

## Undergraduate Research Assistantship Programme, 2025-26

<b>Project Title:</b>	How prisoners of war (POWs) shape war termination processes and domestic interpretations of conflict
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Jonny Hall
<b>Department:</b>	International Relations
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>This project investigates how prisoners of war (POWs) shape war termination processes – how wars end - and domestic interpretations of conflict. Despite POWs’ significant impact on peace negotiations and public opinion on conflict, International Relations scholarship has primarily focused on the role of POWs in international law, leaving a gap in our understanding of their strategic and political dimensions. As such, this project aims to improve our understanding of when and why POWs assume significant importance in both the diplomatic and domestic arena. The research will attempt to identify key factors and mechanisms through process tracing across cases covering variation in power asymmetries, length of conflict (and repatriation processes), and regime type. The research assistant will help with the foundational stages of this research project in terms of case selection and preliminary empirics for these cases.</p> <p>The research assistant (RA) will have three tasks as part of this project:</p> <p><b>1) Conduct a literature review on POWs in war termination and domestic politics</b> (approx. 30 hours)</p> <p>The research assistant (RA) will be provided with a preliminary literature review and key sources as a starting point, before conducting a more comprehensive review of the literature on the role of POWs in war termination processes. This will include engaging beyond International Relations scholarship. The final product of this task will be a document with summaries of each text and conclusions about the current state of the field, including research gaps. As such, the task will develop the RA's skills in academic database searching, source evaluation, and synthesis of complex scholarly debates.</p> <p><b>2) Identify and explore key cases for analysis</b></p> <p>Based on the initial literature review, Dr Hall will work with the RA to identify key cases for analysis through a collaborative process that begins with establishing clear selection criteria. The RA will then begin researching cases that they are particularly interested in via primary and secondary sources. For each case, the RA will provide summaries of key factual information concerning POWs, a timeline of major POW-related events, evidence regarding domestic political mobilisation concerning POW, and available source material for deeper investigation.</p> <p>As Dr Hall will be researching different cases at the same time, results can be compared and contrasted. This collaborative process will not only make the research more efficient but also provide the RA with experience of how comparative case study research unfolds.</p> <p><b>3) Provide preliminary analysis for the project</b></p> <p>Based on their initial research on different cases, the RA will provide preliminary analysis of the project, particularly in terms of <i>when and why POWs assume significant importance in the diplomatic and domestic arena</i>. This task will improve the RA's analytical skills and act as a first cut for the project that will help inform Dr Hall's analysis.</p>	

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<b>Project Title:</b>	How economic inequality-related TikTok content influences political attitudes and polarisation in the US
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Melissa Sands
<b>Department:</b>	Government
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>Political polarisation in the US, especially affective polarisation, has reached historic levels, hindering cooperation and fostering distrust and even political violence. Social media platforms amplify these divides but also offer opportunities for cross-partisan engagement. Research suggests that salient reminders of economic inequality could help bridge these divides. This study examines how TikTok content related to economic inequality influences political attitudes and polarisation in the US. It explores whether narratives about inequality can foster cross-partisan engagement by resonating with users across ideological lines. High-profile events, such as outrage over wealth disparities or elite misconduct, may temporarily override partisan divides, providing an opportunity to study the conditions that reduce polarisation. Key research questions include how TikTok users engage with inequality-related content, how engagement varies by political affiliation, and which content types—memes, testimonies, or news—are most effective in fostering unity. Given the detrimental effects of increasing political polarisation and extremely high levels of economic inequality on governance and societal cohesion, TikTok’s unique algorithm and influence among younger audiences offer fertile ground for studying political discourse.</p> <p>Central to this project is the analysis of TikTok posts and user interactions related to specific events or themes of economic inequality. Using TikTok’s official Research API, Dr Sands aims to gather publicly available data on video content, captions, and hashtags, including those focusing on events such as the Titanic submersible implosion, the assassination of the CEO of United Healthcare, and publicized corporate scandals. This will use several pieces of information on public TikTok users (aged 18 and over) to impute their likely partisanship.</p> <p>Research questions include: (1) To what extent do TikTok users engage with content related to economic inequality, and how does this engagement vary across political affiliations? (2) Can events or narratives that highlight economic inequality reduce partisan polarisation in online discourse? (3) What types of economic inequality content (e.g., memes, personal testimonies, news summaries) are most effective in fostering cross-partisan engagement?</p> <p>The research assistant’s (RA) tasks will include: (1) Conducting a scoping review of TikTok API documentation and related work to inform data collection plan; (2) Use the TikTok Research API to extract and wrangle relevant data; (3) Produce summary statistics and data visualisations that reflect collected data; (4) Other tasks as necessary, which may include conducting a literature review and/or collecting data outside of TikTok.</p> <p>Ideal candidates for this position will have experience coding in Python and querying APIs (or the willingness to learn independently), interest in social media and/or economic inequality or political polarisation in the US, and attentiveness to detail. This project will be of particular interest to students keen to explore topics including the political effects of social media, economic inequality, and political polarisation in the United States, especially those whose skillset and career ambitions intersect with data science and politics.</p>	

