SPH RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

May 2019

Timothy Callaghan, PhD
Health Policy and Management
Q: What is the strangest/most interesting/surprising place you have ever found yourself in the course of your research?

A: I think that the most interesting and surprising place my research has ever taken me was to a colonia (an unincorporated border settlement) between El Paso and Cuidad de Juarez on the western Texas-Mexico border. I was there to carry out a focus group with Community Health Workers to better understand Hispanic health access in Texas. It was a very interesting trip because it was the first time I really understood how diverse the Texas landscape was. It also allowed me to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities that exist for health access in border regions.
Q: What has been the biggest success to date for you with your research?
A: I think that my biggest success to date for my research was a paper I published last year on how meta-ignorance influences anti-vaccine sentiment. The paper immediately grabbed a lot of attention, getting written about in Newsweek, IFL Science, and many other outlets. It also reached the top page of reddit with over 39,000 upvotes. The paper was also awarded the Elsevier Atlas last fall, selected by an external panel of NGOs as the single article published across the thousands of Elsevier journals determined most likely to significantly impact lives around the world.

Q: What sparked your interest in Health Policy and Management as a field of study?
A: I think my interest in this area of work was originally sparked by a Robert Wood Johnson grant I worked on as a graduate student studying state decision-making after the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Early on, I was just responsible for collecting data but over the course of my PhD program, I became an integral part of that research team and became fascinated by state health policy and politics.

Q: What sort of impact do you hope your research will have?
A: Ultimately, I hope that my research will allow us to better understand how politics, public attitudes, and place influence health in America. As a political scientist, my primary goal is to get the field of public health to better account for the inescapable role that politics plays in shaping a nation’s health. Additionally, I hope to build on my background as a political psychologist to better understand what the public thinks about important public health topics like vaccination, antibiotic resistance, and Medicaid work requirements so that we can design health policies with broad appeal while also reducing health misinformation. Above all, I hope that my research will have an impact beyond academia. I hope to help the public better understand public policy in America while also helping to improve public health.

Q: What advice would you give a student interested in pursuing research?
A: I would recommend that any students interested in pursuing research reach out to faculty who are doing research in fields that interest them. The faculty might be able to incorporate those students into the research they have going on to give them first-hand experience. Additionally, those faculty can direct students to the right fellowships, internships, and degree opportunities to help them towards that interest in pursuing research.
Research Interests

- Health Politics
- Rural Health Policy
- Insurance Coverage and Expansion
- Public Health Policy Attitudes
- Disability Policy
- Survey Design
- State Politics and Policy

Recent Publications


Smith, Brianna, Matt Motta, Zein Murib, Timothy Callaghan, and Marissa Theys. Forthcoming, Available Online. ““Gay” or “Homosexual”: The Implications of Social Category Labels for the Structure of Mass Attitudes.” American Politics Research

