award to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections from the U.S. Department of Justice, is that intensive services are offered to inmates while they are still in prison, which are then followed up by after-care assistance upon release. The evaluation of the intervention is being funded by the Smith Richardson Foundation and is led by Philip Cook, Jens Ludwig, Mallory O'Brien and Anthony Braga of Harvard University.

Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Study takes advantage of the random assignment of juvenile arrestees to juvenile court judges in the Philadelphia juvenile justice system to examine the effects of different detention and after-care treatment decisions on youth outcomes such as recidivism, schooling, and formal labor market involvement. Because the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change project has already collected detailed longitudinal data on juvenile offenders in Philadelphia, we will be able to study this "natural experiment" in Philadelphia by carrying out secondary data analysis of the Pathways to Desistance dataset. This project is being led by Thomas Miles and Jens Ludwig of the University of Chicago in collaboration with Laurence Steinberg of Temple University.

Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE), is a "coerced abstinence" program that seeks to increase the swiftness and certainty of punishment for drug offender probation violations, by subjecting probationers to more frequent, random drug tests, and then punishing these tests immediately using mild rather than drastic sanctions (short jail stays that can be served on the weekend by employed probationers). Repeat violations lead to more severe sanctions, which could include the requirement of extended stays in drug treatment. An evaluation led by Crime Lab affiliate Angela Hawkins of Pepperdine University found that the program is highly successful at reducing drug use and crime, even among populations such as methamphetamine abusers and domestic violence offenders. Crime Lab staff are in discussions with Cook County and State of Illinois officials to develop a HOPE like pilot project in Illinois.

Policing

2009 ***COPS Program evaluation*** will measure the effects on crime and community development outcomes of the new $1 billion in local police hiring grants that were recently awarded to law enforcement agencies around the country by the U.S. Department of Justice as part of the COPS program. Previous quasi-experimental studies of the COPS program administered by the Clinton Administration suggests that increased spending for police may be one of the most cost-effective criminal justice approaches for reducing crime – far more cost-effective than long prison sentences. However previous research on the COPS program, or on the effects of police resources on crime more generally, suffer from lingering concerns about potential bias from omitted variables or selection. This lingering scientific uncertainty is important because there remains great controversy within the field of criminology about whether increased funding for police has any beneficial effect at all on crime. Our new study of the latest round of COPS grants overcomes this concern by taking advantage of the fact that the Department of Justice had far more applications for COPS grants than could be funded, and so allocated grants by ranking

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agencies based on some objective scoring criteria and funding proposals until available resources ran out. This enables us to carry out a rigorous "regression discontinuity design" (RDD) that essentially compares crime and other outcomes for agencies just above versus just below the COPS funding threshold. A growing body of social science research suggests that RDD studies, under the right conditions, can generate estimates that are as compelling as those from a true randomized clinical trial. This project is being led by Philip Cook, Jens Ludwig, and Douglas Miller of the University of California at Davis, and is being carried out pro bono.

Metropolitan Nashville Police Department Officer Effectiveness Project is being carried out by the Crime Lab to learn more about the variation in and determinants of police officer effectiveness. Previous research in education policy has revealed that one of the most important determinants of variation in children's schooling outcomes is variation across classrooms in the effectiveness of individual teachers. Moreover previous education research also shows that many of the measurable teacher characteristics that determine hiring, promotion, and teacher compensation levels (such as having a graduate degree) are at best very weakly correlated with teacher effectiveness, while some of the strongest correlates of teacher effectiveness (such as the teacher's SAT scores or selectivity of the college that they attended) are rarely if ever used in making hiring or promotion decisions. Almost nothing is currently known about any such issues in the area of law enforcement, which raises the possibility that there could potentially be unrealized opportunities for substantially improving the effectiveness and efficiency of existing policing systems without any additional spending. Thanks to the provision of administrative records to the Crime Lab by the Nashville Police Department, we will be able to begin to address these questions in the law enforcement area. This project is being carried out pro bono by Jonathan Guryan, Anthony Braga, David Deming of Harvard University, and Jens Ludwig.

