



BROWN

SOCIAL DATA ANALYTICS

IN THIS ISSUE

Data as a Driver of Social Equity

Researchers committed to investigating,
restoring, and upholding social justice

A Decade of Spectacular Growth

AS THE MASTER OF SOCIAL DATA ANALYTICS (MSDA) program marks its 10th year, we have 23 students enrolled and applications are up by over 40 percent from last year. In fact, program growth has been spectacular over the past decade.

With the addition of new faculty and instructors in the Department of Sociology and the Population Studies and Training Center, our course offerings have also increased. In the 2025–26 academic year, we are offering 17 courses in statistics and research methods, with new options such as *Introduction to Social Network Analysis* and *R for Data Analysis*.

To better serve students, we have also created three tracks within the program—in Demographic Analysis, Spatial Analysis, and Qualitative Analysis. These tracks provide students the opportunity to develop specialized expertise in a particular set of methods and to send out resumes signaling that expertise to potential employers.

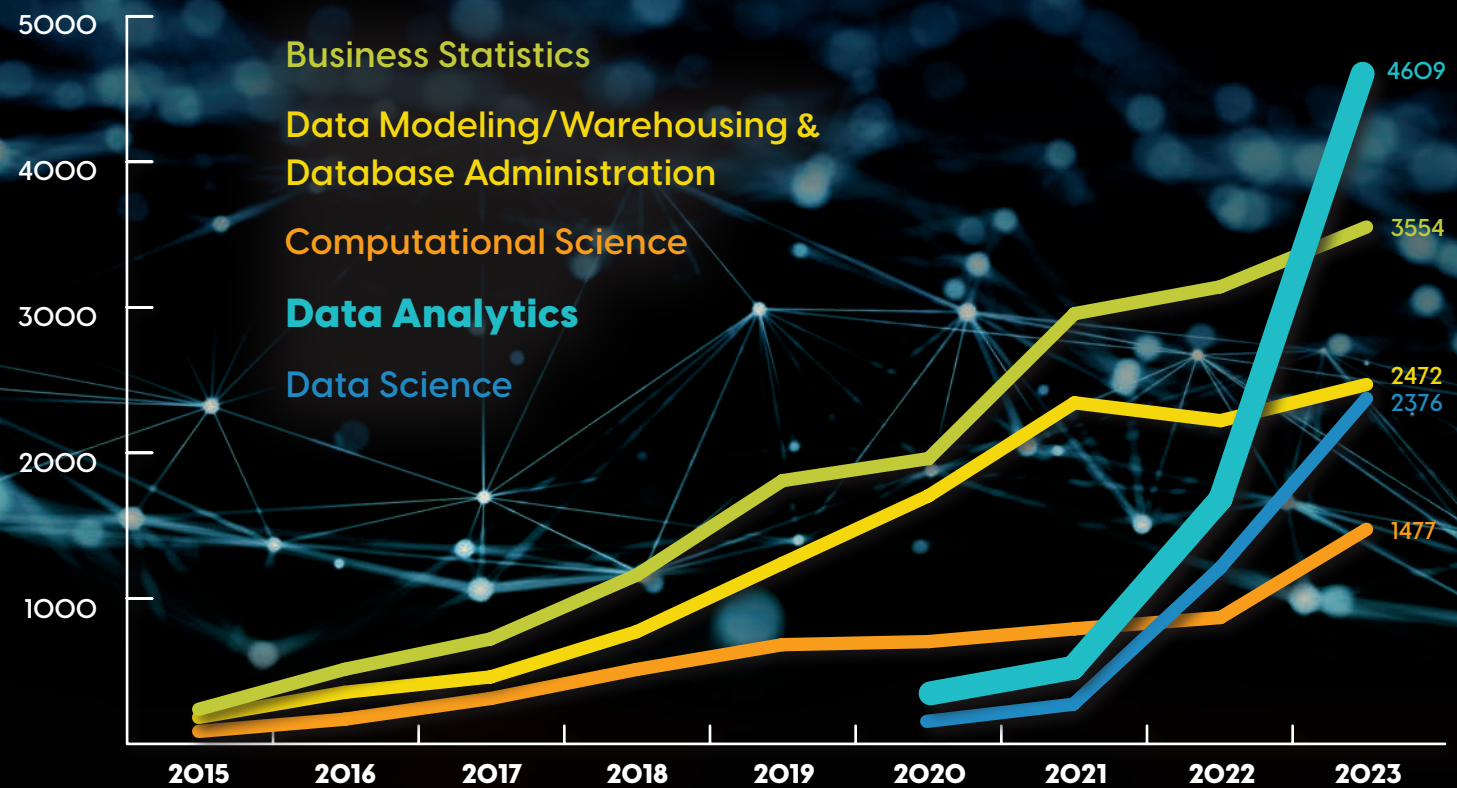
Rapid growth in Brown's MSDA program is part of a national trend responding to the growing demand for data analysts who can identify and make sense of patterns and relationships in complex social data. Nationally, the number of students completing master's degrees in data analytics grew from 344 in 2020 to 4,609 in 2023, making that the first year these graduates outnumbered peers earning master's degrees in Business Statistics, Data Modeling/Warehousing & Database Administration, Computational Science, and Data Science.*