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<b>Project Title:</b>	Incumbency and infrastructure for climate change adaptation in the coastal US
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Rebecca Elliott
<b>Department:</b>	Sociology
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>This project will explore these efforts by American towns and cities to ‘stay put’ in the face of climate change to develop what Dr Elliott calls a sociology of <i>incumbency</i>. Incumbency captures often-implicit commitments to preserving present arrangements of people and property <i>as is</i>, and to reproducing the familiar land uses, skylines, nebulous character of a place, routines of life, and identities those arrangements generate. We will examine: how, where, and why incumbency matters; who or what stays put; what accounts for the uneven resonance of claims to incumbency or incumbent status; and how the physical and social conditions favouring incumbency are (re)produced.</p> <p>Empirically, we will focus on major climate change adaptation infrastructure projects. These projects are the material forms that both make and express incumbency’s possibility. They provide sites at which to witness attempts to stabilise present arrangements of people and property relative to changing risks. The project takes as a premise that adaptive infrastructure is never just a heap of building materials that separate people from peril. Flood walls, pumps, levees, and other defences both make and mark social power, inequality, and notions of value as they alter the landscape and, in the process, distribute benefits and burdens.</p> <p>The research assistant (RA) will build on the research done by previous UGRAs (2020/21 and 2023/24), with a focus on climate change adaptation infrastructure that is intended to protect against the effects of sea level rise and intensifying storms. Coastal US municipalities are in some ways the liveliest empirical contexts to see developments in infrastructure for climate change adaptation unfold. Floods are already the costliest natural disaster in the US and, with over \$13 trillion in property at risk in coastal areas, as well as large and dense populations, there is much at stake. It is in these cities that we find billion-dollar design competitions, engineering collaborations with water experts from around the world, and new partnerships between public agencies and private firms – all oriented towards armouring the coast.</p> <p>The RA’s goals for the year will be to a) empirically characterise the range of infrastructure projects underway, to b) support the development of the sociological dimensions of incumbency, and c) contribute to research design and early interview data collection for the next phase of the project. The RA will need the following skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Organisational skills.</i> The RA will be responsible for reading, summarising, and organising numerous and diverse textual data sources, which need to be managed in a logical file system, as well as cited appropriately.</li> <li>• <i>Critical reading skills.</i> The RA will need to assess the reliability of information found online, triangulate with multiple sources to answer questions, and make determinations of relevance.</li> <li>• <i>Written communication and presentation skills.</i> The RA will need to express themselves clearly and concisely in writing, as well as present data in easy-to-understand language and formats, including data tables.</li> </ul>	

