

Levitt Summer Research Fellows 2016-19

2016

Kateri Boucher '17 with Associate Professor of Philosophy Katheryn Doran: “More than Agriculture: An Exploration of Urban Farms as Sites of Holistic Community Development” [Learn more](#)

Anna Do '18 with Director of Counseling David Walden, PhD: “Stories of Survivors: Exploring the Lives of Sex Trafficking Victims in Central New York” [Learn more](#)

Linh Do '18 with Leonard C. Ferguson Professor of Economics Erol Balkan: “Vietnam’s Economy in Transition” [Learn more](#)

Gabriela Foster '18 with Professor of Government Peter Cannavò: “Perceptions of Place: Understanding the Higgins Lake Water Level Debate” [Learn more](#)

Katherine Glusac '17 with John Stewart Kennedy Chair of Philosophy Professor Marianne Janack: “Intentional Communities: Sustainable Practices Countering Individualistic Mainstream Society” [Learn more](#)

Paul Green '17 with Professor of Biology Herman Lehman: “The Economics of Oral Health in Appalachia”

The guiding question for Paul Green’s research project was “[could] improved oral health infrastructure and programs serve as a point of intervention to stimulate local economies in Appalachia?” In trying to answer this question, he developed a cross-sectional study of economic metrics and oral health data to model how these factors influence each other. This research provided him with the opportunity to explore how “gritty and dirty” collecting and analyzing real-world data is, compared to the tidy data sets presented in the classroom. Green wrote a program to compile and analyze patient data, then proceeded to an extensive literature review to prepare him for his paper. This research project allowed him to explore his interest in public health and explore a persistent socio-economic issue.

Alexandru Hirsu '17 with Henry Platt Bristol Professor of International Relations Alan Cafruny: “The Time Romania’s Corruption Started Fading: An Analysis of the Post-2010 Fight Against Corruption” [Learn more](#)

Abigail Leitschuh '17 and Associate Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures Zhuoyi Wang: “How have Disparate Political and Economic Systems Within the U.S. and China Come to Produce Similarly Unequal Education Systems?” [Learn more](#)

Irina Rojas '18 and Assistant Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies Cara Jones: “Reproductive Health Experiences Among High-Risk Women from a Disabilities Discourse” [Learn more](#)

Margaret Smith '17 and General Director of the Adirondack Program Janelle Schwartz, PhD: “Long Lake School and Community Garden Project”

The focus of this research project was to learn about community gardening through working to expand the Long Lake Grows Community Garden. To help foster a common space for the area, she helped with improvements from excavating new garden beds to installing a water hydrant to help irrigate the garden, while planning for the project’s future with community members and local educators. Her summer at Long Lake concluded with a community meeting to discuss the garden’s future development. The experience led her to think critically about the ethics of consumption and humans’ relationship with the natural world. Smith continues to work with community gardens, serving as a board member for the North Country Grown Cooperative.

Case Tatro '18 and Associate Professor of Economics Emily Conover: “The Impact of a College’s Board of Trustees on Student and Faculty Diversity” [Learn more](#)

2017

Emily Alexander '19 with Professor of Government Peter Cannavò: “Value of Sustainable Practices on Public Health in Utica” [Learn more](#)

Mackenzie Bettman-Adcock '18 with Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature Nhora Serrano: “From Dictatorship to Democracy: The Female Experience in Buenos Aires”

This research project focused on Argentine women's rights movements in Buenos Aires, where Mackenzie Bettman-Adcock attended events sponsored by women's rights organizations and conducted interviews with women at the events. This resulted in the transcription and translation of 18 women's stories and experiences, which became the basis for her research paper analyzing these diverse perspectives on the women's movement in Buenos Aires.

Sabrina Boutselis '19 with Lecturer in Sociology Meredith Madden, PhD and Professor of Women's and Gender Studies Vivyan Adair: "Narrowing the Literacy Gap: Examining Difference in Early Childhood Education" [Learn more](#)

Kaygon Finakin '19 with Associate Professor of Africana Studies Nigel Westmaas: "The role of International Institutions in the continued oppression, exploitation and underdevelopment of various Caribbean Countries" [Learn more](#)

Sabrina Gattine '18 and Amelia Mitchell '18 with Associate Professor of German and Russian Languages and Literatures Emeritus Frank Sciacca and Assistant Professor of Government Heather Sullivan: "Child Malnutrition and Response in Argentina" Sabrina Gattine and Amelia Mitchell spent their summer volunteering at various organizations working to combat childhood malnutrition in Argentina. They discovered that most of these organizations are linked to Cooperadora para el Nutrición Infantil (CONIN) and owe much of their methodology to CONIN's founder Dr. Abel Albino and adapt these methods to the challenges presented by their location. While researching these efforts to address child malnutrition, Mitchell analyzed how these organizations engage families and the local community, confirming her hypothesis that community participation is extremely valuable to fight this persistent problem. Gattine investigated the challenges presented by urban and rural environments, considering how linguistic diversity, as well as differences in climate and geography, influence how NGOs and government programs function in various communities.

