

2025-2026 Research Apprenticeship Program

Project List

Assessing Direct-to-Consumer Digital Health and Stigma Slight-of-Hand

Benjamin Wills

Project Description

Consumer telehealth companies like hims, hers, and Ro are targeting young adults with advertisements for treatments for hair regrowth, erectile dysfunction, and weight loss, among other conditions. These companies claim tens of millions of users and have significant popular visibility through marketing efforts and media coverage, yet there has been little sociological research on their place in the US healthcare ecosystem.

This project does two things. First, it performs descriptive research of a new segment of healthcare, and second, it explores a hunch with significant theoretical implications.

The RAs will collaborate with the PI to compile a list of direct-to-consumer digital health (DTC DH) companies, with a focus on ease of maintenance. Building on work already done by the PI, the RAs will also support the PI in identifying, archiving, and analyzing DTC DH company advertisements, such as those visible in the Ad Libraries of Meta, LinkedIn, and TikTok. Legal use of computational tools such as scrapers, browser plugins, and R and/or Python are likely implicated.

With PI guidance and based on PI's prior and current research and education, The RAs will perform a content analysis of a sample of the advertisements. The RAs will code specifically for the frames used to motivate adoption of consumer telehealth goods and services. Doing so will allow them to identify data necessary to address how stigma may be operating as a mechanism. The PI has anecdotally observed use of stigma-fighting language, but to the at-times explicit end of simply shifting stigma from "having" the condition to not "treating" it—a "stigma slight-of-hand."

Within the broad strokes of the research project, there is also room for RA interest to play a role in shaping the project in terms of questions asked.

This project draws from and has implications for studies of consumption and consumers, business and marketing, digital (social) media, medicine, and science and technology studies.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

- Identify tools and processes for efficiently archiving advertisements and identifying DTC DH companies.
- Computationally and/or manually code data for topic, approach, and other aspects.

Any additional prerequisites, preferred skills, language, etc. for RA?

- The most important prerequisites are curiosity and commitment to a transparent and respectful dialogue with the research team.
- A background or interest in R, Python, and computational social science would be useful, as would manual content analysis experience.

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 2 apprentices preferred

Facts, Expertise, and Moral Values on Social Media Platforms

Elena De Leo

Project Description

The advent of the Internet and new technologies broadens participation in the process of knowledge production, with critical social and epistemic implications. Using data from social media platforms, this project explores how crowds of users collectively construct facts online.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

- Reading
- Evaluating
- Classifying/coding data (texts, images, videos)

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 2 apprentices preferred

Understanding Gen Z's Investment in Financial Markets

Zosia Cooper

Project Description

My dissertation explores Gen Z's financial habits and ideas about money. Surveys show that 45% of Gen Zs became financial investors before they turned 20—an unprecedented level of investment by young people. Using financial investment as a focal point, my research asks several linked questions: (1) How does a young person's social class background affect their attitudes and behaviors around money? (2) Who becomes a financial risk-taker, and why? and (3) How is Gen Z's interest in financial markets driven by changing attitudes regarding the proper role of work in life? Through this research, I hope to provide sociological insight into headline-grabbing phenomena like quiet quitting and meme stock investment, and more generally into how young people are adapting to increasing financial uncertainty.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

- Compiling a dataset of financial YouTubers and podcasters

Any additional prerequisites, preferred skills, language, etc. for RA?

- Comfort with the use of structured data as in Excel spreadsheets. Some experience with coding in R or Python would be preferred.

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 2 apprentices preferred

Immigration, Politics, and Social Boundaries

Ann Jiang

Project Description

This multi-phase research program investigates how immigrants and their descendants form political attitudes and moral boundaries around issues such as immigration, nationalism, and polarization. The project draws on both large-scale survey data and qualitative materials (interviews, online discussions, and field observations) to understand how people talk, reason, and form opinions about belonging and exclusion in everyday life.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

Undergraduate research assistants will contribute to one or more components of this ongoing work depending on project needs and their own interests or skills. These may include:

- Assisting in text-based analysis of online discussions corpus (annotation, coding, and validation tasks) using qualitative and/or computational skills
- Helping with presentation materials such as conference posters, visual summaries, or short public-facing reports
- Providing literature and reference support using Zotero or similar tools
- Supporting data organization through maintaining IRB documentation, file structures, and progress trackers
- Optionally, for qualified bilingual students: conducting or transcribing interviews in Spanish or Mandarin, cleaning transcripts, and writing preliminary summaries

This position is ideal for students interested in public opinion, migration, political sociology, or multi-methods research. Training will be provided for all assigned tasks.

Any additional prerequisites, preferred skills, language, etc. for RA?

- Preferred Qualifications (Not Required)
- Coursework or interest in sociology, political science, or related field
- Experience with R, Python, STATA, or qualitative coding platforms
- Familiarity with Zotero or citation management
- Strong organizational, email communication, and writing skills
- Initiative, curiosity, and problem-solving mindset
- Language skills in Spanish or Mandarin are a plus

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 2 apprentices preferred

Navigating Opportunity: Perspectives from Chinese American Sibling Sets

David Chao

Project Description

How do we evaluate inequality within the family?

