

“If we think of politics as an industry, we might delight in its new “labor-saving efficiency”, but if we think of politics as a democratic deliberation, to leave people out is to miss the whole point.” This is one of the quotes from Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (2000) that always looms in my mind. I surveyed this book extensively in my research during my final year of my graduate program at [REDACTED] University. My research was titled “How Resistance Builds Social Capital: Community Reactions to Gentrification.” As implied by the title and my aforementioned reference to Putnam, my research focuses on social capital in communities often left out in policy. In this research project, I specifically focused on how social and political capital can be built in communities as citizens resist gentrification policy. I argue that resistance to gentrification manifests itself on a spectrum (from active to passive resistance) and that these resistance techniques tend to build social capital in the community. I define active resistance as tending to rely on strategies of seeking political attention and disseminating information (e.g. political protest, lobbying, social media campaigns). Meanwhile, passive resistance is characterized by citizens relying on established caches of social capital (e.g. religious establishments, non-profit organizations, etc.) to facilitate their own survival in a community regardless of social and financial burdens. In brief, my research was primarily concerned with communities frequently abandoned in the policy process and tries to look at the assets those communities can bring to policy.

My research was quite challenging because my thesis came in conflict with portions of the academic community on the topics of gentrification and its relationship with social capital. There have been multitudes of research on the potential benefits of gentrification to social capital, but not many academics have made contrasting arguments that focused specifically on social capital and resistance. I planned to present this research at SECoPA 2019, so it was important that I made thorough arguments as my contrasting thesis would be judged by my peers, public administrators, and seasoned academics. My research challenged me to affirm my passion for a research topic in lieu of challenges. At a foundational level, my research allowed me the opportunity to explore the essentials of public administration. From reading more modern theorists like Putnam to incorporating Max Weber’s theories on social stratification

to define social status when it comes to policy intended to leverage certain community values, I experienced the realities of incorporating multiple schools of thought into research. While many may find this experience to be intimidating, I found it liberating to have such a wide array of theories at my disposal. Whether I end up enhancing and/or complicating knowledge, it is exhilarating to be a part of the tradition. Overall, my research and the experience of presenting it gave me the confidence to assert and defend my arguments while also affirming an affinity for research that would be well-suited to pursuing a Ph.D.

Though it is difficult to predict what direction a project might take given many more years to research it, I can expect that the following theories and issues would be addressed. First and foremost, I would like to expand the utilization of theories to better understand my observations. For instance, I believe Pierre Bourdieu's concept of multiple forms of capital in social relations may differ from Putnam's social capital at times but can bring interesting facets to the overarching goal of illuminating the experience of these communities experiencing change. I would also like to take some time to probe the implied values of what gentrification policy brings to these communities as there is an underlying assumption that certain class values are superior. Bourdieu brings mention to these implied values with his theories on social stratification being largely aesthetic in nature and his theories on class fractions. I would also like to take a more materialist approach to the antagonisms in the communities facing gentrification that might borrow from Marx in a more economic materialist approach to understanding. Lastly, I believe that qualitative research inside communities of people post-gentrification could be beneficial to research. Many of these people are displaced and dispersed among other communities and, by and large, they become forgotten and I want to incorporate their experiences more centrally into gentrification research.

My previous research is but just a glimpse into my interests—it is just a starting point for future research and study. While I am proud of my research experience and could say so much more about it, it is important to stress that my research interests can fall along broader terms. Generally, the heart of my

research is centered around questions of how to create and implement public policy in communities that are typically difficult to reach. For instance, during my internship with the city of [REDACTED], I often worked with war refugees, transmigrant communities, and communities of labor migrants. These communities are difficult to implement policy in due to them being in a persistent state of acculturation whereby they are constantly balancing more than one culture at a time. This acculturative stress was something that we tried to bridge during my internship as we looked to develop a relationship between the city of [REDACTED] and these communities. This relationship had not been previously established as these communities faced the same phenomenon of being “invisible” to policy makers as is so common for them everywhere they go. My work with these communities centered around trying to incorporate and disseminate information to city officials on the needs in these communities. We deemed it necessary to develop programs that would be specific enough to be relevant to the communities but be broad enough that any new refugee or returning migrant could utilize them—a difficult balance. For instance, when I left my internship, the city had engaged in a contract with a third-party on translation at point of service to make healthcare and city services easier to provide to non-English speakers. We found that many migrants do not speak about their health issues with a medical professional because their children are often the ones having to translate for them. All-in-all, this experience working on making public policy more accommodating to war refugees, transmigrants, and labor migrants gave me a keen awareness and interest in making policy better for those communities often forgotten in policy.