Jane Haffer '19 with Assistant Professor of Anthropology Julie Starr: "Branding and Person-Making in Business School" Spending her summer at the Owen School of Business Management's Summer Business Institute at Vanderbilt University, a program for liberal arts undergraduates who cannot major in business-related fields, Jane Haffer scrutinized how the business school teaches and facilitates how students "brand" themselves. Looking into this "person-making"

process, Haffer highlighted the interplay between two seemingly contradictory requirements: being original and creative, but also malleable and conforming. Furthermore, she investigated how the concept of “self” is understood and deployed as a resource and how experts in the field—as well as her own peers—(re)produce and confirm notions and practices of person-making.

Bridget Lavin '18 with Assistant Professor of Theatre Jeanne Willcoxon: “Speaking Out: How Documentary Theatre Provides a Voice to Sexual Assault Survivors” [Learn more](#)

Elizabeth O’Keefe '20 with Associate Professor of Government Gbemende Johnson: “The Role of Identity Politics of the Latin American Community in the 2016 Election”

This research project aimed to understand why the Republican Party retained the same share of the Latin American vote between 2012 and 2016, using both a case study in presidential election campaigns from 2000-2016 and a quantitative analysis of American National Election Studies (ANES) public opinion survey data. O’Keefe used these studies to investigate the importance of campaign strategy, party entrenchment, and post-Great Recession socioeconomic status in the 2016 voting choices of Latino voters. She concluded that increased party entrenchment, combined with a lack of advertising targeting Latin American voters, hindered the Clinton campaign’s ability to grow the existing Democratic Latino voter base.

Kyung Noh '18 with Edgar B. Graves Professor of History Kevin Grant: “Analyzing the Effects of Western Human Rights Standards on South Korean Culture and Politics” [Learn more](#)

Sophia Rachad '18 with Leonard C. Ferguson Professor of Economics Erol Balkan: “Public Health & Development: Serving the Underserved: A Case Study of Morocco” Inspired by her interest in pursuing medicine in her home country of Morocco and realizing she knew much more about the American healthcare system than the Moroccan system, she applied for funding to pursue hands-on research in Casablanca at the Hôpital Mohamed Bouafi. While there, she observed the maternity ward, Intensive Care Unit, and surgical procedures. Ultimately, she combined her knowledge of economic structures in comparable systems with her first-hand observations of the Moroccan healthcare system to develop policies and guidelines to help reform and improve its ability to serve the Moroccan people.

Erich Wohl '18 with Assistant Professor of Sociology Jaime Kucinkas: “Analyzing African American Achievement in Fortune 500 Companies” [Learn more](#)

2018

Jesse Bennett '19 with Professor of Economics Julio Videras: “Analyzing the effects of policy on residential photovoltaic capacity in California” [Learn more](#)

Estella Brenneman '20 with Assistant Professor of Religious Studies Seth Schermerhorn: “The Millennial Pilgrim: The Influence of Technology and Questions of Authenticity and Spirituality on the Camino” [Learn more](#)

Ally D’Antonio '20 with Assistant Professor of Classics Jesse Weiner: “Hyper-Emotion as Disability: Researching Disabilities in the Classical World”

Noting from her studies that “disability” is defined as something that keeps an individual from conforming to preponderant cultural values, Ally D’Antonio asked herself, “what would be considered a disability under Greco-Roman cultural mores?” To answer this question, she studied Greco-Roman values and cases where individuals are portrayed as incapable of actively participating in society and concluded that in addition to what we consider disabilities (such as PTSD or limited mobility), Greco-Roman cultural norms included a non-systematized category of “hyper-emotional” disability. She drew on—among others—Plato, Hippocrates, Virgil, Homer, and Lucretius to illustrate how hyper-emotion was conceptualized and how it prevented individuals and characters from participating in their expected societal role of civic service and responsibility.

