

## Meet Our Faculty Affiliates

Welcome to CISS's new "Meet Our Faculty Affiliates" feature. Starting in March 2022, our Communications Intern [Lily Belisle](#) (CAS '25; Sociology) will share her interview with a CISS faculty affiliate, revealing the inspiration for their research, their latest projects, their favorite teaching experience at BU, and more.

### April 2022: Luke Glowacki (CAS/Anthropology)



[Luke Glowacki](#) is an assistant professor of anthropology and a faculty affiliate of the Center for Innovation in Social Science. He studies the evolution of complex social behavior, including cooperation and war. Dr. Glowacki has done extensive fieldwork among nomadic pastoralists along the Ethiopian / South Sudanese border studying inter-ethnic violence. His research has

been published in leading journals including *Science*, *Current Biology*, and the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. In 2019, he co-founded the [Omo Valley Research Project](#), a non-profit organization advancing scientific research and philanthropy in Ethiopia's Omo Valley where he continues to conduct and direct research.

#### Why does social science matter to you?

This is such an exciting time to be a social scientist. We're now at the point where we can study nearly any aspect of social life with granularity. The types of detailed data we can collect will obviously provide insights into existing theory, but the really exciting part is that new data streams drive new theorizing. We have technologies and analytic capabilities that were unthinkable only a few decades ago. The data we collect today are allowing unprecedented insights into how our social worlds function

which will revolutionize our theoretical frameworks. We're just at the beginning of this so there's a real opportunity to make meaningful contributions that will shape how future generations understand our world.

### **Can you tell us about a recent research project that you're excited about?**

I'm very excited about a few papers that are in pipeline looking at music regularities cross-culturally. This grew out of a project I was involved in during graduate school with collaborators Sam Mehr and Manvir Singh. We realized that even though music is a human universal with obvious and important social functions, there was astonishing little systematic data on the extent to which musical functions and features were conserved cross-culturally or varied across societies. We spent several years building a database on the social functions of music from a representative sample of the world's populations and a discography of music from these cultural regions, including lullabies, love songs, and songs for dancing and healing. We found that online naïve listeners can detect the social function of a song with surprising accuracy. We've extended this research through utilizing a global sample 49 countries and 28 languages, including 3 small-scale societies, replicating the main finding. The implications of this research speak to the fact despite all the wonderful variation that exists between cultures, humans all around the globe build cultural solutions to the same problems. It's easy to just see the differences that exist between cultures overlooking that there are often extremely deep similarities that obvious differences mask.

### **What is the best piece of professional advice you ever received?**

I've received a ton of great advice over the years thanks to many great mentors! Two pieces of advice stand out as being personally important to having a sustained and successful research career. First, a strong research program is generally question-driven and inspired by what you're fundamentally interested in. A question-driven approach provides the flexibility to follow your interests wherever they lead while also hopefully making scientific progress. When you're at the beginning of your research career and it can be easier to follow the path of least resistance even if it doesn't animate you as much as something else. But for the long-haul of a research career there is no substitute for genuine curiosity about your research.

Second, science is much more social than we typically realize, and the scientific

community is much larger than the people in your cohort, department, or even university. Take advantage of this and actively seek to develop a network of people you can learn from, workshop ideas with, and share drafts with. No matter how hard you work or how smart you are, your science will be so much better if you have a community of peers who push and challenge you but developing that network is something you must actively cultivate.

### **What is your favorite course you've taught at BU?**

Teaching undergraduates is one of the best parts of being a professor—the opportunity to reexperience learning something about our world for the first time with students is exhilarating. I often end up having new insights based on observations from my students. AN 321 Cognition and Culture is a ton of fun—we explore how the mind shapes culture and how culture in turn shapes how we think about the world. I try to drive home that there's still so much we don't know—professors and students alike, we are really all explorers just trying to make sense of the world.

### **Tell us a surprising fact about yourself.**

I'm an avid outdoors person who loves being immersed in big wild areas through canyoneering, canoeing, backpacking, or mountaineering. What I love more than anything is to have a few days of food and no set itinerary wandering wherever in the landscape attracts my attention. You can look at things with a detail that is hard to do in our hyperconnected world. In 2005 I tried to ride a horse across Mongolia but so enjoyed interacting with local families that I abandoned that plan and spent the rest of my time getting to know people and learning a lot about pastoralism. This was my first taste of one of the best parts of being an anthropologist—the relationships you build that transcend language, religion, and culture. In 2010 I tried to walk across the Danakil Depression (north to south) unsupported with a friend from the UK. We had 4 camels, strong legs, and a ton of optimism but were ultimately unsuccessful. In the hundred years since the Danakil was first successfully traversed on foot (by a party with around 30 camels), I think it's only become more difficult due to the lack of livelihoods that maintain wells and migratory paths. It's one of those things that I'll probably never get to do again but hope someone out there has that experience and can tell me all about it.