2013 Summer Research Program in
Social Sciences
At Wellesley College

Faculty Projects

Anthropology Department
Anastasia Karakasidou, Department of Anthropology

Mapping cancer

Although cancer has been thought of being a disease of the western world, its incidence has dramatically increased during the last few decades in the non-western world as well. This project aspires to construct maps of cancer incidence and mortality across the globe during the 20th century. All types of malignancies will be investigated in their global incidence. Emphasis will be paid to childhood leukemia/lymphoma, brain malignancies, breast cancer and pancreatic cancer. Students with good statistical skills are encouraged to apply.

Cognitive and Linguistics Sciences
Angela Carpenter, Cognitive and Linguistics Sciences

The Jamaican language, or Jamaican Creole in linguistic terms, has become familiar to many, especially those interested in reggae music and its offshoots. While there has been some analysis of the syntax and sociolinguistics of Jamaican Creole, less research has been done on the prosodic characteristics of the language, especially its rhythms. Investigations of the rhythms of a culture’s language and its music have shown that there is often a connection between the two. That is, the rhythm of a culture’s music often reflects the rhythm of its speech. Much of this research is based on the music and language of European cultures. This summer we seek to extend these findings to Jamaican Creole and reggae music. Our project will thus have two goals: an exploration of the phonetics and phonology of the rhythmic structure of Jamaican Creole and a comparison of these linguistic rhythms with the rhythms of Jamaican music.

The research involves some readings and library research, phonetic analysis using Praat, and some statistical work with Excel or SPSS. Ideally, the student will have completed LING 240 or its equivalent. To be considered, please e-mail me a brief statement of interest (300 words or less) along with an unofficial transcript.
Department of Economics

Kartini Shastry, Department of Economics

My research is in development economics, with a focus on savings, health and education. One of my research interests relates to how people make financial decisions, both in the US and in developing countries. For example, I am studying the impact of financial training workshops on the financial decisions of migrant mineworkers in South Africa and the impact of similar workshops on the financial decisions of female migrant workers in Singapore. This summer, I plan to continue analyzing the data from these two projects as well as a new dataset on financial outcomes in the US.

A second research interest relates to how people make decisions concerning their children’s health and education. In a project with Pinar Keskin, a professor in the Economics department, I study the decision to breastfeed in Bangladesh and how it responded to a national information campaign regarding arsenic contamination in the groundwater. The premise is that after learning that the water poses a health threat, women may choose to delay weaning their infants off breastmilk. This may have positive consequences for the child’s health and increase future birth spacing.

Students working with me will either assist on one of the projects described above or a similar project. Students who are familiar with Stata (taught in Economics 203), willing to learn more Stata, and have good communication skills are encouraged to apply. To be considered, please email me a brief statement of interest and qualifications (300 words max) and an unofficial transcript.

Pinar Keskin, Department of Economics

My research primarily focuses on the determinants, consequences, and economic responses to groundwater scarcity. In the last three decades, groundwater depletion has emerged as a major consequence of the ever-increasing population pressure, intensity of agricultural production and industrialization of developing countries. This summer I plan on analyzing a recently acquired dataset to investigate the impact of industrial water use directly on groundwater scarcity and indirectly on day-to-day decisions of rural farmers in India.

Developing countries, governments, and international organizations have been promoting industrialization as a necessary component of the structural change that is part of economic development. However, many scholars have concerns about the sustainability of industrialization. The economics literature has so far focused on input-output linkages and labor movements as the two primary mechanisms through which industrialization and industrial policies (such as trade policies and anti-trust law) can affect the agricultural sector. I seek to examine a natural-resource link between industry and agriculture, both theoretically and empirically. In particular, I will introduce water as an additional channel through which industrial policies affect agricultural production decisions. The premise is that industrialization may hurt agricultural productivity since farmers compete with industry for an important resource, i.e. water.
Therefore, I am willing to supervise students interested in studying the linkages between industry and agriculture. My research is entirely data-driven, and all these projects will increase students’ ability to conduct empirical work. In addition, these projects will involve the use of software such as ArcGis, Excel and Stata. Students with some familiarity with Stata (taught in Econ 203) would be a good match for these projects.