In this issue of *Social Data Analytics*, we feature three recent graduates who work as data analysts in both the commercial and nonprofit sectors. A common thread in their professional experiences is knowing how to analyze and interpret a wide range of data types, a valuable skill that all of our MSDA graduates are fortunate to carry with them into the world.

David P. Lindstrom PhD
Program Director / Professor of Sociology

Carrie Spearin PhD '07
Associate Program Director / Senior Lecturer

Growth in Selected Master's Degrees Awarded in the US (2015-2023)*



New Head of a Prized Intellectual Home



WHEN SHE FIRST CAME TO BROWN in the late 1990s, Margot Jackson BA '02 had no clue she would end up returning to teach less than a decade later—and that the Population Studies and Training Center (PSTC), an entity she had barely noticed as an undergrad, would be what drew her back.

As a student at Brown, she had concentrated in what was then called Community Health, with the vague idea of following a pre-med path. But by the time she graduated, she had become more interested in pursuing research than practicing medicine.

As a grad student at UCLA, Jackson threw herself into sociological research and soon gravitated towards a community of inspiring scholars at the California Center for Population Research. “Like the PSTC, it’s part of a national network of demographic research centers that are all connected” in terms of supporting scholars in the field, she explains. In 2007, after earning her PhD from UCLA, she moved on to a postdoc position at Princeton in its Office of Population Research, housed in the School of Public and International Affairs.

“By the time I was applying for jobs, being part of this community was really integral to my home within the field of sociology,” Jackson says. “So it was important to me to teach at a university that has that same infrastructure intellectually.” Since its founding in 1965, Brown’s PSTC has established a strong international reputation as an interdisciplinary population studies research center with an outstanding training program in demography. Jackson has been an enthusiastic faculty affiliate of the center since she returned to Brown as an assistant professor in 2009, meaning that along with fellow colleagues in such departments as Sociology, Economics, Anthropology, and

Being part of the population studies community was really integral to my home within the field of sociology. So it was important to me to teach at a university that has that same infrastructure intellectually.

Public Health, she has participated in talks, trainings, colloquia, workshops, and inspiring intellectual exchange while also benefiting from PSTC support for grant applications. From 2022–24, she served as its associate director, helping to recruit the best postdocs, running the PhD and postdoctoral training program, and organizing a seminar series and a robust set of methods workshops for students.

Jackson became director of the PSTC in 2024, responsible for both high-level oversight of the center and adhering to the general expectations that come with its funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). As one of the professors who has been integrally involved in the MSDA program since its formation a decade ago, she’s also especially excited to help introduce new PSTC workshops and other special events especially tailored towards master’s candidates.

“One of the strengths of our MSDA program is that it was built from a highly successful doctoral training program in the PSTC,” Jackson says. “When we were creating it, we designed a degree program that wouldn’t feel like a stand-alone, siloed” course of study that restricted interactions to other master’s students. “We intentionally integrated it into our cutting-edge demographic training program, so what that means for MSDA students is that they take classes with PhD candidates and have the opportunity to—in one year—take a lot of the skills-based coursework that is identical to what these doctoral students do over six years.”