In my pursuit of a suitable Ph.D. program, I noted the most important facets of what I was looking for. UNO’s Public Administration Program has been consistently in my mind, largely because of its commitment to intellectual diversity, community engagement, and its outstanding faculty. I desire a program that allows me to explore my interests without forcing me into a certain school of thought. My aspiration after my Ph.D. is to become appointed faculty at a research-focused university, so a program that offers a pluralistic approach to learning is important to me. UNO has a plethora of faculty with

diverse research interests that can allow me to best explore who I am as an academic and what angle I want to take with my research interests.

UNO also provides an ideal situation where I can pursue some specific disciplinary interests. In particular, I am interested in UNO because of the Emergency Management and Disaster Science Program's faculty. This a unique feature of UNO that better allows me to have fruitful discussions on research topics related to my interests in public policy in communities that are difficult to implement policy in. Emergency management policy has underlying assumptions that many disasters will cause displacement of citizens. There will be some consistencies among displaced people regardless of the mechanism of displacement. Having the specialist knowledge of these faculty can provide me with a great opportunity to garner a more holistic approach to my research interests. Specifically, I am interested in working with Dr. Thomas Jamieson. His work on how disaster-stricken communities are portrayed in media depending on their level of development is quite intriguing to me and I would like to learn more from him on these concepts in order to incorporate them into my research. I also find his research interesting in that it is comprehensive not only about media coverage itself but brings mention to the likelihood of policy learning to occur in observed communities. In my mind, this is applicable to gentrification research because "othering" of community experiences can make it much easier for these citizens to go ignored in future policy.

The community engagement focus of UNO in general is also something beneficial to me in my pursuit of a Ph.D. I have always been someone who wanted my profession to be centered around having an impact in the world. Community engagement has always been of an utmost importance to me as I have spent a lot of my free time volunteering for multiple causes and working directly with community members on projects. I do not want my pursuit of knowledge to just advance my professional interests. I want it to somehow better society. While this public service focus is a stereotype of public administrators, it is worth re-stating. UNO's culture of service in the profession alongside my academic intrigue allows me the opportunity to fully utilize my affection for the discipline.

The outstanding faculty in UNO's Public Administration Program is also a boon for the program. I have already mentioned Dr. Thomas Jamieson, but there are other faculty that I would be excited to work with as well. For instance, Dr. Jodi Benenson is someone that I have quite a lot of research similarities with and believe I could garner a lot from her. Most of my policy interest is centered around questions of (in)equity as is much of her research. She also takes an assets-based approach to understanding volunteerism's relationship to economic mobility in low-income communities. While I have not specifically used the assets-based approach in my gentrification research, I have shown an affinity to the general concept by interpreting and characterizing different concepts of what forgotten community members bring to the table in policy processes. I believe Dr. Benenson and I could have a fruitful relationship where I could get a more sophisticated understanding of how civic engagement relates to economic mobility. I am also interested in working with Dr. Angela Eikenberry as there is much that could be gleaned from her work on how volunteerism and philanthropy can increase civic and political engagement. Underlying my research on gentrification has been a general idea that civic and political engagement is intrinsic to citizen efforts to resist gentrification policy. Most manifestations of resistance are explicitly political or civically-minded and I believe there is a lot that I can learn from Dr. Eikenberry to get a more integral and incorporated understanding of the phenomenon I am observing.

At UNO, I would have the utmost opportunity to fully commit and be pushed to my limits on who I am as an academic. The diverse set of tracks also allow for a specific commitment to important aspects of the discipline. For instance, I would like to pursue specializations in public policy and either public administration theory or urban management. While I am committed to the public policy track, I believe I could go down the theory or urban management path depending on where I find my research evolving. Whether I take the more theory-based approach like the aforementioned discussion on Bourdieu or the more urban gentrification approach surrounding my research, UNO provides the best opportunity for either.