## Undergraduate Research Assistantship Programme, 2025-26

<b>Project Title:</b>	Winning, losing or drawing: Legal disputes over US public lands
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey
<b>Department:</b>	Government
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>The recent actions of the Trump Administration to fire employees in US national parks and to potentially sell off some public lands have considerably raised the profile of conflicts over these lands. This research project will tap into this timely issue by analysing an existing database of legal cases and disputes over US public lands (e.g., wilderness areas, forests, national parks, conservation areas, grasslands, wetlands, etc). This database includes several thousands of legal cases involving public land disputes from 1960 to 2024, focusing on the Western states (including Alaska). The database includes information on the nature of the complaint, the case history, and the eventual outcome of the case, among other variables. Most, but not all, of these legal cases involve legal challenges against government agencies and departments (e.g., US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, etc) by, for instance, environmental groups, mining industries, property developers, indigenous tribal groups, and so on.</p> <p>Because this project focuses on legal cases, the ideal research assistant would have interest (and hopefully expertise) in areas of law, US environmental history, and/or public lands/wilderness areas more broadly. Tasks would entail researching and summarising US legal cases on environmental issues (including literature reviews), interpreting ambiguities and questions that may arise with the specific cases in the database, and helping to interpret trends and patterns across the 64 years of the database. More broadly, the intent of the larger project is to provide an overview of and something of a timeline for how various key historical events (notably, the Environmental Protection legislation of the 1970s) have affected the way that conflicts over public lands have arisen, been litigated in court, and ultimately have been resolved. These patterns will be analysed over time, across various jurisdictions, and with respect to different types of disputes (e.g., involving industries such as mining, forestry, agriculture, but also the rights of indigenous peoples, property owners, and even the “rights of nature”). Finally, it should be noted that there may also be an opportunity for quantitative and qualitative data analysis as part of this research assistantship.</p>	

## Undergraduate Research Assistantship Programme, 2025-26

<b>Project Title:</b>	How governments build domestic coalitions for trade liberalisation
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Boram Lee
<b>Department:</b>	International Relations
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>How do governments build domestic coalitions for trade liberalisation? The United States has used issue linkage—the practice of combining multiple issues in a single negotiation—to expand trade coalitions. Why do some issue linkages gain wide support from domestic groups, while others falter off quickly?</p> <p>This book project argues that pro-social groups’ political ties shape the viability of issue linkage. For a government to gain support for linkage of issues with high externalities, it needs to form a coalition of pro-trade groups and pro-social groups (e.g., unions, environmentalists) whose agendas are often at odds with each other. Dr Lee’s theory contends that pro-social groups’ ties to political parties mitigate their fears of enforcement failure and build a strong monitoring mechanism that can police compliance behaviour (e.g., labour), whereas pro-social groups without strong party ties tend to outsource enforcement tasks to international organisations so they can sound alarms for violations of linkages (e.g., the environment).</p> <p>The chapter on environmental issue linkage has already been completed. The research assistant (RA) will help construct a dataset on labour issue linkage. Specifically, the project tests whether labour groups tend to support trade agreements more when they have strong ties to the Democratic Party controlling for other political economy variables such as exposure to trade, organisational revenues and political ideology. For this, Dr Lee is in the process of collecting information on US labour groups’ positions on trade negotiations from 2003 to 2024.</p> <p>For the current academic year, Dr Lee is planning to collect data on US labour groups’ positions on trade agreements from 2003 to 2024. The RA is expected to investigate a list of US labour groups’ positions on ten US-related trade agreements (e.g., from CAFTA-DR to the IPEF). They will look at three sources to determine the labour groups’ positions: a) labour group websites (if any), b) public citizen online archive, and c) news articles via Factiva and LexisNexis.</p>	

