
The Undergraduate Research Assistantship Programme

LSE Phelan United States Centre
Donor Report, 2025-26

SUMMARY 2025-26



Left to Right: Nicolas Valladolid, Ishaan Devalla, Emma Giuliana Giacchini Heijnen, Francesca de Grazia, Xin Yi Mu, Charlie Bradshaw, Blanche Boomla, Maria Huang

The Undergraduate Research Assistantship programme enjoyed another successful year in 2025-26, with nine projects completed and over 150 student applications received. The programme maintained its strong interdisciplinary focus, with applications submitted from over 19 LSE departments - a unique aspect of the Phelan US Centre's scheme.

Students had two opportunities to meet and discuss their research throughout the academic year, first at our annual meet & greet in November 2025 and next at our half-way check-in in March 2026.

Following on from the successful application to the LSE Eden Centre student-led evaluation of the impact of the programme on students' personal and academic development, the Phelan US Centre also provided additional research support via LSE Library and LSE LIFE, and produced the first handbook for the programme to more clearly outline expectations and key information for research assistants.

As in prior years, student participants have exciting plans ahead, ranging from an internship in the UN Secretary-General's office, to a law firm contract, and an MPhil at Oxford University. This is a testament to the students' own excellence and the continued impact of the programme in opening further opportunities for its participants.

The Phelan US Centre Undergraduate Research Assistantship programme, 2025-26



9 Research Assistants



155 Applications



19 LSE Departments



Title: How economic inequality-related TikTok content influences political attitudes and polarisation in the US

Faculty: Dr Melissa Sands (Department of Government)

Research Assistant: Blanche Boomla (Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science)

"I compiled a manually coded dataset... capable of automatically classifying the full dataset of approximately 62,000 TikTok videos."



Title: Incumbency and infrastructure for climate change adaptation in the coastal US

Faculty: Dr Rebecca Elliott (Department of Sociology)

Research Assistant: Maria Huang (General Course)

"My specific research contributions primarily take form in populating a census of coastal infrastructure projects of preservation-worthy spaces."



Title: Winning, losing or drawing: Legal disputes over US public lands

Faculty: Professor Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey (Department of Government)

Research Assistant: Emma Giuliana Giacchini Heijnen (Department of Government)

"Given the scale of the dataset, reading and manually coding every case was not feasible. Instead, we used Large Language Models (LLMs)... I evaluated the LLM outputs against the original Westlaw case documents. "



Research Assistant: Ishaan Devalla (Department of International History)

"My own part ranged widely, from verifying the model's output to working out why cases spiked in areas, to tracking down source material on the history of public land."

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Title: How governments build domestic coalitions for trade liberalisation

Faculty: Dr Boram Lee (Department of International Relations)

Research Assistant: Nicolas Valladolid (Department of International Relations)

"I tracked these unions' response to various developments in the negotiation process, determining whether, how, and why their positions towards each deal changed."



Title: Anglo-American financial cooperation and the "passing of the torch" from the UK to the US

Faculty: Dr James Morrison (Department of International History)

Research Assistant: Xin Yi Mu (Department of Economic History)

"Building on years of work by Dr Morrison..., my role was to read, organise, and process a portion of this material, contributing to a growing digitised database of these trans-Atlantic exchanges."



Title: Night work and the politics of freedom

Faculty: Professor Paul Apostolidis (Department of Government)

Research Assistant: Francesca de Grazia (Department of Government)

"I was tasked with conducting primary and secondary research in the childcare sector in the U.S., from interviews with childcare centres to summaries of research papers and policy initiatives."



Title: Developmental challenges in US territories and freely associated states

Faculty: Dr Ryan Centner (Department of Geography and Environment)

Research Assistant: Iyla Joy Ceelen Davis (General Course)

"I examined six core dimensions: the status of US citizenship, sovereignty, governing documents, US defence and security, the application of US federal law, and political representation."



Title: The state of the states

Faculty: Professor Peter Trubowitz and Chris Gilson (Phelan United States Centre)

Research Assistant: Charlie Bradshaw (Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method)

"I have honed my policy analysis, research, and writing skills, and have gained experience engaging with real-world stakeholders on subjects that truly matter to them."

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Is there anything you would like to say to the donor who made the programme possible?

"This opportunity allowed me to engage with research that genuinely matters, work that gives a voice to people whose labour is often overlooked. It has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my time at LSE, and I hope the programme continues to offer future students the same."

"I am going on to my dream masters at the University of Oxford, and I sincerely believe my participation in the programme played a large part in my acceptance to this masters. I hope your continued support for the programme will help many more LSE students to achieve their full potential and make a real impact on the world."

What are your plans for the future?

"I am going on to read the MPhil in Economics at the University of Oxford, where I intend to focus on public economics and economic policy."

"I plan to pursue a MPhil in International Relations at Oxford."

"I am starting a masters in Global Public Policy. This is an EU Commission, Erasmus Mundus program. The first year takes place in Vienna at CEU, and the second in Barcelona at IBEI."

"I'm planning to pursue graduate roles in finance or economics."

How has the programme contributed to your goals?

"It sharpened both my primary and secondary research skills and gave me something concrete and substantive to reflect on and draw from going forward."

"It amplified my interest in inequality and environment; I now have a specific set of theoretical tools, a research focus I care about, and evidence I can sustain a substantial independent project."

"I sincerely believe my participation in the programme played a large part in my acceptance to my masters."

"Beyond the technical skills, it gave me a much clearer picture of how historical scholarship is produced, which has shaped how I approach my own studies."

What was the stand-out aspect of the programme?

"[A research participant] told me how important it is for providers like her to have their voices recognised, and asked if I could send her the final project once completed. It gave me a sense of purpose and urgency I had never felt before."

"Watching someone engage so deeply with their work gave me a real window into what academia looks like from the inside."

"The programme made me feel particularly valued and gave me a sense of responsibility and ownership of the project."

"My favourite aspect of the program was the research itself."