
The BA thesis process is an opportunity to develop substantive policy knowledge and even expertise in a policy area; to pursue methodological skills in new areas or further existing skills; and to improve your writing skills, especially in organizing and structuring a coherent, longer paper. This process is a capstone experience that asks you to integrates ideas, skills, and policy knowledge from your time at UChicago and in the program.

Spring 2018
- Read about topics or in policy areas that interest you that could become a thesis-length project
- **Important Date #1 (4/18/18): Google Form due** (topic, title, research question, intended approach)
  - can be domestic or international, disciplinary or interdisciplinary
  - methodological approaches vary substantially
    - qualitative research: participant observation, interviews, focus groups, organizational case study
    - quantitative research: analysis of big data sets, GIS mapping, regressions, cost-benefit analysis
  - critically, you must be able to answer your question with the methods available to you

Summer 2018
- Review scholarly & journalistic resources and reach out to potential informants for informational interviews
- Consider tracking sources and thoughts in a research journal and/or annotated bibliography
- Consider starting to collect data, esp. in projects needing more time (e.g., interviews, observations)

Autumn 2018
- Enroll in PBPL 29800, the required BA Seminar class, with preceptor
  - sections have 12-15 students, meet 1h 20m per week to develop question, methodological approach
  - double majors can opt out of one of their BA seminars with waiver (will be paired with PBPL preceptor)
- **Important Date #2 (11/21/18): IRB forms submitted** (if going through IRB approval process)
  - Jim Leitzel, Chad Broughton, and Sorcha Brophy can serve as Principal Investigators
- **Important Date #3 (12/5/18): Thesis Ghost Deck with Background and Literature Review sections due**
  - about 20-25 pages, at discretion of preceptor

Winter 2019
- Enroll in PBPL 29801, the second half of the required BA Seminar class, with same preceptor
  - Meet 1h 20m once per week in workshop and/or writing group format
- **Important Date #4 (2/6/19): Polished Draft and Second Reader Forms due** to preceptor
  - BA theses tend to range between 35-55 pages
  - Who can serve as a 2nd reader/faculty reader for the PBPL BA paper?
    - UChicago faculty, senior lecturers and lecturers, & Harper-Schmidt Assistant Professors
    - UChicago grad. students & faculty from other universities (approved case by case basis)
    - a second reader is not necessary for special honors, but can improve your feedback
  - In special cases: enroll in PBPL 29900, a reading and research course (enrollment limited)

Spring 2019
- **Important Date #5 (4/6/19): BA Symposium**
  - required miniature academic conference (10 min. presentations with some Q/A)
- **Important Date #6 (4/17/19, 5 p.m.): Final Draft due**
  - BA papers need title page, including name of preceptor (& second reader if you have one), date of submission, and abstract, and are submitted electronically to preceptor, second reader, & Lee Price
  - In May, determinations made for special honors & nominations made for Taub Thesis Prize
  - Honors requires overall GPA of 3.4 or higher and having your BA thesis evaluated as honors-deserving
  - preceptor and second reader can make both nominations; program committee then vets nominations
  - evaluation based on extent and originality of research, argumentation, writing quality, etc.
  - avoid being vague, starting late, disrespecting the process, and offering generic policy recs.
- **Important Date #7 (6/7/19): Celebration! Senior Lunch & Richard P. Taub Annual Lecture to recognize seniors, award Taub Thesis Prize, & celebrate our seniors and their upcoming graduation!**
Examples of Previous PBPL BAs

2016 Best BA Winner: Ebola Virus Disease Surveillance in Sierra Leone: Port Loko and Kambia District Ebola Response in the West Africa EVD Epidemic. The West Africa Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Epidemic is the worst outbreak of EVD in recorded history. While much has been published regarding the international and national-level EVD responses, there is a dearth of literature on more local structures, successes, and failures. This paper therefore seeks to understand how the EVD response unfolded in the Port Loko and Kambia Districts of Sierra Leone. 43 District Surveillance Officers, the epidemic’s frontline responders, were surveyed. From this, it was found that political deference to the World Health Organization and their focus on technical epidemiology over logistical and operational needs had a strong and negative impact on the efficacy of both district’s EVD response. A number of policy recommendations follow: most significant is the need to establish an Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response network in conjunction with the improvement of Sierra Leone’s existing District Health Information Systems 2 architecture. Doing so will empower Sierra Leone’s government to take the lead in future outbreak responses.

2015 Best BA Winner: Digital Dividends: Investigating the User Experience in Chicago’s Public Computer Center System. Despite their growing prominence as a policy strategy, little research exists on public computer centers (PCCs), their impacts on users and communities, or their degree of success as a policy tool for workforce development, education, community building, or the reduction of digital inequality. Using data generated from 371 original surveys of the users of PCCs in Chicago, which were transformed by funds from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, this analysis seeks to understand how, why, in what way, to what end, and with what degree of success do Chicagoans use the PCC system. It concludes that PCCs facilitate social services access, educational advances, community development, and act as a powerful workforce development tool. This research demonstrates that PCCs are valued not only for access, but also for in-person assistance and training, and recommends that policymakers continue to fund PCCs and recognize that PCC value derives both from technical and human resources.

Example of quantitative study: The Geography of Local Education Reform: An Analysis of Renaissance 2010 and Gentrification: used Census, American Community Survey, and CPS data to explore relationship between school reform and gentrification, had to figure out how to measure gentrification, ran several regressions, and worked in ArcGIS, a mapping and spatial analysis software, to examine this relationship. Interviews too, but mostly quantitative analysis.

Example of qualitative study: Whose Culture is it? Analyzing Public Participation in Chicago’s 2012 Cultural Plan: participant observation, this student attended and participated in 19 meeting where residents and arts and culture people discussed the 2012 Chicago Cultural Plan. Qualitative analysis that looked for themes in the field notes that student took, wrote these up in a very colorful, ethnographic style.

Others titles

- Mental Healthcare Access for Female Veterans: The Jesse Brown VA Center’s Women Veterans Health Center
- “Y Aunque La Jaula Sea de Oro, No Deja de Ser Prisión”: Perils Faced by Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in U.S.
- Additive Schooling for Asian Americans in Chicago Public Schools
- “I’m so busy with everything else”: Mixed-Methods Look at Challenges Low-Income Women w/Type 2 Diabetes Face
- The Power of Police: An Examination of Stop and Frisk in New York City
- Failure of the Dharavi Development Project in the Slums of Mumbai
- Creative Place-making and Economic Development in Cleveland (went to business school)
- Training and Evaluating Teachers in Chicago Schools (went into urban teaching)
- Transparency & Open Data in City of Chicago Government (became data person for both Obama campaigns)
- Innovative Strategies for Urban Rebirth in Detroit (went into community development, applying to Kennedy School)
- Exploring the Relationship between Non-communicable Diseases & Econ. Growth in Nigeria (medical school)

Please note: If you plan to graduate in Autumn 2018 or Winter 2019, let Lee Price (lee@uchicago.edu) know ASAP (you’ll have different deadlines for the Polished Draft, the BA Presentation, and the Final Draft).