Finally, there is some potential for continuing work during the academic year depending on skills, interest, and availability. To be considered, please email me a brief statement of interest and qualifications (500 words max) and an unofficial transcript.

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**Environmental Studies Program**

**Beth DeSombre, Environmental Studies Program**

As part of a broader book project examining why good people do bad environmental things, I am working on sub-project on incentives versus norms as mechanisms for changing behavior. There are policy mechanisms that look as though they are operating using economic incentives but that almost certainly have their primary effect through the creation of, or intersection with, social norms. For example, providing a rebate for avoiding the use of a disposable bag increases the extent to which people bring reusable bags. That observation is often used as evidence of the importance of aligning incentive structures so that it is less costly to do the better environmental action. But it is unlikely that the primary effect of this action is through economic incentives; the incomes of people in most places where these policies are used are too high for such a small cost increment to make a large behavioral difference for purely market reasons. This project will look generally at the conditions under which (and for whom) economic incentives are likely to be a successful motivating factor, and do likewise for social norms, and identify case studies to use to try to tease out the relative influence of each where both are operating together. Other research for the bigger project will also happen. Students with backgrounds across the social sciences and environmental studies will be qualified to work on this project.

**Jay Turner, Environmental Studies Program**

The new Chevrolet Volt, your cell phone, and some solar and wind farms all share one thing in common: they rely on lithium-ion batteries. As environmentalists, engineers, and politicians work to promote a more sustainable future that is less carbon-intensive, many of the key technologies they tout are highly dependent on batteries. Yet little attention has been given to the environmental and social consequences of the battery industry. This summer, the focus of my research will be on the structure of the lithium-ion battery industry: how is it organized, which natural resources it draws on, how has it been affected by recent energy and economic policies (the Obama administration has made expanding production of such batteries a centerpiece of its domestic energy agenda), and the industrial ecology of batteries (from manufacture to disposal). Completing this project will involve research into the structure of the industry (using trade journals and government data), historical research on origins and implementation of relevant policies, and quantitative analysis of material flows and international trade data.
Political Science Department

Hahrie Han, Department of Political Science

Organizing for Social Change

Political organizing is an approach to social change in which people come together to acquire the power (capacity, resources) to act on their own interests. Organizing works by developing leaders, creating community around those leaders, and then drawing power from that community. As such, a critical part of organizing is learning to develop the capacity of others to act as leaders and agents of social change. Many different teachers, organizations, and organizers seek to develop leadership, create collective capacity, and make change in the world, but we do not yet have systematic ways of capturing learning from all these endeavors. This project’s purpose is to design more systematic ways for organizers to incorporate research into their work and assess the outcomes of the work they are doing. We will begin by gathering, assessing, and cataloging existing tools used to research and assess organizing.

Students working with me will gather research tools used to assess the teaching, training, and practice of organizing and develop systems for cataloging them. They will also support the development of a network of researchers interested in this work, such that we can jointly develop better ways for incorporating research into the work of organizing. Experience with surveys is a plus, as is an understanding of political organizing and an interest in using products from this project in their own research. Students must be thorough, meticulous, and attentive to deadlines. In addition, students should be able and willing to work independently.

Marion Just, Department of Political Science

I will be working on several projects this summer, any one of which would be ripe for student research collaboration. I will be continuing my research on whether or not German parties choose more attractive women for their district lists than for their party lists. I collected the data last year and they are ready for analysis. My new project concerns women candidates’ for Senate in 2012. Do women candidates make more or different use of social media than their male competitors? I am in the process of data collection for this project with collaborators at USC. We are examining Tweets, Facebook postings, Pinterest pins, and possibly other social media and or advertisements. A research assistant may be asked to conduct interviews with staff members concerning the use of social media. I am beginning a project on how people process humorous political information. This research will involve large scale experiments. I expect a research assistant to play a role in developing the experiments and the panel and identifying funding for the project. I am happy to work with an enthusiastic student at any level, who has an interest in these topics. Background in political science, psychology, and/or statistics would be a plus. Comfort with use of the computers and ability to work independently some of the time are essential skills.
Psychology Department

