

Undergraduate Research Assistantships 2020-21

Left to right, top to bottom: Sajjad, Sarah, Emily, Matthew, Johann and Hawa – the 2020-21 Undergraduate Research Assistants



How using Zoom has changed Congressional hearings on economic policy

Faculty: Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, Government

Research Assistant: Matthew Bradbury, Economics

"I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to work on this internship. This opportunity has been a highlight of my year, a year so devoid of highlights. I have benefited greatly from this scheme – both in terms of enjoyment, and character development allowing me to receive an offer from my dream job."

– Matthew

Examining the legacy of Henry Kissinger

Faculty: Roham Alvandi, International History

Research Assistant: Sajjad-Ali Mohajerani-Irvani, International History

"Thank you for the opportunity, programs like these are so valuable to students like myself who are not necessarily following traditional career paths. This research experience has been invaluable. Indeed, my time at the Centre has better prepared me for my own future projects." – Sajjad

How US state institutions seek to control socially marginalised women

Faculty: Amanda Sheely, Social Policy

Research Assistant: Sarah Ang, Social Policy

"I would like to thank Mr Guetter for his generous donation. Being a research assistant has been a highlight of my time at the LSE and I have had an immensely enriching experience working with faculty and being part of the Phelan US Centre." – Sarah

The acceleration of prison reform in the age of COVID-19

Faculty: Johann Koehler, Social Policy

Research Assistant: Hawa Patel, International History

"I want to extend my warmest thank you for allowing this program to exist. It truly changed my third-year experience." – Hawa

Charismatic infrastructure for climate change adaptation in the US

Faculty: Rebecca Elliott, Sociology

Research Assistant: Emily Douglas, Geography and Environment

"I would like to express my gratitude in supporting the program." – Emily

The disasters of the international financial system after World War I

Faculty: James Morrison, International Relations

Research Assistant: Johann Power, Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method

"I am very thankful for the opportunity as it is truly rare for undergraduates to be offered a paid research role with a member of faculty and yet such opportunities are brilliant experiences for undergraduate students." – Johann

"Undertaking this research has been a genuine highlight of my time at LSE, especially insofar as encouraging academic independence and confidence. It is no doubt that I have come out of this project feeling enriched from the experience of contributing to research and making a difference at such a fantastic institution, especially on work that is so pertinent to the current landscape in the US." – Emily

Outstanding Achievements

The achievements of the Research Assistants and their project leads within the program, across LSE and externally highlights the special character of this program. Students and Project Mentors have won awards at LSE and outside (including, ***Sarah Ang, Best Written Pitch in the LSE Student Idea Showcase, 2021***). They have also had academic papers published, written articles for student-led journals, held and presented at conferences, spoken at public lectures, and even been interviewed for academic podcasts.

"At the end of the program, I was able to present a paper to an academic conference, which would have been completely unthinkable before." – Hawa

"I wrote a reflective piece for the *Earthrise Environmental Journal*, where I looked back on what I had learnt from the project. I will also soon be undertaking a research internship. I was told that my experience with the Centre was one of the main reasons I got the position." – Emily

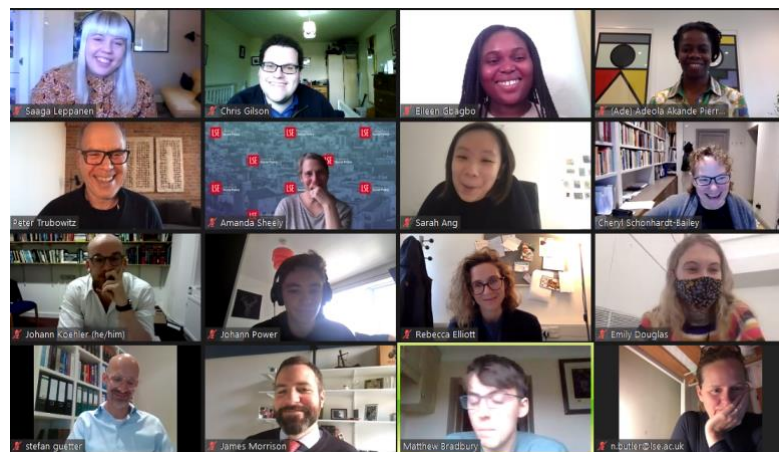
The unique opportunity for these undergraduate students to collaborate with faculty and explore academic topics in depth have allowed them to shape their future in a hugely beneficial manner. It has also enabled our faculty to take strides in their wide-impacting research projects, which would have otherwise not been possible.

