

Levitt Summer Research Groups 2016-19

2016

James Bryan Case Tatro '16, Emma Raynor '18, and Hunter Sobczak '17, led by Professor of Government Sharon Rivera: “Explaining the Sources of Foreign Borrowing by Russian Elites” [Learn more](#)

Victoria Bullivant '18, Rachel Dawson '19, and Reed Johnson '18, led by Professor of Anthropology Chaise LaDousa: “Refugee Engagements with Institutional Structures”

This part of an interdisciplinary exploration of the refugee community in Utica consisted of an ethnographic and community-integrated study at the Midtown Utica Community Center. While they tutored and played with local children and teens at the MUCC, the group observed and documented their reports of adjusting to life in Utica. To understand the MUCC better, the group volunteered for 25 hours a week, writing grants, doing yard work, painting signs, organizing and leading trips, and helping to lead high schoolers in a month-long summer program. They ended their time at the MUCC with a better appreciation for how the “non-essential” services and community space the center provides help young refugees adjust to life in a new country and integrate into the community.

Erica Chen '19, Audrey Nadler '18, and Sofia Rachad '18, led by Leonard C. Ferguson Professor of Economics Erol Balkan: “Refugee Engagements with Institutional Structures” [Learn more](#)

Alexander Hollister '17, Hersheena Rajaram '19, and Patrick McConnell '19, led by Professor of Economics Paul Hagstrom: “Refugee Engagements with Institutional Structures” [Learn more](#)

Andre Burnham '18 and Fiona McLaughlin '19: “Honeybee Fitness: Local Bees vs. Bees Imported from the South” [Learn more](#)

Ryan Franquiz '18, Sebastian Lissarrague '18, and Nicolas Yardas '18, led by Henry Platt Bristol Professor of International Relations Alan Cafruny: “The Ebbing of the Pink Tide” [Learn more](#)

2017

Professor of Economics Paul Hagstrom, Professor of Anthropology Chaise LaDousa, and Assistant Professor of Economics Javier Pereira: “Refugee Connections to Utica and US Financial Institutions”

Student researchers:

Megan Bates '18, Micaela Caterisano '19, Mariani German '19, Almahdi Mahil '20, Ben Morgan '19, Thomas Morris '18, Herseena Rajaram '19, and Morgan Walsh '18

Building on Prof. Hagstrom’s decades-long research into Utica’s refugee community, this research group conducted a large-scale survey—ultimately reaching more than 400 people—exploring refugee’s ability to access financial institutions. They found that a refugee household typically needs some financial assistance (through resettlement programs, public education, welfare, or Medicaid) during their first years in Utica, but ends up being a net boon to the local economy through refugee families’ participation in the local labor and real estate markets. Additionally, this group of professors have focused their summer research on explaining why refugees stay in Utica for the long run: this includes conducting anthropological studies into cultural factors and looking at how institutions in Utica directly and indirectly support refugee families. In this case, they found that the ready access refugees in Utica have to financial institutions upon arrival and throughout their time in the city is a major positive factor as they integrate into the local community and contribute to Utica’s economy.

Assistant Professor of Government Heather Sullivan and Visiting Professor of Government Joel Winkelman: “Legitimacy and Social Media: Trump’s Retweets”

Student researchers:

Allyson D’Antonio '20, Alexandra Gale '19, Caroline Moore '19, and Micaela Rostov '19

This research group analyzed Donald Trump’s retweets between the announcement of his candidacy and the first three months following his inauguration to discern any changes in the patterns of his retweets and apply theories of legitimacy presented in political science scholarship. Each student selected specific facets of this retweet behavior, and their preliminary findings suggested that Trump followed some predictable patterns but not others. One student compared his behavior to Marco Rubio’s, whose more professionalized campaign mostly advertised media appearances and endorsements, whereas Trump almost exclusively retweeted

random citizens. Another team of two students found that Trump's retweet behavior became more conventional over time, conforming more to a strategy like the Rubio team's. A fourth student focused on Trump's interactions with the media through retweets, finding that most of the retweet behavior feature a small subset of conservative news outlets, an aberration from the general trend of increased professionalization, which would favor engagement with more varied news sources to increase his social media presence.