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<b>Project Title:</b>	Anglo-American financial cooperation and the “passing of the torch” from the UK to the US
<b>Faculty member:</b>	James Morrison
<b>Department:</b>	International Relations
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>Following several years of work together through the US Centre, this project further extends Dr Morrison’s broader research agenda, specifically on Anglo-American financial cooperation and the “passing of the torch” from the UK to the US in the 20th Century.</p> <p>This project has two robust prongs, both rooted in the documents surrounding the political-economic collaboration between the US and the UK across the first half of the 20th Century.</p> <p>Dr Morrison has collected a large “dataset” of thousands of pages of materials from numerous archives and collections, related to Anglo-American political and economic policy in this period. The prospective research assistant will work with Dr Morrison to help organise, review, and process these documents. This will include the collections from the US (especially the US Federal Reserve) and UK collections (especially papers of Walter Runciman and the Board of Trade). The research assistant will read these documents for their content, take a first pass, and organise them according to the rubrics developed by Dr Morrison. They will enjoy getting a much richer sense of these fascinating trans-Atlantic interchanges and negotiations.</p> <p><b>Skills required</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most important: a passion for organising digitised primary documents about the global economic order in this period.</li> <li>• An eye for detail, and the ability to work in an organised, systematic fashion.</li> <li>• Ideally, the student will have some familiarity with computer science, data science, and/or library science.</li> <li>• Command line experience is also highly desirable.</li> </ul> <p>The successful student should be comfortable using either Mac or Linux operating systems.</p> <p><b>Value for the Student</b></p> <p>In the past, students have reported that they enjoyed working through these materials and getting to know the colourful historical characters. The practical skills of data management and information organisation will prove valuable to employers in the private sector and those in research-oriented pursuits.</p>	

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<b>Project Title:</b>	Night work and the politics of freedom
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Paul Apostolidis
<b>Department:</b>	Government
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>This project, which is a book-in-progress, examines the growing phenomenon of night-time labour through an analysis that combines empirical studies of night workers with close readings of texts in political theory. What structural features of contemporary capitalism can we discern when we view society through the lens of night work? How might a focus on night work reveal the gender and racial dynamics of an employment economy increasingly based on data-analytics, supply-chain logistics, and platformised care-work and other gig jobs? What possibilities for working-class organising do nocturnal time-spaces in today's world encourage? The book addresses these questions through a series of theoretical and empirical pairings that consider 'microwork' (online tasking) in connection with Karl Marx's analysis of the 'working day,' childcare work in dialogue with Marxist-feminist writers, warehouse labour (for Amazon) as an aspect of racial capitalism, night work induced by climate change, and night-time political education projects in conversation with democratic theorist Jacques Rancière.</p> <p>The research assistant (RA) is needed to conduct research on empirical issues concerning the provision of night-time paid childcare for the book chapter that deals with such work.</p> <p>The RA will be expected to produce an annotated bibliography that covers a thorough search of published academic, journalistic, and policy-report sources on the experiences of care workers who perform night-time labour, concentrating on childcare but also including sources on other kinds of care work or care work in general and with a geographical focus on the US and UK.</p> <p>In addition, the RA will be expected to conduct primary research involving online outreach to childcare providers, agencies, and platforms in a targeted US location (likely Seattle) to ascertain how available and affordable night care services are, how strong the take-up of such services is, and what if any characteristics distinguish the parents or guardians who tend to secure these services. The RA will then analyse the main themes emerging in these inquiries and produce a summary report of the findings.</p> <p>If time permits, the RA may also contribute to the information base being gathered through this project about night-time labour in agriculture and construction in the US in response to global warming and the problem of dangerously high heat during daytime hours.</p>	