Traditional approaches have emphasized birth order, social class, and parenting styles to compare inequality across families. Scholars often do not discuss how the maintenance of a family's public image contributes to parents' socialization of their children, or how socialization contributes to children's educational aspirations. One hypothesis is the socialization of gender and its impact on aspirational goals suggests that gender may be a structural force that shapes the way families as systems find equilibrium. This research extends this body of work by shifting the narrative of family studies away from comparing between families to instead focus on differences within families. Through qualitative interviews with second generation Chinese Americans sibling sets, I plan to apply a family systems approach to examine the impact of sibling influence on educational aspirations.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

- Coding Qualitative Interview Data
- Analyzing Data
- Participant Memos

Any additional prerequisites, preferred skills, language, etc. for RA?

- Familiarity with NVIVO is preferred but not required.

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 1 apprentice preferred

Making Sense of Privilege: How the Offspring of Chinese Economic Elites Manage Criticism

Fan Fu

Project Description

This project investigates how Chinese young adults from affluent or entrepreneurial families understand their privileged social positions and respond to public criticism of wealth and inequality. In contemporary China, rapid economic growth has created a generation that benefits from extraordinary family resources while facing increasing public scrutiny over fairness and merit. How do these young people make sense of their advantages, and how do they explain or justify their success in a society that values hard work and meritocracy? Using in-depth interview methods, the study explores how interviewees talk about success, effort, and opportunity. Together, this study aims to understand how privilege is interpreted and negotiated in everyday life.

For students, this project offers practical, hands-on training in interview-based qualitative research. Participants will learn how to collect and interpret first-hand narratives, strengthen their communication and analytical skills, and gain a deeper understanding of how social inequality is produced and maintained in everyday life.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

RAs will work closely with the project mentor to participate in the research process from preparation to data collection:

1. Training: Receive step-by-step guidance on qualitative interview methods, including ethical considerations, rapport-building, and question design.
2. Participant Recruitment: Identify at least five potential interviewees who fit the study criteria (Chinese young adults from affluent or entrepreneurial families).
3. Data Collection: Conduct at least five one-hour interviews using the provided interview guide.
4. Transcription: Transcribe recorded interviews accurately into written form for analysis.

Any additional prerequisites, preferred skills, language, etc. for RA?

- Fluent Mandarin (Chinese) speaking ability is required, as most interviews will be conducted in Mandarin.

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 3 apprentices preferred

Digital Nomadism and Urban Change: Integration and Community Dynamics in Mexico City

Olivia Sanchez

Project Description

My dissertation examines how global mobility and digital labor are reshaping urban inequality and community life in Mexico City. Focusing on the rise of digital nomadism, the project investigates how remote workers and transnational migrants transform neighborhood identities, housing markets, and local governance. Through a mixed-methods design that integrates ethnography, policy analysis, and spatial data, I trace how digital platforms such as Airbnb mediate these changes across five central neighborhoods—Roma, Condesa, Polanco, Zona Rosa, and Doctores.

The qualitative component draws on over thirty semi-structured interviews and participant observation to explore how digital nomads and local residents negotiate belonging, authenticity, and legitimacy in shared urban spaces. Complementing this, the quantitative component analyzes Airbnb listings, census data, and housing statistics from 2018 to the present to evaluate how digital labor and urban policy shape spatial inequality. By bridging sociological theories of urban life and moral order with urban planning perspectives on governance and development, the project illuminates the social and aesthetic dimensions of transnational gentrification. Ultimately, it seeks to develop theoretical and practical frameworks for building more inclusive and equitable cities in the age of digital mobility.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

- Collect and catalog local government planning documents (neighborhood-level urban plans, zoning reforms, Programa de Rescate, etc.).
- Gather Mexican and international media articles (2018–present) discussing digital nomads and housing in CDMX.
- Code documents for themes.
- Produce 1–2 page memos summarizing the discourse in each media source or policy document.

Any additional prerequisites, preferred skills, language, etc. for RA?

- The majority of data/content is in Spanish; therefore, bilingual skills are required.

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 2 apprentices preferred

Shifting Grounds: The Role of Conceptual Metaphors in the Supreme Court's Reasoning on Abortion

Kelly Jones

Project Description

This dissertation examines how conceptual metaphors shape judicial reasoning in Supreme Court abortion cases. The project analyzes landmark decisions including *Roe v. Wade* (1973), *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), and recent cases to understand how justices use metaphorical language to frame complex legal and moral questions. By investigating the cognitive and linguistic bridges that connect abstract legal concepts to familiar experiences, this research explores how metaphorical framings influence judicial decision-making, reflect ideological positions, and shape public debate on one of America's most contentious issues. The study contributes to understanding how institutional discourse constructs societal norms and legitimizes legal reasoning.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

- Data collection: Building our database of lower court decisions and amicus briefs; organizing court cases and their proceedings, and cleaning the data for computational text analysis; Extracting metaphors from abortion jurisprudence
- Some data analysis: learning how to map the logical entailments of metaphors; thinking about the larger implications of these entailments (brainstorming/idea workshopping)

Any additional prerequisites, preferred skills, language, etc. for RA?

- Knowledge of python, excel, cognitive linguistics, or law is a plus, but not required

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project

- 2 apprentices preferred

Mixed-Race Humor in a Colorblind Era

Ayumi Matsuda

Project Description:

Using data from interviews conducted with multiracial students along with videos collected from TikTok, this project explores what mixed-race humor can tell us about multiracial identity and a multiracial collective consciousness in America.

Anticipated Tasks for Research Apprentice (RA)

- Transcribing collected interviews
- Coding interview transcripts using qualitative analysis software like Dedoose
- Assist with recruitment of further interviews if needed

How many Apprentice(s) would you like assigned to your project?

- 1 apprentice preferred