

## UGRA Programme 2023-2024 Report

Project Title: Imagining 'Progress' in the Chicago Police Department, 1865-2023

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### **Introduction**

This past academic year, I had the opportunity to work with Dr Johann Koehler of LSE's Department of Social Policy and Dr Tony Cheng of Duke University's Department of Sociology on a study of the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) organisational reputation management. In particular, we looked at how the CPD has imagined their own progress from 1865 to 2023. To that end, I was tasked with (1) coding the annual reports the Department published over the past 158 years for keywords of progress, and (2) sourcing and coding other police publications for their overarching themes. This fits into a wider research series by Dr Koehler and Dr Cheng about the patterns that emerge in how the CPD views and expresses themselves.

### **Research: Methods & Findings**

My first task as a research assistant for this project was to familiarise myself with the Chicago Police Department's annual reports. I did this by reading a sample of annual reports as well as the existing code base that had been compiled from the documents for a previous project. This was an exceedingly helpful introduction to the practice of coding documents, which I hadn't done before. By performing this review, I was also able to get a sense of the practices commonly used by the Department in their communications, be it by comparing themselves to other police departments nationally or to other public service departments like the Fire Department.

Having gotten this initial sense of the information I would be working with, I worked on my first main task – coding the annual reports for instances of progress and related keywords. Managing some documents not being OCR-compatible (i.e. having to read some documents, looking for keywords instead of having the search function available) was a bit of a challenge, but the vast majority of documents did have this functionality. It was fascinating to see firsthand how patterns in the CPD's messaging emerged through coding the documents; all of the available annual reports over the past 160 years form quite the tapestry for such a prominent US police department.

Once I completed coding the annual reports for progress keywords, I moved into forming a research plan for the rest of my assistantship. This involved arranging a research consultation with Sonia Gomes, Academic Support Librarian, who helped me refine my preliminary idea of ways to find instances of the Chicago Police Department's voice, and guided me through library resources that could help me. This was a great introduction to LSE's extensive library services, and I found myself using later on in the term for my classes. I then worked on finding documents that would suit the project's needs.

I was able to find digitised archives of the Chicago Police Department's publications that they had published for police officers. These digests included many stories that aimed to express a particular view of the police officer experience and could be interpreted as towards the public. This collection was an ideal find for the project because it was created by the CPD, offering a very clear example of the police department voice. Furthermore, I found newsletters published by the Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge No. 7 – the union for police officers in Chicago. This was an illuminating juxtaposition between police officer voices and the police department voice. It showed how police officers themselves felt about certain issues and how they viewed the department.

With these publications in hand, I proceeded to read a sample of these documents and identify key themes in how the police portrayed themselves to, well, themselves. They were able to take a much more personal approach in their own publications as opposed to the annual reports; where the annual reports were intended for city officials and administrative stakeholders, the police publications were for police officers both active and retired, and they sounded that way. Some articles had a charged message, and stories about police officers' personal lives were very frequent.

### **Thanks & Closing**

In my application to the program, I mentioned the CPD's self-expression of progress over time is something I would be interested in watching a long documentary on. Doing this research was even better, and I'm thankful I was able to engross myself in this topic over the past year; it was a nice change from my quantitative coursework, and definitely a highlight of my LSE experience.

My experience as a research assistant was one I greatly enjoyed. The US Phelan Centre did a great job of quickly answering any administrative questions and ensuring everything went smoothly. I felt very supported by the faculty to communicate with them and to maintain a balance between my research and my coursework, and am very happy to have had the opportunity to work with Dr Koehler and Dr Cheng. Thank you!