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Nick Schou

Political scientist Daniel Masterson named UCSB's 7th Pahl Scholar

The Pahl Center for the Study of Critical Social Issues at UC Santa Barbara has selected Daniel Masterson as its newest Pahl Scholar. With the \$50,000 award, Masterson, an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, will lead a new research initiative on the aftermath of deportation, including life trajectories, migration choices and reintegration in Honduras.

As the Pahl Center expands its mission under Director Shaunak Sastry to provide data-driven solutions to pressing global challenges, Masterson's work serves as a cornerstone of the center's commitment to applied social science. His work investigates the economic and social consequences for Hondurans who are deported annually from the U.S. — a population that often returns to a cycle of poverty and coerced mobility with little to no institutional support.

"Each year, tens of thousands of Hondurans are deported back to Honduras, often with limited resources and little preparation for return," said Masterson, UCSB's 7th Pahl Scholar. The Pahl Initiative to support rigorous social science research on topics of pressing social importance launched in 2019. "Despite the scale and urgency of this issue, there is limited systematic evidence on what happens after deportation," he added. "This project examines post-deportation life trajectories: who returns, under what conditions, and how individuals navigate work, family obligations, safety concerns, and decisions about staying or migrating again. At a moment of rapid shifts in migration dynamics across the Americas, building credible evidence on

deportation and return is increasingly important.”

Masterson spent five years in the humanitarian sector, at the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Syria and as a founder of the nongovernmental organization A Plate for All. Before joining the faculty at UCSB, he held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Immigration Policy Lab at Stanford University and earned his Ph.D. in political science from Yale University.

His research has been supported by the National Science Foundation and the World Bank and featured in prominent outlets such as The New York Times and The Economist. As the Pahl Scholar, Masterson will continue to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world policy impact.

“My prior research has centered on refugees and displacement in other regions; this work extends that agenda to the Americas, where coerced mobility is reshaping communities in real time,” Masterson said. “The goal is to generate evidence that clarifies the human consequences of deportation and informs debates about migration policy and reintegration under constrained conditions.”

“I am very excited for Dr. Masterson to have been selected as the 7th Pahl Scholar,” Sastry said. “His project embodies the spirit and the letter of the Pahl Center. A detailed and rigorous analysis of the economic, political and behavioral outcomes of deportation from the U.S. has never been more urgent or necessary. We are excited to support Dr. Masterson and look forward to working with him through the year.”

Tags

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