During her five-year term as director, Jackson intends to work with colleagues to offer more noncredit short courses and workshops through the PSTC on topics ranging from survey design to modeling techniques, focus groups, and other areas of interest to master’s candidates. “Every semester we already offer at least three workshops that run from three hours to a full day and are taught by experts in a particular technique,” Jackson says. In expanding this, she hopes to offer MSDA and other students “formal exposure to skills or methods that may not require a semester-long commitment. ▶▶▶



cover: illustration by imaginima / Stockphoto | left: background illustration by Larysa Tsyvinska / Stockphoto | right: illustration by Clempes Design / Alamy Stock Vector | above: photo courtesy of Margot Jackson



▶▶▶ **CHILD-FOCUSED RESEARCH**

In addition to directing the PSTC, Jackson continues to teach core courses in Sociology, along with classes such as *Legacies of Inequality* and *Unequal from Birth: Child Health from a Social Perspective*, both of which tie in to her own areas of research. Since completing her dissertation, titled *Short- and Long-Term Social Determinants and Consequences of Children’s Health*, she has focused on the study of poverty and inequality among children and families in the US, and the role of childhood circumstances in contributing to intra- and intergenerational inequality. In the process, she has co-authored numerous chapters and articles published in *American Sociological Review*, *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *Demography*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Social Forces*, *Social Science and Medicine*, and *Social Science Research*, among other publications.

Most recently, Jackson has focused on the effects of public policies on the behaviors and outcomes of children and families—or as she puts it, on whether “the generosity of the welfare state manifests at the level of the child.”

Collaborating with colleagues at the Urban Institute, a policy think tank in Washington, DC, Jackson helped generate the State-by-State Spending on Kids Dataset, a longitudinal database spanning from the 1990s to the present that measures expenditures in all 50 states on 25 different programs relevant to children in the areas of health (programs like Medicaid, CHIP, the earned income tax credit, SNAP, housing support). “My interest is then linking the state-level data to vital statistics data that contain the universe of births in the US across this period,” she says. “I look at how the generosity of the safety net in the area of, say, income support or health insurance affects the likelihood of low birth weight, preterm birth, those types of outcomes.”

What have Jackson and her colleagues discovered so far? “We find pretty strong and consistent evidence that the greater the generosity of safety net benefits, the more children benefit—and there are particularly large benefits for children in economically disadvantaged families,” she reports. Now she’s looking to “expand our way of thinking about generosity” beyond state-level expenditures and is working with researchers at the Brookings Institute (another think tank) “to combine our measure of

We find pretty strong and consistent evidence that the greater the generosity of safety net benefits, the more children benefit...

expenditures with a measure they’ve been working on, which is the household benefit amount—the amount of money that a typical family with a certain profile (income, family structure) would be eligible to receive in a particular state and year.”

Although she didn’t end up in medical school as originally planned, Jackson has maintained her lifelong interest in public health as it pertains to children and families. And now that she has two young children of her own, nothing could feel more relevant to her day-to-day life than monitoring the wellbeing of other families throughout the country striving to provide their kids what they need to thrive. ■■

Analyzing the Complexity of Social Networks



FRESH FROM EARNING HIS PHD AT HARVARD, Derick Baum joined the Sociology faculty in fall 2024 as a quantitative research methods fellow. MSDA program directors are excited that in addition to pursuing his own research during his two-year postdoc appointment, he is introducing students to cutting-edge methodologies through a new course called *Introduction to Social Network Analysis*.

“Throughout grad school, I taught courses on quantitative methods, which is where my passion lies—teaching this material to social science students,” Baum says. “So it’s really exciting to get to design my own course here at Brown.”