2018

Sophia Coren '21, Lana Dorr '21, and Jada Langston '20, led by Assistant Professor of Archaeology Colin Quinn: "Archaeology as Advocacy: Celebrating Cultural Heritage and Promoting Sustainability in Transylvanian Mining Communities" [Learn more](#)

Andrew Vorrath '20 and Choiwing Yeung '19, led by Assistant Professor of Biology Cynthia Downs: "Hidden Resources: Zoos and Comparative Approaches to Immunology"

This research group worked on a project with two focuses: evaluating local zoos as sites for studying immunology and disease among the animals and organizing lessons for Utica-area schoolchildren aimed at helping them understand their connection to the environment. The overall theme of the lessons emphasized how conserving of ecosystems can prevent the spread of disease both among animals and from animals to humans. As humans encroach upon habitats, animals in those environments tend to be forced together and native predators eradicated, making disease transfer more likely; the introduction of new species can also lead to disease transmission from reservoir species to humans, as happened with the Hendra virus in Australia, which spread from bats to horses and finally to humans. The Downs groups also made a great deal of progress in assessing the feasibility of using the Utica Zoo as a site for immunological research, gathering samples and contributing to a database for a nation-wide research project studying how immunological defenses scale in mammals.

Nora McEntee '19, Julia McGuire '20, Amarilys Milian '20, and Kaitlyn Thayer '19, led by Professor of Sociology Steve Ellingson: "From Rust Belt to Locavore Haven: How the Movement for Local Foods Took Root in Central New York" [Learn more](#)

Anne McClanahan '20, Geoffrey Ravenhall Meinke '20, Rachel Schooler '19, and Matthew Zeitler '20, led by Assistant Professor of Sociology Jaime Kucinkas: “The Situated Nature of Contemplative Places”

This group explored multiple facets of meditative and yogic practices by conducting interviews with practitioners on- and off-campus. 38 interviewees in total were found between researchers working in the Utica/Syracuse area, Chicago, Santa Barbara, and New York City. Anne McClanahan focused on the connection between mindfulness techniques and practitioners’ experiences with stress, confirming previous research that found mindfulness techniques help practitioners recognize and deal with rising stress levels in their daily lives, lowering their perceived stress levels over time. Matt Zeitler approached mindfulness and meditation with questions about how religiosity and theistic beliefs influence practitioners’ experiences, finding support for sociological theories highlighting the incorporation of spiritual identities into navigating daily life. Religious participants tended to bring meditation techniques into their prayers and reported an increase in their religious feeling that they credited to meditation; “spiritual, but not religious” interviewees similarly reported deepened spiritual connection and feeling; secular and atheistic participants tended to couch their experience in non-religious terms, emphasizing stress relief and health benefits. Geoffrey Ravenhall Meinke and Rachel Schooler collaborated on a paper examining the interaction between spaces, the number of people in those spaces, and practitioners’ perceptions of mindfulness and meditation. Most interviewees mentioned a feeling of “energy” or sense of communion when participating in mindfulness groups or classes. However, two groups in particular reported specific contexts that detract from their experiences. Instructors dislike practicing in their own studios because they are perceived as experts and are often interrupted by students looking for advice; some students at the College who took mindfulness classes on campus found that the social dynamics of campus life lingered in the class, distracting them with fears of judgement and/or a competitive mindset.