Angela Bahns, Department of Psychology

My lab is currently studying the social ecology of friendship. Our work is informed by social psychological theories and research in the areas of prejudice and close relationships. Research in support of the Contact Hypothesis suggests that exposure to people who are different from ourselves can be an effective strategy for reducing prejudice. And yet research on attraction demonstrates that people often prefer to form friendships with similar others. So how is the goal of fostering diverse friendship best realized? One strategy often employed by institutions and communities that profess to value diversity is to implement policies to increase the diversity of their personnel. In spite of these good intentions, however, my research reveals an ironic finding: As environments become more and more diverse, friendships become more and more homogenous. Simply bringing a diverse set of people to a common space appears to be not enough to foster diverse friendships. We are currently studying how individual-level factors such as attitudes toward diversity and community-level factors such population size and human diversity jointly affect friendship formation. We are finding that people who value diversity more are more likely to be in attitudinally diverse friendships, and particularly if they are living in an environment in which people generally place a high value on diversity. I am willing to supervise summer research projects related to attitudes toward diversity and friendship formation. Ideally, the student who works with me will be interested in conducting literature searches, reading and synthesizing the existing research related to this topic.

Nancy Genero, Department of Psychology

The "Schooling Girls and Boys Project” has implemented a series of mixed-method studies to assess the impact of single-gender instructional and classroom management practices on achievement among children in South Carolina public schools. The project is an integral part of an ongoing advanced research and service-learning seminar in the Psychology Department. From our observational work, we've learned that teachers of single-gender classrooms are hard at work trying to figure out the most effective ways to engage their students. They know that single-gender education involves becoming more aware of gender differences and preferences. However, understanding those differences and applying them in an instructional setting is easier said than done. To explore teacher perceptions of engaged learning and academic performance in single-gender classroom settings, we conducted a comprehensive on-line teacher survey last fall. All teachers listed with the South Carolina Department of Education as teaching at least one single-gender class were invited to participate in the study. The survey was designed: 1.) to evaluate single-gender teaching strategies; 2.) to assess the role of same-sex peer interactions in promoting academic gains; and 3.) to explore the effect of teacher evaluations (i.e., praise and correction) on student engagement and performance. To participate in this research project, students are required to analyze existing data using SPSS and EXCEL. Successful completion of an introductory statistics course is required. Any of the following courses in psychology--developmental, social, gender, cultural, community or educational -- or related fields would be highly desirable.
Julie Norem, Department of Psychology

Parsing Effects in Positive Psychology: When being positive helps and when it doesn’t.

Positive Psychology (PP) represents a movement, begun in its contemporary version, by Martin E. P. Seligman in 1998. It aims to encourage scientific exploration of what leads individuals and collectives to thrive. The movement also promotes interventions intended to lead to positive change and foster positive development. An explosion of new journals, conferences, courses, fellowships, and even careers (e.g., positive psychology coaching and consulting) testify to the huge interest and impact of this movement.

Massive media attention to statements from those associated with PP has lead to dissemination of over-simplified generalizations built from shaky empirical foundations. My reading of the PP research suggests that there are systematic distortions in the ways in which the evidence is interpreted: e.g., there is ample evidence that the “prescribed” interventions can successfully increase positive mood in the short term. Assertions about those interventions and performance is based on much weaker, more complicated and contentious evidence. In particular, there is very little explicitly causal evidence of those relationships.

I am working on a paper in which I review the major bodies of evidence from PP. I will test the hypothesis that the majority of PP effects research are short-term positive mood increases, while effects on objective performance and health outcomes are overwhelming correlational, relatively rare, and sufficiently difficult to replicate or generalize from that we should be skeptical about them. I am looking for a student who would update my bibliography of relevant research (using Endnote for record-keeping), read and summarize findings using the categories I just described, and talk with me about the available research and its implications. Ongoing involvement in the project is a possibility, depending on motivation, interest and performance over the summer.

Jennie Pyers, Department of Psychology

How does bilingualism shape children’s cognitive development?