Baum, who grew up in Brazil and speaks English with a wonderfully lilting accent, first got smitten with social network analysis as an undergrad at the University of California–Santa Barbara. Although he started out as a film major (“I really like films and watch a lot of them,” he says with a smile), once he found the coursework disappointing he began taking random classes that sounded more interesting to him. One on social network analysis—“taught by a very influential person in the field, as I found out later”—immediately struck a chord for helping him make sense of “complex social dynamics that are hard to understand.” That felt meaningful and relevant, and proved to be “a defining moment” in his academic career, leading to a double major in sociology and math at UC, followed by six years of graduate work at Harvard, where he earned recognition as a Presidential Scholar. ▶▶▶

above: photo by Bob Ebbesen / Alamy Stock Photo | left: photos courtesy of Brown’s Department of Sociology

illustration based on image by Jozsef Bagota / Alamy Stock Vector | photo courtesy of Derick Baum

Connecting Outside of Class



Every year Sociology students and faculty members get together for several purely social events, including our annual fall and spring receptions.

CLASS OF 2025

COHORT SIZE **23**

AVERAGE AGE **23**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN **China, Singapore, Turkey, United States**

UNDERGRAD STUDY

Beijing Normal University, Boston University, Brown, California Polytechnic State University, Communication University of China, Hampshire College, Hong Kong Baptist University, Macau University of Science and Technology, National University of Singapore, New York University, Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers University, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Syracuse University, United International College, University of California – San Diego, University of California – Santa Barbara, University of Connecticut, University of Reading, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

UNDERGRAD MAJOR

Accounting, Business, Communications, Decision Sciences, Economics, Finance, International Business, International and Public Affairs, Languages and Literatures, Linguistics, Marketing, Psychology, Sociology

AT A GLANCE



“We all go through this all our lives,” Baum points out. “We have relationships with a bunch of different people, these relationships change over time, we form new relationships, we meet new people... and social network analysis is just a formal way of studying this, quantifying these relationships, analyzing how they change over time. And what drew me to this was that a lot of social science research kind of aggregates information about individuals from survey data, but the focus of social network analysis is to understand the behaviors

of people as a function of their social context and interdependence on other folks.”

Now Baum focuses on the methodological development and substantive applications of network analysis, meaning that he makes use of network data “to study inequality in social capital” due to variations in access to occupations and “the mechanisms behind disparities in network size between groups.” With his strong mathematical skills—honed through taking endless notes and puzzling through plenty of challenges in grad school—

Baum develops statistical models for using network data “to shed light on various social phenomena.”

In the new course he’s teaching in spring 2025, Baum is introducing MSDA students to social network analysis through an emphasis on hands-on, applied learning. As his syllabus explains, “the first part of the course emphasizes descriptive network analysis, covering basic statistics for describing networks, approaches to visualizing network data, measures of the centrality of individual units within a network, and methods for detecting network subgroups.” A series of problem sets throughout the semester gives students the opportunity to get comfortable using the R programming language to analyze network data. “Later we focus on statistical methods for network inference,” Baum explains, which accommodate the complex structure of interdependencies in network data. Among the methodologies introduced at this point in the course are exponential random graph models (ERGMs), network autocorrelation models, and stochastic actor-oriented models (SAOMs).

We all go through this all our lives. We have [changing] relationships with... people... but the focus of social network analysis is to understand the behaviors of people as a function of their social context and interdependence on other folks.

Within days of arriving on campus, Baum says he immediately felt at home, finding it easy to connect with faculty members and playing pool with grad students on Friday evenings. “It’s nice to have time to focus on my own research, to finish ongoing projects,” he says. But he finds the community itself an even bigger draw. “My office is in the Population Training and Studies Center (PTSC), where there are weekly events, people get feedback on their papers. It’s a real community, with both students and faculty participating,” he says, adding: “I expected that coming to Brown would be a good opportunity, but I’m surprised that it’s even better than I could have imagined.” ■

photo illustration by Anna Bekkur / Alamy Stock Photo

illustration by Panther Media / Alamy Stock Photo

SELECTED MSDA COURSES

ADVANCED ELECTIVES OPTIONS

- ▶ Techniques of Demographic Analysis
- ▶ Focus Groups for Market and Social Research
- ▶ Context Research for Innovation
- ▶ Qualitative Methods
- ▶ Ethnography: Theory and Practice
- ▶ Geographical Analysis of Society
- ▶ Spatial Thinking in Social Science
- ▶ Text as Data for Social Science Research
- ▶ Event History Analysis
- ▶ Introduction to Social Network Analysis
- ▶ Statistical Methods for Hierarchical and Panel Data
- ▶ Causal Analysis
- ▶ R for Data Analysis
- ▶ Computational Methods for Social Scientists
- ▶ Applications in Geographic Information Systems
- ▶ Spatial Thinking in the Social Sciences

