Overview

When Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler published Nudge in 2008, it would have been difficult to imagine the unprecedented interest in behavioral economics and behavioral science that followed. Governments and organizations, it turns out, are hungry for solutions that work, and behavioral science provides low-cost, high-impact answers for society’s most pressing problems. Behavioral scientists, including the faculty in the Behavioral Insights Group (BIG), have long been studying how making actions and decisions easy and attractive, rather than cumbersome, dramatically improves human decision making, and outcomes for society.

Worldwide, behavioral science is becoming an essential item in the toolkit of policy makers at every level of government, enabling them to combine insights from psychology, economics, neuroscience and social science with field experiments and empirically-tested results. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Singapore, Australia, the United States, and many other countries, all have established or emerging behavioral insights teams. Countless more cities and regional governments, NGOs, and other policy-based organizations are looking to create such teams.

Behavioral science has been applied to the following policy areas: civic engagement, consumer protection, education, health, justice, taxation, transportation, and many more. From addressing road congestion and safety to increasing organ donation, behavioral science has made an impact on policy-making worldwide.

This guide is meant to serve as a helpful resource to prospective and current students across Harvard, who are interested in learning more or working in this field.

The Essential Reading List

Books (you can find these in most Harvard libraries!)

Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein

Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion by Robert Cialdini

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman
Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much by Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir
Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions by Dan Ariely
Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics by Richard Thaler

Inside the Nudge Unit: How Small Changes Can Make a Big Difference by David Halpern
Judgement in Managerial Decision Making by Max Bazerman & Don A. Moore
The Undoing Project: A Friendship that Changed our Minds by Michael Lewis

Online resources
- BIG hosted Behavioral Exchange in 2016, a conference with nearly 400 attendees globally and recorded all of the sessions, which can be found here
- BIG’s YouTube Channel with other event recordings can be found here
- ideas42 explains What do we mean when we talk about behavioral science? here
- The UK Behavioral Insights Team has a wealth of information about behavioral insights and interventions online. Read their blog, policy publications and academic publications.
- The World Bank maintains a behavioral interventions Results Brief Collection here
- The Economics, Psychology, Policy blog has a list of behavioral policy readings here
Courses/Content Knowledge

Students interested in behavioral science can see a list of relevant courses on the Behavioral Insights Group website, and can also check our Suggested Curriculum, but may specifically be interested in:

- Immersive Field Course: UK Behavioral Insights (MLD 335Y / HBSMBA 6022)
- Behavioral Economics and Public Policy (API 304)
- Behavioral Economics, Law and Public Policy (API 305 / HLS 2589)
- Behavioral Economics & Global Health (GHP 237)
- Behavioral Science of Negotiations (MLD 224)
- Behavioral Science for Inclusive Organizations (MLD 310)
- Leadership Decision Making (MLD 301)
- Science of Behavior Change (MLD 304)

How Do I Get Involved?

…As a career

A passion for high-impact, low-cost policy changes that are evidence-based is an essential starting point for working in the field. The skills organizations ask for vary, but usually include:

- Knowledge and understanding of relevant policy, usually including field experience
- Strategic planning and conceptual thinking
- Project/program management
- Statistical knowledge (including experience with R or Stata)
- Understanding of (and sometimes experience running) randomized control trials
- Ability to attract and manage a multidisciplinary team
- Ability to translate behavioral science knowledge to a lay audience
- Ability to adapt and find opportunities in failures/setbacks.

…Through further education

Many universities around the world offer postgraduate programs in behavioral economics/science and related disciplines. A list of Masters programs in Europe can be found here, while a more comprehensive global list of Masters and PhD programs is maintained here.

…While at Harvard

Student roles are a great way to get to know faculty and a large number of like-minded students. Time commitments are usually very manageable (although being organized helps).

Course Assistant

More common in students’ second year at HKS, course assistants can support HKS courses related to behavioral insights. Positions are advertised publicly here, and applications are submitted here. Note: past experience suggests it is a good idea to follow-up that application.
form submission with a direct email to the relevant faculty member, also copying in their faculty assistant, letting them know why you’re interested and your relevant qualifications.