Samantha Fogel '19 with John Stewart Kennedy Chair of Philosophy Professor Marianne Janack: “An Evaluation of the Impacts of Evaluations”

While comparing the traditional American grading system to the alternative narrative evaluation system (like those practiced at Reed and Hampshire Colleges), the benefits of the alternative system became very apparent to Samantha Fogel. The traditional system rewards students for simply completing a task (and can create an atmosphere of over-competition) and discourage them from taking pleasure in learning for its own sake. However, this dilemma reverses when narrative grading systems are used: the anxiety of receiving bad marks and incentives to perform the minimum amount of effort to pass are eliminated, while creativity and curiosity are

promoted in students. She also investigated the bias against narrative evaluations in certain fields and provided ways to help employers and admissions offices interpret and understand non-traditional transcripts.

Eva Lynch-Comer '19 with Professor of Women's and Gender Studies Vivyan Adair: "A Survivor's Healing Journey: From Surviving to Thriving"

Drawing on a diverse array of literary sources (from memoirs, poetry, and novels to a self-help book), Eva-Lynch Comer's summer research project sought to understand the struggles faced by survivors of sexual assault and the healing strategies they use to come to terms with their trauma. The nonlinear and repetitive nature of healing from trauma, combined with painful engagement with traumatic memories, grief and anger, and flashbacks can be discouraging to a survivor going through the process alone. However, sharing and hearing stories can help survivors feel less isolated in their often painful and sometimes frustratingly "labyrinthine" journeys of healing and help them recover.

Bennet Morrison '20 with Professor of Africana Studies Heather Merrill: "Knowledge Sharing with the Maliseet of New Brunswick"

Bennet Morrison returned home to Canada to explore the educational system of the Neqotkuk First Nations in New Brunswick. Keeping in mind the historical use of education as a tool for oppressing indigenous peoples, he maintained a critical perspective and primarily relied on the individual experience of people within the Neqotkuk nation to inform his research, while also reviewing literature concerned with the ethics of research in indigenous communities, indigenous pedagogy and epistemology, and the history of federal education policies. Ultimately, Morrison found that the system developed by the Maliseet (in which the Maliseet language and traditions are incorporated into curricula and tribal elders are supported in teaching roles) shows us a promising way forward for correcting the historical erasure of indigenous knowledge and practices through the education system.

Claire Nicholson '20 with Assistant Professor of Government Erica De Bruin: "Land Hunger: Environmental Migration and Conflict in Bangladesh"

This research project explored environmental security, or how environmental factors (like scarcity, stress and degradation) can contribute to or cause conflict and precariousness for humans, through migrations of human populations in Bangladesh. Claire Nicholson focused on two case studies from the 1970s and 90s. The first case study considered the environmentally-motivated and government-

sponsored migration of ethnic, linguistic, and religious majority populations to displace the indigenous minority living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. These policies led to deforestation, displacement of local tribes, and huge demographic shifts; these effects led to resistance by indigenous militias, armed conflict, and thousands of deaths in battles and massacres. The second case study, on economically-motivated migration from rural to urban areas, brought up other issues: while no armed conflict broke out, rapid population growth in cities like Dhaka overwhelmed public services, making them less accessible to the urban poor. Lack of economic opportunities has also led many poor migrants to turn to criminal activity to support themselves. This research illustrates the complex challenges presented by environmental migration, issues that will be ever more pressing as climate change makes environmental disasters more common.

Sandra Saldana '19 with Lecturer in Psychology David Walden, PhD: “The Role of Social Support in Mental Health in Favelas”

This research project examined how social factors influence mental health in Brazilian favelas. During a preliminary literature review, Sandra Saldana found that feelings of empowerment, connections with friends and family, positive identifications, and hope and a feeling that there is meaning in life are all crucial for recovering from severe mental illness. Rampant poverty, crime, and violence in Brazil contribute to the high rates of depression and anxiety among its poorest citizens and prevents NGOs and government organizations from providing adequate physical and psychosocial support. To understand the lived experience of people living and working in São Paulo’s favelas, Saldana conducted semi-structured interviews with mental health professionals, residents, and volunteers and uncovered two main factors to consider when addressing widespread public health crises: how poverty disrupts families and how these effects (including cycles of criminality and violence) have an impact on mental health outcomes, and how poverty and mental health are dealt with by the community at large. Disruptions in family life lead to problems in the community, which in turn leads to more disruption in families, creating a sense of hopelessness that is a primary contributor to mental health problems. This research shows that the mental health crisis in Brazil’s favelas will require community-building interventions beyond addressing the mental health issues of individuals.