Housing policy

Moving to Opportunity evaluation seeks to learn more about whether, how and why growing up in a distressed, dangerous public housing project increase the risks that youth become involved in crime and violence. Jens Ludwig is serving as project director for the long-term evaluation of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Moving to Opportunity (MTO) residential mobility experiment, which was launched in 1994 in five cities: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, LA, and New York. Evidence from a 5 year follow up found a more complicated pattern of results, with MTO moves causing short-term reductions in violent crime arrests for both boys and girls, but after several years, some increases in property crime arrests for male youth. The 10 year evaluation is currently out in the field with $16 million in funding from the Federal office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US Department of Education, the Gates, MacArthur, Russell Sage, Smith Richardson and Spencer Foundations, and will examine youth involvement in crime and risky behavior as well as other related outcomes such as schooling attainment, mental and physical health, and basic decision making processes such as future orientation. Results should be available late in 2010.

Chicago Housing Voucher Study This study, like MTO, seeks to learn more about the degree to which neighborhood social and institutional environments influence youth criminal involvement and related outcomes like school dropout or achievement test scores. This study takes advantage of the fact that there is excess demand for housing vouchers in Chicago, and that the voucher program wait-list in Chicago that was created in the late 1990s randomly assigned voucher applicants to wait-list positions – thereby creating a "natural experiment" that is as rigorous as any clinical trial. We will measure youth involvement in violence perpetration by matching administrative arrest records from the Illinois State Police (ISP), and measure youth violence victimization using mortality data from the National Death Index (NDI), and are in the process of

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obtaining Chicago Public School data to analyze schooling outcomes. This project is being supported by a $900,000 grant from CDC, and is being led by Brian Jacob at the University of Michigan in collaboration with Jens Ludwig and Roseanna Ander.

University of Chicago Crime Lab Directors

Jens Ludwig (Director), is the McCormick Foundation Professor of Social Service Administration, Law, and Public Policy at the University of Chicago, Non-Resident Senior Fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution, Research Associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), and a member of the Board on Children, Youth and Families at the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Sciences; **Harold Pollack** (Co-Director), is the Helen Ross Professor at the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration, and faculty chair of the university's Center for Health Administration Studies; **Roseanna Ander** is the Executive Director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, and previously served for 10 years as Program Officer for the Gun Violence program at the Joyce Foundation in Chicago.

University of Chicago Crime Lab Affiliates

David Abrams is an Assistant Professor of Law, Business, and Public Policy at the University of Pennsylvania; **Anthony Braga** is Senior Research Associate in Criminal Justice Policy and Management and Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government; **Henry H. Brownstein** is Senior Vice President and Director of Substance Abuse, Mental Health and Criminal Justice Studies at NORC at the University of Chicago; **Kerwin Charles** is the Edwin and Betty L. Bergman Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago; **Philip Cook**, is the ITT / Terry Sanford Professor of Public Policy at Duke University; **Jeffrey Grogger**, is the Irving Harris Professor in Urban Policy, University of Chicago; **Jonathan Guryan** is an Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business; **Angela Hawken** is Assistant Professor of Economics and Policy Analysis at the School of Public Policy at Pepperdine University; **Jennifer Hill** is Associate Professor of Applied Statistics at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development; **Brian Jacob** is Walter H. Annenberg Professor of Education Policy at the University of Michigan, Director of the university's Center on Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP), and an Executive Committee Member of the National Poverty Center; **Mark Kleiman** is a Professor of Public Policy at UCLA; **Benjamin Lahey** is Irving B. Harris Professor of Health Studies and Psychiatry at the University of Chicago; **Steve Levitt** is the William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, and Director of the Becker Center on Chicago Price Theory; **John List** is Professor of Economics, University of Chicago; **John MacDonald** is the Jerry Lee Assistant Professor of Criminology at the University of Pennsylvania and adjunct Behavioral Scientist at RAND; **Michael McCloskey** is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Temple University and previously Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Chicago; **Tracey Meares** is the Walton Hale Hamilton Professor of Law at Yale Law School; **Thomas Miles** is Professor of Law at the University of Chicago, and co-editor of the Journal of Legal Studies; **Mallory O'Brien** is the Director of the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission; **Charles Payne** is the Frank P. Hixon Professor in the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration; **Dennis Rosenbaum** is Professor of Criminal Justice and Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago; **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** is Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the University of Chicago; **Laurence Steinberg** is the Distinguished University Professor and Laura H. Carnell Professor of Psychology at Temple University.

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