Research Assistant

These are a great way to dive into a specific topic with a specific faculty member. Many faculty will have a budget for research assistants and projects for RAs to work on. However, these sorts of opportunities are typically cyclical and may not be constantly available across two years. It is best to directly contact the faculty member you’re interested in, copying in their faculty assistant (their contact information can generally be found under their school profile) and build a relationship in advance.

There are also research labs that need staffing, such as the Harvard Decision Science Laboratory and the HBS Computer Laboratory for Experimental Research.

Behavioral Insights Student Group Committee

Applications for leaders of the Behavioral Insights Student Group (BISG) open in the spring semester for the following academic year, so keep an eye on the BISG newsletter. If you’re only learning about the committee now, you can still get in touch by emailing the committee. Positions include: Co/Leader, Communications Chair, Careers Chair, Student Representatives, and others. These positions are a great way to shape the BISG how you see fit, and build relationships with faculty, administration and the behavioral insights community. Find out more here.

Remember, many great opportunities for students are possible but not advertised. Don’t wait for HKS Today to advertise these sorts of roles. If you’re interested in the work of a given faculty member, reach out to them to meet and discuss what opportunities might be available.

Connections to BISG Alums Working in Behavioral Science

Join BISG on Slack and you’ll find a channel on behavioral job and internship opportunities, a space to ask questions or discuss research, and a place to connect to Harvard alums who are working in the field. Simply follow the steps on Slack to join the BISG group, subscribe to the available channels and get networking!

…While completing my MPP at HKS

MPP students who are required to complete a PAE capstone project in their second year can undertake behaviorally-informed projects and access support for their work through the Behavioral Insights Group. This support can include:
• **Help finding clients.** In previous years, BIG was able to source potential projects for students from the Netherlands Authority for the Financial Markets, USAID, MDRC, Georgetown University Institute for Reproductive Health, the World Bank, the Israel Ministry of Environmental Protection, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – and many others!

• **Help getting expert interviews.** With a global network of experts, BIG is able to help student secure interviews with and support from experts most relevant to their projects

• **Supervision & Advice.** BIG faculty are potential advisors for PAE projects

Keep an eye on the [BIG website](http://bigwebsite.com) and newsletter for PAE opportunities and further information.

**Who Is Doing This Work?**

According to the OECD, there are 196 institutions around the world applying behavioral insights to public policy. The full OECD list can be found [here](http://oecd.org).

Some organizations focus entirely on behavioral science applications to policy and provide consulting services to client organizations, including:

• [The Analyst Institute](http://theanalystinstitute.com), based in Washington, DC
• [Behavioral Insights Global](http://behavioralinsightsglobal.com), operates globally
• The Behavioural Insights Team, based out of the United Kingdom, with offices in New York, Singapore, and Australia
• BEWorks, based in Toronto
• The Busara Center for Behavioral Economics in Kenya
• Center for Advanced Hindsight, based out of Duke University
• ideas42 with offices in New York, Washington, DC, and Boston
• In Class Today, based in San Francisco
• Ionia – Behavioral Insights, based in Alabama
• MDRC Center for Applied Behavioral Science, based in New York City
• OPower, based in San Francisco
• Rare Center for Behavior & the Environment, in Arlington, Virginia
• TGG with offices in New York, Chicago and London
• UCL Centre for Behaviour Change, based in London
• VAL Health, with offices in New York, Greenwich, and Philadelphia
• World Bank Mind, Behavior and Development Unit (eMBeD), based in Washington, DC
• WBU Labs Center for Applied Learning Science, based in Salt Lake City, Utah

Other organizations make it a part of their broader policy and business platform, including:

• Acorns (Financial Services)
• Boston Consulting Group
• CharacterLab (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• Commonwealth (Financial Services)
• Commonwealth Bank of Australia (Financial Services)
• Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• Donors Choose (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• European Commission (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• Facebook
• Financial Conduct Authority (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• GiveDirectly (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• Google (Technology)
• Maritz (Services)
• Mint (Financial Services)
• Morningstar (Financial Services)
• OECD (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• StickK (Technology)
• Student Social Support Lab (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• Urban Labs (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• USAID (Gov/Nonprofit/Research)
• Walmart (Retail)
• WaterSmart (Technology/Energy)
• Yelp (Technology)

Governments worldwide have created behavioral science teams, including:

• Australia
  • Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA)
• Peru
• Qatar
• Singapore
Many states also have their own nudge units, including NSW and Victoria. United States:
- White House Social and Behavioral Sciences Team
- Cities across the US are also increasingly employing behavioral science, e.g. The Lab @ DC and the Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative.

