

Call for papers: 2020 NSF/CEME Decentralization Conference

Mechanism Design for Vulnerable Populations

April 17-19, 2020

**Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
University of Pittsburgh**

Submission Deadline: Friday, January 31th, 2020

The goal of this conference is to apply and extend mechanism design to the practical needs of institutions that serve vulnerable populations. These populations pose conceptual and technical challenges for the designer due to the high stakes decision making environments, complex constraints on agents' action space, and the cumulative effects of disadvantaged participation in previous mechanisms.

The field of mechanism design has played a significant role in designing public sector allocative mechanisms, making important contributions to school matching algorithms, the FCC spectrum auctions, the creation of electricity markets, and allocation mechanisms for public goods and government projects. Most of these applications, with the notable exception of the school matching mechanisms, consider sophisticated actors.

Recently, scholars have begun to apply the tools of mechanism design to domains that include vulnerable populations such as the construction of social safety nets. This endeavour will be challenging. Whether it is returning veterans, families facing housing insecurity, the previously incarcerated, or individuals overcoming addictions, the daily struggles of these populations are often unobserved by the designer, making it difficult to form accurate assumptions about agent types, action spaces, or perceptions of the mechanism. For vulnerable populations, small behavioral deviations or changes in allocations can result in dramatic differences, e.g. a missed car payment resulting in a job loss. In addition, marginalization is often the cumulative outcome of a sequence of mechanisms: the housing market affecting a child's school choice, which constrains his options in the job market, which in turn affects his outcome in the criminal justice system.

For the conference, we seek papers that address mechanism design for vulnerable populations. Topics could include:

- General theoretical papers on behavioral mechanism design and robust mechanism design
- Social work: service referral, drug rehabilitation protocols, adoption / foster care, transition to workforce

- Basic needs: housing integration by income and identity, shelter allocations, food banks
- Participatory democracy and participatory budgeting mechanisms
- Criminal justice: parole monitoring, bail setting, pretrial negotiation
- Transportation: route selection, road repair, transport markets
- Education: school matching algorithms

Submissions will be accepted until Friday, January 31th, 2020. Full papers are preferred, but extended abstracts will also be considered. Please email all submissions to jinyong.jeong@pitt.edu with the subject line *Decentralization Submission*. We will announce the conference program by Friday, February 14, 2020. All participants should confirm their attendance by Friday February 21, 2020.

Organizers:

- Sera Linardi
Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
Director, Center for Analytical Approaches to Social Innovation (CAASI)
University of Pittsburgh
- Jinyong Jeong
Postdoctoral Scholar, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
Center for Analytical Approaches to Social Innovation
University of Pittsburgh
- Scott E. Page
John Seely Brown Distinguished University Professor
Williamson Family Professor of Management
Ross School of Business
University of Michigan