Public Philosophy Working Groups

Alexander Cook '20, Melissa Mouritsen '20, Nana Kwame Odamtten '20, Hillary Bisono Ortega '21, Dorothy Poucher '21, and Kayla Self '21, led by Christian A. Johnson Excellence in Teaching Professor of Philosophy Professor Todd Franklin: “Freedom of Expression at Small Liberal Arts Colleges” [Learn more](#)

Alexander Black '19, Kylie Davis '18, Kenneth Gray '20, Conor O'Shea '18, Alexander Scheuer '18, Samantha Walther '18, and Nico Yardas '18, led by Maynard-Knox Professor of Law and Government Frank Anechiarico and Judge Ralph Eannace: “The Treatment of People with Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System: The Example of Oneida County, New York” [Learn more](#)

Antton De Arbeloa '21, Maya Figiuolo '21, Savannah Kelly '21, and Diana Perez '21, led by Professor of Government Sharon Rivera: “What are ‘Human Rights’?”

This working group, assessing the possibility of establishing a Human Rights Lab at Hamilton College, spent the better part of a year investigating the concept of human rights under international law. In particular, they focused on areas where the international community could expand its application of these rights, using digital tools to investigate under-reported abuses. In their preparatory report, the group found that human trafficking and environmental damage are two areas in particular where the application of human rights legislation has been lacking: trafficked people are typically criminalized under immigration, prostitution, or vagrancy laws, thus re-victimizing them in the penal system; environmental hazards and damage are often by-products of economic development and are condoned by governments, even if they violate a group’s rights or endanger their land and water, which sparked protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Their report also examined how the spread of technology can help document human rights abuses. Information about one’s rights is readily accessible on the internet and the proliferation of portable, high-quality recording devices like digital cameras and smartphones allow oppressed and censored people to disseminate evidence of abuses if their governments refuse to acknowledge them or actively cover them up. Social media, as well as connecting protestors and dissenting voices, also provide spaces to upload this evidence and make it visible to human rights watchdog organizations. The group also considered existing human rights labs, mostly at large public universities, which contribute evidence through data or digital analysis to entities and non-profits working to prosecute human rights abuses.

2019

Thomas Anderson '20, Antton De Arbeloa '22, Elizabeth Atherton '22, Kate Biedermann '22, and Kayla Self '21, led by Assistant Professor of History Mackenzie Cooley: “New World Nature: Diversity & Loss in the Early Modern Atlantic World” [Learn more](#)

Adriana Jonas '21 and Erin Rosen '21 led by Professor of Economics Paul Hagstrom and Assistant Professor of Economics Wei Zhan: “Toward a Better Understanding of Refugees’ Preferences”

This research project uses surveys and economic coordination games to document refugees’ integration into American society and how it influences their perceptions of women in leadership roles. Refugees’ integration into a community can be measured in many ways: higher education attainment, work experience, possession of a driver’s license, and number of close friends who grew up in the US or are from one’s own cultural milieu. To prepare for the studies, Rosen and Jonas reviewed previous research on American citizens’ views on women in leadership positions, which reveals that they are generally viewed less positively and rewarded less for their work. They also examined a study on the cross-cultural integration of Mosuo (a matriarchal society in which girls take more risks) and Han (the patriarchal ethnic majority in China) schoolchildren and how their behavior toward girls assuming leadership roles changed over time, which showed that exposure to girls more inclined to risk-taking can change boys’ attitudes toward women leaders. Among the concerns the group has taken into consideration while designing the study are protecting the privacy of participants by ensuring confidentiality, making sure participants comprehend the material and are technologically literate, and eliminating variables in bias and prejudice by limiting the games to participants within one cultural group at a time. The games they developed measure levels of risk-taking and trust in participants differ when they are told that a man or woman is leading their group by advising their decisions. Looking ahead, the group is introducing pilot studies and Hamilton and Houghton Colleges, meeting with area refugee resource organizations, and broadening their scope beyond Utica to investigate whether preferences change based on where someone settles or their country of origin.

Ravena Pernanand '21, Rachel Pike '21, and Abigail Roller '21, led by Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies Aaron Strong: “New Hartford Climate Research Assessment” [Learn more](#)