



# IKMZ Speaker Series

## **The network advantage: informal communication predicts better outcomes beyond formal collaboration (or why it takes a village to produce research with impact)**

**Monday, 18 May 2026,**  
**Time: 12.30 – 13.30**  
**Room: AND-4-06**

## **Sandra González- Bailón**

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**Professor of Communication  
and Sociology, Director of  
the Center for Information  
Networks and Democracy**



### **Biography**

Prof. Sandra González-Bailón is the Carolyn Marvin Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania, where she directs the Center for Information Networks and Democracy (CIND) and holds a secondary appointment in Sociology. Previously a Research Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute (2008–2013), she earned her doctorate from Nuffield College, University of Oxford, and completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Barcelona. Her research agenda lies at the intersection of computational social science and political communication, examining how online networks and algorithmic curation shape information exposure, political engagement, mobilization, diffusion, and news consumption.

### **Abstract**

Academic performance relies on a special type of social capital known as the “invisible college”, a term that aims to capture the informal networks of scholars who exchange ideas, collaborate, and influence the direction of knowledge. Measuring this web of informal relationships is an empirical challenge. In this talk, I will discuss research in which we approximate these ties through the analysis of the ‘thank you’ notes appended to journal articles. We analyze scholars’ embeddedness in this informal structure of collaboration and reveal that (1) informal ties create a larger and denser network of support than co-authorship ties; (2) disconnection from informal networks is associated with lower productivity and impact; and (3) informal ties are a more relevant predictor of publication success than formal collaborations (i.e., co-authorship), even after matching for gender, seniority, methodological orientation, geographical location, and institutional prestige. Using coarsened exact matching and random forest regressions, we demonstrate that informal support structures are significantly associated with citation impact, creating gaps in who benefits from these connections.

**Please join us for this talk of the spring semester 2026!**

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