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Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students

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Since the fall of 2013 I have been a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at UW-Madison. Over the last two years I have developed a research project about the consequences of economic inequality for individuals' perceptions of social justice and preferences for redistribution. I have been exploring this research question in various political economic contexts and I was very fortunate to receive the support from the Mellon Foundation to conduct summer research abroad. I used the Mellon Fellowship funds for exploratory dissertation fieldwork in London, Oxford and Paris in the summer of 2015. Below I provide a brief description of my fieldwork activities and some of the outcomes that have resulted from them.

I spent the first part of my stay in London meeting with faculty from the London School of Economics (LSE) and researchers from the National Center for Social Research (NatCen). The UK is known for maintaining several large, high-quality longitudinal studies about various aspects of the British society, and before my visit I had maintained correspondence with some of the staff behind these studies in order to learn about them. I met with staff from the NatCen directly involved with the *Understanding Society* survey and the NatCen-Demos project which aims to understand poverty and inequality in British society from a subjective perspective. Specifically, the project is about the subjective experience of poverty and the perceptions of others about the poor. Since my work deals with the ideas that individuals have about their own position in society and about others, it was a great opportunity for me to learn about the methodological details of the NatCen-Demos project. The project applies specific techniques using various large datasets to conduct secondary analyses without spending a lot of resources in face-to-face interviews –something that I hope to do for my dissertation. Also, I was able to learn about several other datasets at a great level of detail, and I was able to identify the sources that I could use for the comparative project that I envision for my dissertation.

At LSE I was able to meet with the staff working under Professors Mike Savage and Fiona Devine on the *Great British Class Survey*. Similarly, I was able to learn about the methodological underpinnings of this study but, perhaps more importantly, I was able to discuss and learn about some analytical strategies that are not common currency in this other side of the Atlantic: sequencing methods, social network analysis and multiple correspondence analysis. Lastly, I had the opportunity to travel to Oxford to meet Prof. Brian Nolan, faculty at the Martin School at Oxford University, expert in inequality and co-editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Economic Inequality* (2009) with our own Tim Smeeding from the LaFollette School of Public Affairs at UW. I learned about Prof. Nolan's current project about modeling the consequences of implementing various strategies to reduce inequality in various countries. We have kept in touch ever since and now I will be presenting at the session on "reducing inequality" that he and others are organizing as part of the 2016 annual conference of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE).

I planned my visit to London so that it would coincide with the 2015 SASE annual conference, which took place at the LSE. The theme of the conference was, precisely, "Inequality in the 21st Century", and it was an amazing opportunity to meet people from other European institutions and have similar conversations about ongoing projects, commonly used methods for analysis and data sources. Many things have resulted from these conversations. For instance, I am currently working on an article about inequality and redistribution that builds on a recently published piece by Prof. Alexander Schmidt-Catran (from the University of Cologne, Germany) that uses the *European Social Survey* and other sources. Prof. Schmidt-

Catran was very kind and generously shared with me his data and his models so that I could replicate and extend his paper.

I had an analogous agenda in mind for my visit to Paris, where I spent the second part of my stay. In Paris I met Profs. Cornelia Woll and Olivier Godechot, directors of the Max Planck Sciences Po Center on Coping with Instability in Market Societies (MaxPo) and several students at MaxPo. The meetings that I had there were similar to the ones in London in that I was able to discuss projects, methods and data sources with many people in a way that was both inspiring and informative. Importantly, I also learned about the data availability limitations that one faces when studying inequality and public opinion in France, something that represents an important consideration for the case selection for my dissertation.

My visit coincided with the 2015 conference of the Council of European Studies (CES). Similarly, the CES conference represented an opportunity to meet people from elsewhere in Europe. Of the many meetings and interviews I was able to have, the conversation with Prof. Herman van de Werfhorst from the Amsterdam Center for Inequality Studies (AMCIS) is worth mentioning. Prof. van de Werfhorst is working on a project about inequality and public opinion, was able to provide very useful and detailed feedback for my project, and encouraged me to consider a short stay at AMCIS as part of their exchange program for when I conduct part of my dissertation work. This was one of many invaluable conversations that broadened my perspective and opened up many doors and opportunities.

Lastly, and anecdotally, in Paris I also met with Prof. Frederic Lebaron, a former collaborator of renowned French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and an expert in multiple correspondence analysis. Although this meeting was part of my broad exploratory agenda to introduce myself and get acquainted with people and institutions to discuss different possibilities for my dissertation work, I hold this particular meeting close to my heart. As a sociology student, I have read and admired the work of Pierre Bourdieu since I was an undergrad. Meeting professor Lebaron and hearing stories about how Bourdieu used to write and work to coordinate his research team was academically enlightening, but also, personally inspiring. In sum, the Mellon Foundation funds allowed me to conduct exploratory fieldwork that helped me identify the best possibilities for what is already becoming my dissertation. It also allowed me to make valuable professional connections that are already materializing in the form of conference presentations, papers and joint projects. And finally, at a personal level, it allowed me to have an incredibly enriching and inspiring stay at places that are home to some of the leading institutions in my field of interest. For all this, I sincerely thank the Mellon Foundation for providing me with their generous financial support.