Sophomore Early Research Program 2016-2017
Social Science Faculty Projects

Social Sciences: Projects in Environmental Studies, Peace & Justice Studies, Psychology, Sociology, and WCW/Women's and Gender Studies

Environmental Studies

Beth DeSombre
*Interactions Between Domestic Politics and International Fisheries Negotiations*

Working on a book project on how different countries behave in international negotiations on ocean fisheries protection, particularly focusing on U.S. action in international fisheries agreements. The project involves looking at negotiating positions and fishing behavior to compare U.S. actions across different regulations with that of other countries, to determine what influences behavior and negotiating positions. Some social science (American politics, international relations, or environmental policy) or ES background helpful; work will include reading documents from fisheries conservation organizations and researching catches across fisheries.

Peace & Justice Studies

Catia C. Confortini
*Bio-Pink: Gender, Power and the Transnational Diffusion of Breast Cancer Governance in Nigeria*

This is a study of breast cancer organizations in Nigeria and their interactions with global health organizations and international breast cancer advocacy organizations. The student will work on social media analysis: a small number of Nigerian breast cancer organizations have intensive social media presence. The student will follow these organizations online, collect and analyze their data, while learning to use coding and social media analysis applications, such as NVivo or Atlas.ti. The student will also become familiar with the appropriate qualitative methodologies and the growing literature on social media analysis. I require mastery of with social media platforms, as well as enthusiasm about learning to use unknown applications software.
Psychology

Tracy Gleason
A Longitudinal Examination of Social Forms of Imagination

I am examining a much studied component of cognitive science (imagination) in a longitudinal developmental context focused on social processes (relationships). My students and I will be interviewing adolescents who had imaginary companions as children to investigate continuity in fantasy orientation over the course of development and to understand the role of imagination in human social networks. Work will include elements of psychological research from recruiting families, conducting interviews and surveys, conducting cognitive assessments, data entry, cleaning, coding and possibly analysis, to interpretation/presentation of results. Excellent social skills and attention to detail will be required; this project affords in-depth exposure to quantitative and qualitative methods in psychological research.

Sociology

Markella Rutherford
Who’s Minding the Children?

This research project investigates the contested definitions of child welfare and neglect that are at play when parents and the State disagree about what is best for children. While the state's child welfare system has long served a policing function for poor parents, with disproportionate effect on people of color, recent high-profile controversies often involve whiter, more affluent, and highly educated parents who command more media attention for their concerns. This project includes case studies of anti-vaccination activism, protests against standardized testing, and "Free Range Kids" movements. My aim is to draw these cases together for careful comparison to examine how and when clashing parental and state claims of authority over children gain traction, with particular attention to questions of how players in these different cases deal with class differences and racial inequalities.

The SERP student working on this project will learn qualitative methodologies for collecting and analyzing data. Tasks will include using online and library resources to assemble, catalog, and analyze material for content analysis: including press reports, legal cases, and social media campaigns. The student may also have the opportunity to develop interview questions and interview key informants for the case studies. Although I work from a disciplinary perspective as a sociologist, the documents under study for this project range across several topic areas including health, law, and education. The ideal student for this project will have a strong interest in the study of family and childhood, some familiarity with a sociological perspective, strong organizational abilities, and be comfortable working independently.
Wellesley Centers for Women & Women's and Gender Studies

Nancy Marshall
Early Child Care and Education: Policy and Practice

Ongoing projects include studies of the quality of early child care and education (ECE) programs in Boston and Providence, a study of parental decision-making about what ECE to use for their children, studies of child development among children in ECE programs, and reviews of ECE policies at the state and federal level. The student could be involved in these interdisciplinary projects (psychology, social policy, sociology) in several ways (to be determined based on interests and skills): (1) library and internet review of current state and federal policies; (2) literature review on parental decision-making, particularly among low-income families; (3) library and internet review of ECE policies in EU and other countries; (4) data entry of observational data of ECE programs; (5) data analyses of observational data; (6) drafting blog posts on current topics in ECE policy and practice, drawing on our research and the field. The student will develop skills in policy analysis and comparative analysis, data entry and data analysis, writing for a general audience about research and policy. Students should have some coursework in social sciences, an interest in the topic, some experience using the online library databases at Wellesley College (course-related is fine), and a desire to develop the above skills. Previous data analysis experience is a plus, but not necessary.