"I will be working in the UK Government Economics Service. I believe that this program has been indispensable in providing me with the skills and opportunities for development which facilitated a successful application." – Matthew

"Blown away by the brilliance of my UGRA Emily. I would have made exactly zero progress on this project without her work and her work is just so, so good." – Dr Rebecca Elliott (Faculty)

The program itself has also been successful in pivoting wholly online at the start of this academic year. The Centre been able to host our check-in sessions online and keep in close contact with our UGRA and faculty through emails to provide any support possible.

145 applications received in 2020-21



UGRA Meet and Greet session, November 2020

Integrating Experience

The UGRA program continues to be an integral part of participating students' experience at LSE. This year especially, the Research Assistants have benefited from having the opportunity to work directly and build relationships with faculty, explore further resources, gain key research skills and be a part of a unique community at the Centre, during a time where much of their normal university experience was disrupted. Students also valued the present-day significance of their projects, including its relatability to their own studies, which enabled them to have greater success within their degree courses.

"Getting to know my Dr Alvandi has been invaluable. He has been a great source of advice." – Sajjad

"I could apply the knowledge I have gained to my other modules. The research skills that I have learnt have also served me well when I worked on my undergraduate dissertation." – Sarah



Left to right, top to bottom: Sarah, Emily, Matthew and Hawa at the half-way session

Q&A with LSE Phelan US Centre Research Assistants 2020-21

How do you feel you have benefited from the program?

"The most valuable part of the program was the opportunity to work closely with faculty and in doing so learn how to conceptualise and develop a research project at a higher level. The program has also offered me new opportunities to engage with research as I attended conferences and submitted a pitch for the Student Idea Showcase."

"I have been able to benefit from opportunities not otherwise offered through my program at LSE, through the responsibility to perform independent work, and as such gain skills directly relevant to the world beyond LSE. The Centre has also created a kind and supportive environment wherein I can respond to those challenges and ensure that I can use these as chances to grow."

What has been your favourite aspect/memory of the program?

"In May, Dr Koehler and I were struggling with how to frame all the data that we had been collecting for months into a comprehensible and digestible scheme for readers of the paper to follow. We spent a few mornings in his office, surrounded by Pret coffee and too many croissants, yelling names of countries at one another and running over to the whiteboard to write them down. It is an extremely fond memory I still laugh over!"

"Contributing to building a digital database of Keynes' work has been my favourite part and a nice legacy to leave behind. This database will make it much easier for researchers to work with Keynes's writings and I hope this same project is undertaken to compile and organise the writings of other famous writers."

"I enjoyed the first phone call, where the project was explained to me and I saw for the first time the boundless freedom offered to academic curiosity."

Was there enough support from the Centre and faculty as the program was moved online?

"I must extend my gratitude to the team at the Centre for always being extremely responsive and keeping us updates and informed of all the key deadlines and milestones. Dr Elliott has paralleled this in her unwavering support."

"The help from the Centre team was immeasurable, I also could not have asked for a more thoughtful and caring supervisor."

How has the program complemented your learning experience at LSE?

"Carrying out research allowed me to develop and refine my research skills in a way that was complementary to what I was doing in my degree and made me feel more confident. Having independence, yet also guidance, helped me to familiarise it."

"The programme has certainly enriched my learning experience – I have had the opportunity to explore an area of policy that I was interested in, and I could apply the knowledge to my other modules. It has also challenged me to go beyond the classroom in my learning."

"The program has perfectly complemented my learning experience by allowing me to develop my own academic pathways, through gaining an understanding of how research, and indeed the real world more generally works, through the setting of deadlines and independent study."

What does the future hold for you, and do you feel the program helped to shape that?

"I am going to start graduate studies. The program certainly helped me to figure out what my interests were and gave me exposure to quantitative methods which I plan to explore further. Working alongside faculty has also cemented my desire to pursue a similar career."

"I would love to continue being involved with historical projects as studying and engaging with History are so essential to me. The program has allowed me to show that my relationship with History goes beyond just the classroom and that I am serious about pursuing it beyond university."

Would you encourage other undergraduate students to apply for the UGRA?

"Absolutely. I never would have fathomed even a fraction of the support I received from the program back when I applied. Working on a topic that holds interest to you whilst bonding with a faculty member who is extremely well-versed in your interest is a worthwhile endeavour, and everyone at the Phelan US Centre wants to see you succeed."

"I would firmly encourage other students to apply. This program will allow you to dive into a fascinating topic, perform fascinating work and develop essential skills."