The number of children in the U.S. being raised speaking two more languages is growing rapidly. This summer we will begin to ask the question of what aspects of cognitive development are shaped by early bilingualism. Specifically, we will explore whether and how bilingualism supports theory of mind development in preschoolers. Theory of mind is the ability to understand that others’ thoughts and beliefs are different from yours. We will be conducting research with bilingual children who are fluent in two spoken languages and bilingual children who are fluent in a signed and a spoken language. We will work with some children in area preschools, but we will also invite children and their families to come to campus to participate in our research project.

The summer student will be involved in developing the research study, recruiting bilingual families to participate in the study, and testing children between the ages of 3-5 years. The ideal applicant would be fluent in more than one spoken language, ideally Spanish or Mandarin, and have experience working with young children. The student will be calling and interacting with families to explain the research project and to schedule times to participate in the study, so she should exhibit a high degree of professionalism alongside a warm and friendly demeanor.
Knowledge of American Sign Language is ideal. Experience with SPSS and comfort with Apple computers is highly desirable.

Department of Sociology

Thomas Cushman, Sociology

The Meaning of Freedom and Essence in Feminist Thought: A Perspective from the Sociology of Knowledge

The history of the idea of freedom is complex. Traditionally, “negative freedom” has been the hallmark of first generation conceptions of rights that defined the classical liberal tradition. Yet negative freedom most often refers to freedom from some external constraint such as the state or the family. For the most part, feminist theories of the late 20th century adopted some idea of “liberation” as their practical ideological foundation. Implicit in this idea was freedom from the patriarchal state, familial control of the female body, and from discrimination in the economic sphere. However, one hallmark of many feminist theories, especially those influenced by post-structuralist thought, is the idea of “liberation from essence.” This study uses the sociological methods of qualitative content analysis to look at the “structure of thinking” characteristic of anti-essentialist feminist thought. It also examines recent feminist social thought that relies on the idea of “perfection of essence”, a perspective that puts it more squarely in line with the idea of positive freedom, though with a sense of freedom defined from cultural traditions of femininity.

Wellesley Centers for Women

Linda Charmaraman, Wellesley Centers for Women

Media, Identity, and Adolescent Development

I am currently working on a few research projects at different stages that focus on the role of social, televised, and technological media on adolescent identity. I hope to incorporate my intern's research interests and goals in crafting a productive summer immersion into interdisciplinary social science research from the fields of education, human development, psychology, and sociology. The range of intern responsibilities will range from analyzing open-ended survey questions to interviewing young people to writing literature reviews. I will invite the intern to become involved in one of my projects this summer, which include the following: (a) literature review of social networking use and influences on mental and physical health of vulnerable or stigmatized adolescents, (b) the sense of community or alienation derived from mass media messages, particularly in terms of racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, and gender identity, or (c) media and young peoples' civic engagement. My hope is that I can mentor someone who is interested in a future career in either research or nonprofit work pertaining to vulnerable populations (i.e. racial/ethnic minorities, LGBTQ, low income, etc.). I look forward
to providing mentorship regarding the many facets of life as a research scientist, including how to select the right graduate program according to personal interests and goals, how to navigate writing for grants/scholarships, as well as how to present project findings to academic audiences.

Wendy Wagner Robeson, Ed.D., Senior Research Scientist, Wellesley Centers for Women

Work, Families and Children

Currently several research projects are being conducted under the umbrella of Work, Families and Children at the Wellesley Centers for Women. My focus is on child development (birth to age 8) and early education and care. One project is supporting low-income pre-kindergarten children’s literacy and school readiness skills through the implementation of a literacy curriculum combined with on-going professional development for their child care teachers. Another project is focused on fathers’ increased participation in child rearing and involvement in their children’s lives. A third is assessing the quality of care found in early education and care centers and family child homes. There are other on-going projects as well. I am willing to supervise any research project a student wishes to complete involving any of the projects listed as well as on any topic in child development or early education and care. There are many data sets that can be explored and used in answering questions a student may have about all facets of child development, school readiness, quality of child care, family functioning, combining work and family and/or early education and care in general.