Diplomacy Lab Project Puts Students’ Research Efforts to the Test

The Diplomacy Lab, an initiative of the U.S. State Department, is looking to harness the intellectual power of John Jay students to conduct research into real-world foreign policy challenges.

John Jay is one of 14 universities and colleges nationwide that are participating in the Diplomacy Lab’s pilot phase during the fall 2014 semester. The College was chosen to mount three research studies, under the guidance of faculty members and conducted in the context of undergraduate and graduate courses.

“At other universities, it’s becoming increasingly common to have courses interface with government agencies. The Diplomacy Lab really suited our purposes,” said sociology Professor Rosemary Barberet, who along with political science Professor Susan Kang is overseeing one of the Diplomacy Lab projects as part of the capstone seminar in the master’s program in International Criminal Justice.

The 10 students in the seminar will investigate “Women in Criminal Justice: Measuring Outcomes” for their Diplomacy Lab project. Five teams of two students each will study reforms aimed at increasing the recruitment and retention of women as criminal justice professionals in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Costa Rica, Egypt and Lebanon — all post-conflict or post-transition countries identified by the State Department.

“We tell the students that this is essentially a short-term consultancy,” said Barberet. And, like most consultants, the students will be expected to produce a report that includes an executive summary and key policy prescriptions. Throughout the semester, students work directly with State Department officials via video- or teleconferences.

Along the way, students participating in the three Diplomacy Lab projects can expect a few challenges, beginning with the difficulty of finding usable preexisting research literature. “We had to give students a briefing on scrounging, training them to look outside the scholarly or academic literature,” Barberet noted. “Students have come to recognize the challenges of looking outside the box when it comes to research, and some of them are a bit perplexed at how little research they’re finding.”

Once students have amassed their research findings and the data from expert interviews, they are faced with a new challenge. “They are used to writing papers and policy prescriptions, but they’re a little bit daunted at how to prepare something short,” said Barberet, referring to the 15-page paper for each team and the cumulative, class-based 20-page final project report.

In addition to the capstone seminar’s examination of Women in Criminal Justice, the Diplomacy Lab at John Jay this semester also includes U.S. Foreign Policy Options to Tackle Migration in the Mediterranean Sea, an independent study for graduate and doctoral students led by Professor George Andreopoulos of the Department of Political Science and Michalis Tsiniszelis of the University of Athens; and Criminal Justice Responses to Wildlife Trafficking as a Crime, the focus of an undergraduate research-methods course led by Professor Gohar Petrossian of the Department of Criminal Justice and doctoral student Julie Viollaz.

Petrossian, whose specialty is wildlife trafficking, says she was surprised at her students’ enthusiasm for what she concedes is not a mainstream topic. “Normally, in Research Methods, students have to come up with their own topics,” she said. “I didn’t expect this level of interest.”

The State Department asked for a focus on illegal fishing as well as trafficking in four “mega-fauna” — elephants, tigers and rhinoceroses — with an emphasis on law enforcement responses at the country level, including an evaluation of effectiveness and policy recommendations. Once again, students will be expected to think outside the box for research materials.

“This is about more than just academic articles,” said Viollaz, whose dissertation will explore illegal leopard poaching. “There’s just not as much data on this topic,” she said, “so they’ll be looking at non-traditional sources, media reports, NGO reports, etc.” Yet any paucity of information seems unlikely to diminish the young researchers’ passion for the subject.

“This is a way to increase awareness,” said Adriana Alvarado, a junior. “Animals need a voice, and we can be that voice.” Monnaro Guervil, also a junior, plans to take the research one step further by studying abroad in South America during the winter session to look into human and wildlife trafficking issues.
Collaboration and Commercialization: 
I-Corps Grant Promotes Student Entrepreneurship

Professor Ping Ji of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science is the recent recipient of a unique award from the National Science Foundation, an I-Corps Team Grant, which builds on her previous research in a way that promotes potential commercialization while offering a springboard into entrepreneurship for her graduate students.

Ji, who is also Deputy Executive Officer of the Ph.D. program in Computer Science at the CUNY Graduate Center, has been developing an innovative monitoring and tracking system for locating mobile devices. The I-Corps grant is intended specifically to explore whether or not such technology can form the basis of a viable start-up business. And, although the research team is a collaborative effort among Ji, doctoral student Jie Chu and an industry mentor, it is Chu who serves as the entrepreneurial lead, responsible for laying the groundwork for a successful business.

With its emphasis on commercialization, the I-Corps grant presents new territory for Ji. “This grant entailed seven weeks of workshops,” she notes. “It’s really business training, much of which is focused on learning how to discover potential customers. Since our product is primarily applicable within law enforcement, our customer discovery involved surveying a number of people in that industry. On the whole, they thought this technology could be very useful.”