## Undergraduate Research Assistantship Programme, 2025-26

<b>Project Title:</b>	Development challenges in US territories and freely associated states
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Ryan Centner
<b>Department:</b>	Geography and Environment
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>This project is about how urban planning and development occurs within the context of US territories, which are non-sovereign possessions. The project is particularly interested in the Pacific territories: Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. Dr Centner has established some of the basic regulatory frameworks within these territorial contexts that makes them different from US states (notwithstanding their own tremendous diversity across 50 states). The student will be able to choose one of the Pacific territories and pursue more in-depth fact-finding related to that case. The student will also need to contrast one territory case with another case in the Pacific that has a “Compact of Free Association” with the US: the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau. While these are technically independent countries, their status as “freely associated states” puts them in an unusual position regarding sovereignty overall and development pathways more specifically.</p> <p>The student will create a detailed comparison of development opportunities and obstacles between one US Pacific territory and one Pacific nation in “free association” with the US. It will be important to trace examples of development that have occurred during the last generation, and to consider how both geographical location and geopolitical dynamics have played a role.</p> <p>More broadly, this project aims at moving into a broader discussion about how “territorial” contexts (whether possessions of the US or other powerful countries) present particular kinds of development challenges and opportunities due to their unusual arrangements related to sovereignty and governance. Urban questions are rarely raised in these settings, and there are novel issues in planning and development that both academics and practitioners will benefit from understanding more thoroughly and critically.</p> <p>The research assistant will work to understand in detail how territorial (and quasi-territorial) status affects urban and development possibilities. Beyond the basic details that have already been assembled, they will work to understand what kinds of projects have come to fruition in recent years, and what actors or organisations have been involved in them. It will be important to understand the role of the US federal government and its agencies in these environments. This will require both extensive online reading of planning proposals and budget discussions, as well as reaching out to planners in the chosen islands to arrange interviews (to be conducted by the LSE academic lead) and maintaining correspondence with these Pacific interlocutors.</p> <p>This project will help the RA’s professional development by exposing them to the dynamics of both urban planning and geopolitics as they intersect within the Pacific context. It will be an especially good opportunity for students with a focus on the Pacific region, or on “territories” generally (whether American or not), or those keen to have a better grasp on urban/development challenges in small-island settings.</p>	



## Undergraduate Research Assistantship Programme, 2025-26

<b>Project Title:</b>	The State of the States
<b>Faculty member:</b>	Peter Trubowitz and Chris Gilson
<b>Department:</b>	Phelan United States Centre
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>In 2018 the Phelan US Centre launched The State of the States, a map-based interactive online resource bringing together US state-level information all in one place. This resource went on to win a Guardian Universities Award for Digital Innovation in April 2019. The State of the States is now being developed, with the assistance of colleagues in LSE Research and Innovation, into a new subscriber-based online platform to help those working for US state and local government to make better decisions about policy and implementation through a database with important and useful state-level facts and figures, and a repository of best practice case studies on policy implementation and effectiveness.</p> <p>The research assistant(s) will assist in the further development of The State of the States by providing support, including researching and writing state policy case studies, compiling key related data covering state elections and state government and updating the platform with this information, outsourcing organisations and individuals to contact to further validate the platform, and assisting with writing up blog articles to promote the project to external policy audiences, primarily in the US.</p> <p>This project will be co-managed by the Director of the Phelan US Centre, Professor Peter Trubowitz.</p> <p>The research assistant will have several main tasks and responsibilities in this project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To research and/or write short policy case studies to support the State of the States platform in policy areas including homelessness, unemployment, and COVID-19.</li> <li>2. To identify, via desk research, organisations and individuals and other potential stakeholders (including US state and local authorities) to contact to assist with the further validation of the project.</li> <li>3. To monitor and update data sources related to state policy and political information relevant to The State of the States platform.</li> <li>4. Assist with the writing up of blog articles to promote the platform, with an opportunity for co-authorship.</li> </ol> <p>In their work on this project, the research assistant will gain valuable experience in understanding the inner workings of US federalism, state politics and policy, organisational learning, and policy diffusion. They will also gain significant experience in finding, cleaning, and working with large datasets in the context of an important public-facing digital project. The experience gained from working on this project will be invaluable to students who wish to work on US state-level policy issues, especially in the areas of homelessness, unemployment, and COVID-19, as well as those who have an interest in public interest digital projects covering political and policy issues.</p> <p>The importance of case studies to this project will mean that the research assistant should have an interest in US public policy as well as research skills and the ability to work with both academic and non-academic sources, such as newspaper articles and US state government documents. The ability to summarise information from a diversity of sources into a coherent narrative would also be advantageous.</p>	