Other behavioral science communities across the world include:
- The Danish Nudging Network (Denmark)
- The European Nudging Network (Europe)
- The Irish Behavioral Science and Policy Network (Ireland)

**How do I get a job at one of these organizations?**

For advertisements of current job openings:

- Follow the BIG Jobs Board
- Sign-up for the BISG newsletter
- Attend the annual BISG Careers Panel, advertised in our newsletter. View recordings of past careers talks here.

For broader help thinking about careers in this space, or for introductions to current practitioners, don’t hesitate to reach out to BIG’s Program Manager Shibeal O’Flaherty or the BIG Faculty most relevant to your interests.

**Research Projects**

Those interested in diving into some research, or building a research body of work for potential PhD applications, may want to consider undertaking a research project. Most commonly that would be through a Reading & Research credit which will require a faculty advisor and the production of a substantial piece of writing.

If you are looking to do research at any level, the following may be helpful:

- Harvard Digital Lab for the Social Sciences
- Harvard Decision Science Laboratory
- HBS Computer Laboratory for Experimental Research
- Mind Brain Behavior
- The Foundations of Human Behavior Initiative
- Funding schemes for postdoctoral fellowships
Research tools and tips

- All Harvard students have Qualtrics accounts, a great survey service.
- If you’re thinking about running surveys, put aside an hour to discover and embrace mturk.
- You also have access to some Harvard-wide software licenses, including Stata.
- Harvard’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) is important and entirely navigable. You can also sign up to receive the IRB newsletter here.
- If you’re going to work in one of the labs, they will require you to do the compulsory, free ethics training. It is worth doing whether required or not.
- Zotero is an unbelievably good citation tool and manager. If you have manually done your own citations and bibliography before, this is much better. Take 30 minutes to learn how to use it as early in your degree as possible. Be sure to download both the desktop version and the browser extensions.
- G*Power is a very helpful tool for working out (among other things) sample sizes for experiments.
- Doctoral students from Cambridge and elsewhere have compiled a master list of open datasets for psychology and survey research, available here.

Newsletters and Mailing/Seminar Lists

First and foremost, interested students should join the BISG mailing list by signing up here. If you are specifically interested in the application of behavioral insights to public health, you should also sign up to the BISG Chan chapter mailing list here. In doing so you’ll receive weekly newsletters during the academic year on the latest events, jobs, and opportunities in behavioral insights for students. (You can also view the BISG newsletter archive here.)

In addition, you may wish to sign up to:

- Harvard Business School’s Negotiation, Organizations, & Markets (NOM) email list, by emailing Elizabeth Sweeny
- The Behavioral and Experimental Economics Workshop Seminar List, by emailing Margaret Brissenden
- Judgment and Decision-Making Talks in Greater Boston/Cambridge
- Harvard Society for Mind, Brain and Behavior Mailing List
- The Behavioral Science & Policy Association (BSPA) newsletter
- The Behavioral Scientist Weekly Email Edition
- Decision Science News

Need More Information?

- Follow BIG on Twitter: https://twitter.com/HarvardBIG
- Check out our Jobs Board: http://harvardbehavioralinsightsgroup.tumblr.com/
- Harvard Kennedy School students can check out JACK to find job/internship opportunities focused on keywords “Behavioral Science/Insights”
- Check out BE-Recruit Jobs Board: http://www.be-recruit.com/jobs/
- Check out the Behavioral Science Jobs board: https://www.behavioraleconomics.com/jobs/
To discuss opportunities for PAEs, internships, and more, contact:

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