GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Submitted by Catherine G Quinn on July 6, 2016 - 9:55am

Our PhD program has long been an essential part of the Department of Political Science’s mission. The department’s graduate students do tremendous work as teaching assistants and instructors in undergraduate courses, receiving recognition in senior exit surveys and high scores on student course evaluations. Many of our former graduate students have now established themselves as leading scholars in political science while teaching at other top universities in the United States and abroad. Our department has recently compiled one of the best job placement records in the US. In just the past three years, our PhD students have landed tenure track positions at Cornell, Vanderbilt, University of Arizona, University of Minnesota, Rutgers, University of Delaware, McGill, Ohio University, Georgia State, Western Washington, and Portland State.

Graduate students learn to conduct original academic research on politics, policy, and governance. The program features strong training with cutting edge research tools, including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Students are also now developing innovations in big data approaches and using novel tools for visual presentation of quantitative findings.

This year’s winners of our annual research grant awards provide a window into the breadth and quality of research conducted by graduate students. These awards are provided through several endowment funds built with generous donations from alumni and other friends of the department.

The Camden Hall Graduate Research Grant was awarded to Andreu Casas Salleras and Nora Webb Williams for a collaborative project exploring online images and social movement participation. Casas Salleras and Williams are testing whether ‘online image-sharing’ increases the likelihood of social movement growth and success. The grant also provided undergraduates with important research experience. The students hired on the project coded and labeled images shared on Twitter during the 2015 Black Lives Matter protests.

Elizabeth Chrun won the Ione E. Curtis Graduate Research Grant to fund research exploring how democratic countries have responded to the threat of political corruption. Chrun’s dissertation covers a wide variety of anti-corruption agencies and explores the conditions that explain the success and failure of anti-corruption efforts. The grant will support field research in Quebec, Canada.

This year’s David J. Olson Graduate Research Grant winners are Erin Adam and David Lopez. The Olson Grant supports research on regional and local governments and research related to work or labor politics. Erin Adam’s interdisciplinary project explores how grassroots political organizations form and maintain political alliances. Using in-depth interviews and a series of participant observations, Adam explains how the need to maintain alliances changed the agendas of immigrant rights and LGBTQ groups in Washington State and Arizona. The grant will fund Erin’s travel for field research and the costs of transcribing interviews. David Lopez’s research looks in cross-national perspective at the political effects of social welfare policies. He will use the Olson Grant for research related on education. Lopez analyzes how political fights over education reform lead to changes in authority over compulsory schooling, and considers how such institutional changes influence broader political and policy developments. The Olson grant will support fieldwork in Chile. David will interview key actors across the educational spectrum, including teachers’ unions, state education bureaucrats, and political elites at the national and local level.

The Peter May Graduate Research Grant goes to Crystal Pryor for dissertation research on the bureaucratic,
technological, and psychological sources of strategic trade controls. Pryor seeks to explain how states control the export of sensitive military technologies. Trade controls are essential for preventing the spread of WMDs and for destabilizing accumulations of military technologies. However, coordinating such controls across countries is very challenging. The Peter May Grant will allow Pryor to develop new data from trade databases with Census Bureau information.

The research that these grants fund often helps the students to secure additional outside funding or otherwise advance their careers. For example, Erin Adam has recently been awarded a prestigious dissertation fellowship from the American Association of University Women. David Lopez's has been awarded a dissertation research grant from the National Science Foundation. Finally, Crystal Pryor has won a yearlong post-doctoral fellowship from US-Japan program at the Weatherhead Center at Harvard University.

Our graduate program's strong track record of success has allowed us to continue to attract top students who make outstanding contributions as teachers in our undergraduate program, conduct ground-breaking research on important topics, and go on to thriving careers as prominent political scientists at other universities. However, the program also faces considerable challenges with funding. Students have been impacted by the rising cost of living in Seattle and by budget cuts that affect our teaching programs. The department research grants, funded through endowments supported by gifts from alumni, faculty, and friends, are essential for maintaining the success of both our graduate and undergraduate programs.

People Involved:  David Lopez  Erin Adam  Nora Williams  Elizabeth Chrun
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