Aoife Thomas '20 with Lecturer in Sociology Meredith Madden, PhD: “The Teaching of American Indian History and Culture in Central New York Elementary and Middle Schools” [Learn more](#)

Andrew Wei '20 with Henry Platt Bristol Chair of Public Policy and Professor of Economics Ann Owen: “Inequality and Bias in the Demand for News” [Learn more](#)

2019

Alex Cook '20 with Bates and Benjamin Professor of Classical and Religious Studies Heidi Ravven: “Combating Deception in Genocide” [Learn more](#)

David Gagnidze '20 with Lecturer in Religious Studies Meredith Moss, PhD: “An Ethnography of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)” [Learn more](#)

Joel Harper '21 with Assistant Professor of Government Alexsia Chan: “Orewellian or Ordinary?: Situating India’s UID and China’s SCS within Global Neoliberal Trends through Comparative Analysis” [Learn more](#)

Richard (Gus) Huiskamp '21 with Lecturer in Government Joel Winkelman, PhD: “Populism in the Behaviorist Imagination: V.O. Key Jr. on Ins, Outs, and the Electorate”

For his summer research project, Gus Huiskamp applied the theories of behaviorist political scientist V.O. Key Jr. to the populist Louisiana politician Huey Long, in part to shed light on modern populist movements and reactions to them. Long’s rise to power and the reaction against it can be analyzed through Key’s conception of “Ins” and “Outs:” Long represented the interests of Northern Louisiana’s poor and marginalized Black and Catholic constituencies (the “Outs”) by promoting education and infrastructure investments. The “Ins,” rich white landowners and capitalists, responded to this erosion of their power by accusing Long of corruption, “crudeness,” and “procedural aberrations” directly and through local newspapers. Key viewed Long’s populist organizing as a disruptive force to what he viewed as the ideal system, where two clearly delineated parties vie for power by appealing to voters’ rational interests and use established processes to put their agenda into practice. Long’s “procedural aberrations,” circumventing the political establishment, benefited his supporters but eroded long-entrenched political norms. Key’s focus on this erosion of norms (which were established to

keep his constituents from benefiting from or participating in the state government) mirrors anxieties about populism today: fears of extremist politics are subsumed by a non-ideological fear of populist movements threatening democratic institutions and the current political order.

Tessa Lavan '20 with Associate Professor of Religious Studies Quincy Newell: “Exploring Caregiving on Pilgrimage: The Intersection of Gender, Healing, and Religion at Sacred Sites in Lourdes, France” [Learn more](#)

Jerry Tang '21 with Professor of Economics Erol Balkan: “A Tale of Two Cities: Urban Transformation and Social Change in Shanghai”

Zeyan (Jerry) Tang spent his summer exploring and documenting the living conditions of people living in urban Shanghai in color photographs of their living spaces from shanty-towns to high-end skyscrapers, capturing the current moment in the city’s evolution. The rapid urbanization of Shanghai has led to gentrification, unequal educational opportunities, pollution, and traffic congestion. Combining his photographs with the city’s history of urban development and demographic data, as well as what he learned visiting eight other Chinese cities, Tang hopes to document global urbanization in developing countries and the socio-economic issues rapid urbanization raises in his ongoing research. For Tang, whose family moved to Shanghai when he was four years old, this project is of special personal significance for showing how his adopted home city has changed before and during his lifetime.

Connor Thomson '20 with Professor of Sociology Steve Ellingson: “An Analysis of Urban Development, Urban Poverty, and Economic Development in Utica, New York”

This research project investigated both the history of urban renewal and current development projects in Utica, NY. Despite decades of population loss, industrial capital flight, arson, and widespread poverty, Utica has endured partly thanks to the city government’s adaptive urban renewal strategies. Today, the city government is partnering with companies and firms to implement large-scale development projects like the Marcy Nanocenter and Downtown Hospital, which hope to attract highly-skilled professionals to revitalize the heart of the city, while economic development agencies supplement these projects by providing resources to small businesses and local entrepreneurs. Though prioritizing this type of investment will ultimately help the city’s redevelopment, these projects are failing to assist the city’s most impoverished residents. Developers tend to funnel most of their county, state, and

federal funding into developing the city's urban core, while economic development agencies struggle with reaching out and making funding available to low-income neighborhoods. All in all, Utica's urban renewal efforts have had some positive effects, but these benefits are not equitably distributed among the city's residents.