Buffett Undergraduate Research Fellowship Opportunity

Wanted: The Hunt for Fugitive Criminals

Faculty Mentor: Daniel Krcmaric, Associate Professor, Political Science (Evanston campus)

Project Synopsis: From the Nazi war criminals who fled Europe at the end of World War II to modern cases such as Edward Snowden and the Boston Marathon bombers, manhunts capture the popular imagination. While journalists have written a great deal on manhunts and fugitives, scholars have generally paid less attention to this important issue. This research project addresses the sources of success and failure in manhunts. That is, why are some wanted fugitives quickly located and apprehended whereas others manage to evade capture for decades? My tentative answer draws a distinction between "lone wolf fugitives" and "networked fugitives," those who can rely on a broader sociopolitical movement to provide logistical support, financial assistance, and places to hide.

The empirical portion of this project focuses on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List. This famous list was the brainchild of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and debuted in 1950. Since then, 532 people have appeared on the list. These fugitives span the global (such as terrorist Osama bin Laden and Ruja Ignatova, the so-called "missing cryptoqueen") and the domestic (mobster Whitey Bulger and James Earl Ray, the killer of Martin Luther King, Jr.). The goal is to create a systematic dataset of these fugitives that includes information about their lives, their crimes, their time on the run, and ultimately their capture or death. This dataset will then be used in a statistical analysis that examines success and failure in the hunt for wanted fugitives.

Project Term: Summer only

Project Location: The student can be anywhere. There is no required travel. If on campus, the student will meet regularly with Prof. Krcmaric in person. If away from Evanston, Zoom meetings will suffice.

Ideal Applicant: The student will help Prof. Krcmaric track down, organize, and analyze information about the 532 individuals who have appeared on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List between its inception in 1950 and the present day. There are no specific language or technical skills needed, but experience with Excel or another spreadsheet software is an asset. Intellectual curiosity— particularly a willingness to take a deep dive into the lives of these individuals—is the most important requirement for this position.

Number of Available Positions: One