Conventional methods used to locate mobile devices depend on collaboration with the device itself and thus can be circumvented by malicious users. The technology Ji is creating makes it possible to locate mobile devices without such interaction, and can provide an obvious boon to law enforcement in tracking down devices involved in criminal activities. Ji also sees potential applications in health care, retail and network performance management systems.

I-Corps and similar grants can be a key to a healthy innovation loop connecting faculty and student researchers, the government and the economy, Ji observed. “I hope that more faculty and students will get involved in this kind of research effort,” she said. “Research should ultimately be useful; it should ‘go out of the building,’ as they say in the I-Corps workshops. This type of funding is important because it also recognizes the potential for students to be entrepreneurial and do impactful research that can be applied to improve people’s lives.”

Columnist and Author, Professor Browne-Marshall Shines a Light on Race & Law

In her most recent book, Race, Law, and American Society (Routledge, 2013), Gloria J. Browne-Marshall, an Associate Professor of Constitutional Law and former civil rights litigator, offers a sweeping survey of U.S. race law cases from 1607 to the present. The treatment of those cases serves the notion of race writ large, and underscores the significance of constitutional decisions for all Americans.

“There’s this idea that civil rights law was created just for people of color,” Browne-Marshall observed. “But when the U.S. Supreme Court rules in favor of rights, everyone gains. The people involved in these legal cases challenged the law and fought for the justice they deserved, and in winning justice for themselves, they won it for everyone.”

The book is broadly organized into chapters on criminal justice, voting rights, property rights, civil liberties, the military, education and internationalism. While an important resource for the scholar and educator, Browne-Marshall points out that the book was intentionally written in a way that makes it appropriate and accessible for the lay historian or general reader as well. Moreover, Browne-Marshall also sought to rescue from the typical anonymity of case law the names and characters of individuals who often fought years-long battles in bringing cases before the Supreme Court.

Browne-Marshall champions the need for all to understand their constitutional rights and to have a working knowledge of what the Supreme Court does as a co-equal part of the government. With that end in mind, she also writes a weekly column for the Milwaukee Courier covering topical legal issues and the Supreme Court, tailored for a lay audience.

“Most people don’t follow the Court, but the law affects us every moment, and the law of the land often impacts us more than local jurisdictions,” she said.

In addition to her scholarship, Browne-Marshall is a public speaker, a founding member of a think tank on law and policy, and author of a number of plays, many of which deal with the shifting realities of race, identity and class. But she is most impassioned about her role as a constitutional law professor and being, as she puts it, “one of the guideposts” in the lives of her students. “The idea that the Constitution is an everyday part of living in this country; the belief the democracy only works if you work it — these are ideas that we need to impart to our young people,” she said. “They need to learn to pay attention to the law and know that law is history and, as such, provides a way of seeing where this country has been and where it’s going.”

Browne-Marshall’s next book, She Took Justice, will trace the history of 100 African American women and the law, from the Salem witch trials through the civil rights movement.
The Underground Sex Trade: Measuring the Tip of an Iceberg

Dr. Meredith Dank, who earned her Ph.D. from the John Jay/CUNY Graduate Center doctoral program in criminal justice in 2009, has spent the better part of a decade trying to shed light on some of the darkest corners of the world of crime. In her latest effort, released earlier this year, she and several co-authors, including mathematics and computer science Professor Bilal Khan, produced a comprehensive report on the sex trade in the United States, an industry believed to generate millions of dollars — possibly hundreds of millions — annually.

The report — “Estimating the Size and Structure of the Underground Commercial Sex Economy in Eight Major U.S. Cities” — is the result of three years of research from its initial half-million-dollar funding by the National Institute of Justice. Along the way, Dank and her research team interviewed roughly 120 law enforcement officers and other criminal justice officials, and more than 140 incarcerated pimps, pornographers and sex workers.

Simply obtaining clearance for the inmate interviews from the U.S. Bureau of Prisons took eight months, she noted. “Data collection is always a potential problem,” said Dank, who is a Senior Research Associate with the Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center. “Anytime you’re interviewing people convicted of a crime, it’s tricky to get them to open up.” The researchers took steps to make sure the interviewees could not be identified.

After carefully examining Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Kansas City, Miami, Seattle, San Diego and Washington, the researchers estimated the 2007 worth of the underground sex economy across the eight major cities to be between $39.9 million and $290 million. Nearly all types of commercial sex venues existed in each city, including massage parlors, brothels, escort services and street- and internet-based prostitution, although regional and demographic differences influenced their markets.

The study produced a number of findings, some of them striking:

- The internet is changing the sex trade, with prostitution declining on the street but thriving online.
- Child pornography is becoming increasingly available and graphic.
- Unexpected parties, including secretaries, nannies, hotel managers and others, benefit from the commercial sex economy.
- Pimps use a variety of tactics to manipulate women into sex work. In addition, women, family and friends sometimes facilitate entry into the sex trade.
- Pimps, traffickers and pornographers perceive the underground sex economy to be low-risk.

Reaction to the study was swift and, in Dank’s words, somewhat overwhelming. “The Urban Institute has never experienced anything like this before” she observed. “This study blew the roof off.” And, she quickly added, the media didn’t always get it right. “People ignored or misunderstood critical aspects of this,” said Dank, who posted a follow-up blog on the Urban Institute website in an attempt to clarify matters.

“What we know about the underground commercial sex economy is likely just the tip of the iceberg, but our study attempts to unveil its size and structure while documenting the experiences of offenders and law enforcement,” Dank noted in a report summary.

Her research focus, she admits, is depressing, but it’s one in which lives are at stake. Moreover, “Being able to work on this topic when it’s still fairly new allows me to help shape the discussion.”

Read the Urban Institute report online at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/413047-Underground-Commercial-Sex-Economy.pdf

Samantha Majic and the Politics of Sex Work

Professor Samantha Majic’s scholarly interest in sex work and the rights of those in the trade dates to her doctoral studies at Cornell, when she focused on poor women’s sexuality in the context of gender and political issues. Now, on the heels of her latest book, Sex Work Politics: From Protest to Service Provision, Majic served as the opening presenter in the “Sex Work Initiative,” a series of panel discussions, lectures and book talks that has been running throughout the fall semester.

Having shifted the focus to the policy side of sex work while doing field research in San Francisco, Majic, a member of the Department of Political Science, pointed out that sex work is more than just prostitution. It also includes dancing, pornography and fetish work, among other forms, yet only prostitution is criminalized.

Moreover, she noted, the United States is the only Western country that almost uniformly criminalizes prostitution.

Some factions, Majic noted, “have linked up to fight sex work from a consumer standpoint, the johns, but what they’re doing is just reapplying criminalization.”

Majic also sees a propensity for mislabeling. “There’s a tendency to equate all sex work with sex trafficking, but they’re not the same thing.” She is hopeful that the Sex Work Initiative will encourage others to think about the subject more broadly, and get away from the common misconception that sex work and sex trafficking are synonymous.

In Sex Work Politics, Majic examines two nonprofit organizations in San Francisco — the St. James Infirmary and the California Prostitutes Education Project — that provide free, nonjudgmental health and social services by and for sex workers. To maintain these services and to qualify for government funding, such organizations must comply with federal and state regulations for nonprofits, and Majic explores how nonprofit organizations negotiate their governmental obligations while maintaining a commitment to outreach, advocacy and sociopolitical change.

Majic discussed her new book, which was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in December 2013, in a book talk held on Oct. 8 in the Moot Court. Other events in the semester-long series included panel discussions on system responses to the sex trade, sex worker narratives in their own words and sex worker health and safety, and an open-forum faculty conversation on funding sex work-related research.

Comments? Questions? Suggestions?
Send them to Daniel Stageman, Director of Research Operations, Office for Advancement of Research, Room 601 BMW.
e-mail: dstageman@jjay.cuny.edu

Visit the Office for Advancement of Research’s website at www.jjay.cuny.edu/academics/960.php
GRANTS UPDATE

**AMY ADAMCZK (Sociology), $15,930** from the University of Notre Dame for a study of “Parental Cultures and Practices of Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Faith to Children: Contexts, Commitments and Consequences.”

**MICHAEL BROWNSTEIN (Philosophy), $35,000** from the American Council of Learned Societies for an ACLS Fellowship, “On the Virtues and Vices of Spontaneity.” Also, $32,486.16 from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for a Visiting Scholar Fellowship.

**ANTHONY CARPI (Sciences), $615,080** from the U.S. Department of Education for “A Success Pipeline for Hispanic Students: Expanding a Model Transfer Articulation Program by Supporting Cohort Identity, Academic Progress and Learner-Centered Curriculum.”

**PREETI CHAUNA (Psychology), $272,023.36** from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation for the Misdemeanor Justice Project.

**ANN JACOBS (Prisoner Reentry Institute), $50,000** from the David Rockefeller Foundation to support the New York State Prison to College Pipeline. Also, $87,200 from the New York City Council for the CUNY Black Male Initiative; $250,000 from the Tow Foundation for the Public Advocacy Fellowship Initiative; $200,000 from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation for a Roundtable on Pretrial Practice; $30,000 from the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision for “Remedial Education Services for Incarcerated Individuals,” and $44,375 from Providence House Inc. for the Providence House Parole Reentry Program: Technical Assistance Project.

**JONATHAN JACOBS (Philosophy), $95,550** from Wake Forest University as the Jack Lynch Distinguished Visiting Scholar.

**JANE KATZ (Health and Physical Education), $25,000** from the Agnes Varis Trust for an Aquatic Wellness Program for Underserved Populations.

**DAVID KENNEDY (Center for Crime Prevention and Control), $4.75 million** from the U.S. Department of Justice (Office of Justice Programs) for the National Center for Building Community Trust and Justice. Also, $450,000 from the Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation to support the National network for Safe Communities: Outreach and Support for Chronic Violent Offenders, and $4,881 from Booz Allen Hamilton Inc. for “Technical Assistance for Drug Market Intervention Training to Eliminate Overt Drug Trafficking in Anniston.”

**BILAL KHAIR (Mathematics and Computer Science), $499,986** from the National Science Foundation for “Collaborative Research: Applying Behavioral-Ecological Network Models to Enhance Distributed Spectrum Access in Cognitive Radio.”

**MICHAEL LEOPE (Psychology), $348,750** from the National Science Foundation to study “Prejudice in the Courtroom: The Nature, Expression and Reduction of Bias against Outgroup Defendants.”

**SARA MCDOWELL (History), $99,210** from the Institute for Advanced Study for a Mellon Fellowship.


**ERIC PIZA (Law, Police Science and Criminal Justice Administration), $107,249** from the New York City Police Department for “Policing by Place: A Proposed Multi-Level Analysis of the Effectiveness of Risk Terrain Modeling for Allocating Police Resources.”

**BELINDA RINCON (Latin American and Latina/o Studies), $40,000** from the Ford Foundation for “War, Gender and State Formation: Latina War Stories from the Mexican Revolution to the War on Terror.”

**JODIE ROURE (Latin American and Latina/o Studies), $65,000** from the City University of New York and the New York City Council to support the Ronald H. Brown Law School Prep Program. Also, $10,000 from CVS Caremark for the CVS Caremark Speaker Series/Ronald H. Brown Law School Prep Program.

**DOUGLAS SALANO (Mathematics and Computer Science), $40,000** from the National Institute of Justice for “Assessing and Enhancing the Utility of NIBRS Data.”

**CHARLES STONE (Psychology), $45,000** from the National Science Foundation for collaborative research on “Memory and Jury Deliberation: The Benefits and Cost of Collective Remembering.”

**BRETT STOUP (Psychology), $45,000** from the Tides Foundation to support the Public Science Project.

**CHARLES STROZIER (History/Center on Terrorism), $5,178.96** from ARTIS Research for “Dynamics of Sacred Values and Social Responsibilities in Governance and Conflict Management.”

**KATE SZUR (Student Academic Success Programs), $19,177** from the New York State Education Department under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

**KAREN TEXEIRA (Upward Bound), $83,045.05** from the Mary Rose Crescent Trust for program support.

**JEREMY TRAVIS (President), $40,000** from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for “Perspectives on Punishment: An Interdisciplinary Roundtable on Punitiveness in America.”

**MARIO VOLPE (Sociology), $25,300** from the Daniel & Joanna S. Rose Fund Inc. for an Emotional Competence Pilot Project.

**CATHY SPATZ WIDOM (Psychology), $155,620** from the National Institute of Justice for “A Supplement to Support the Thirty-Year Follow-up of the Cycle of Violence.”

**GUOQI ZHANG (Sciences), $83,000** from the American Chemical Society Petroleum Research Fund for “Non-Precious Metal Catalytic Asymmetric Reduction of Unsaturated Bonds: A Supramolecular Approach.”

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**Diplomacy Lab Project**

*Continued from Page 1*

Daniel DeStefano, who along with fellow senior Francisco Nuñez is researching illegal fisheries, sees a practical, more long-term aspect to the Diplomacy Lab research. “This is work experience that we can’t replicate in a classroom setting,” he observed. “It could be helpful in the future, and could be a topic to follow up on after John Jay.”

Students’ names are on the final reports as primary authors, Petrossian pointed out, which Nuñez said means “you leave college with something besides a diploma.”

Added Barberet: “It’s not often that you can list a specific class on your résumé, so this is a good thing for students. But it’s a two-way street. Like any internship, you get what you give.”