COURSE HIGHLIGHT



TEXT AS DATA FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

In describing his popular new course available to MSDA students, post-doctoral fellow **Tiziano Rotesi** notes that “the explosion of accessible digital text is rapidly changing the work of researchers interested in studying culture, decision making, and human interaction. For example, the narratives, debates, laws, and opinions that form the core of political discourse are predominantly text-based, emphasizing the need to understand what is being communicated and written.” Since these data provide a totally different way of approaching social science research, his graduate-level course provides students with a hands-on learning experience full of practical skills for text analysis.

The course covers a wide range of topics, including data collection strategies and ethical considerations related to text analysis. From the perspective of social science researchers, it explores various methods to discover patterns, measure variables of interest, and assess causal relationships using textual data. Through theoretical discussions, engagement with recent literature, and practical exercises, students gain the necessary knowledge and expertise to effectively analyze text data in their own research. The course also looks at recent research that develops and applies machine learning tools and causal inferences to address questions of interest in social science research.

The explosion of accessible digital text is rapidly changing the work of researchers interested in studying culture, decision making, and human interaction.

Rotesi is an applied microeconomist from Italy with a joint appointment at Brown’s Population Studies and Training Center (PSTC) and the Data Science Institute. He earned his PhD in Economics from Bocconi University in Italy and is interested in the mechanisms that guide how individuals interpret data, form beliefs, and evaluate policies. In his research, he has studied the impact of narratives on public discourse, racial discrimination, and attitudes toward immigration. He is also interested in improving existing methodologies for accurately measuring these narratives in text.

“The applications of text analysis are broad and impactful,” Rotesi tells students, providing the ability to analyze everything from news reports to social media posts in order “to understand public sentiment and opinion.”

Seeing Things Differently



EVEN AS A CHILD, Chouaib Elhajjaji ScM '23 remembers that he didn't quite fit in as he was growing up in Tunisia's deep south. None of the societal roles readily available appealed to him, but he recognized an inchoate inner force driving him to find a different path—to find his own way. "I didn't want to live an empty life," he says in earnest. "I want to have at least a small added value—to make a positive impact."

For Elhajjaji, his quest to find a fulfilling way of life led first to Tunis, the capital city, where he studied at the American University in North of Africa. There he began supplementing the scholarships he depended on by working his way through school. Despite his passion for poetry and affinity for issues-oriented work supporting human rights and sustainable energy—which he did throughout his undergraduate studies—he chose a "very practical" double major in business management and marketing. After graduation, he continued working for LMDK, the Tunisian communications agency that initially enticed him to focus on "the grand cause" of advocacy work—and where he now serves as head of research, analysis and communications strategy.

As an undergrad, Elhajjaji's pragmatic approach to higher education led him to build on his bilingual upbringing in Arab and French by adding English—a language that has become increasingly useful in the business realm in northern Africa. His mastery of multiple languages soon began to pay off, with English serving him especially well once he began the arduous process of applying for a Fulbright grant for graduate study in the US. At the height of the pandemic, Elhajjaji scrambled to prepare for the necessary GRE and TOEFL exams to get

into American grad schools. The intense preparation led to his earning both the Fulbright sponsorship and a spot at Brown starting in fall 2021.

In Tunisia, Elhajjaji had naturally gravitated towards interdisciplinary studies and been "intrigued by the concept of intersectionality," an approach to understanding the social, political, and economic landscape in Tunisia and the wider world that aligns with his own proclivities. Looking to further his studies outside the political constraints of his homeland, he was attracted to Brown's MSDA program because of its heavy emphasis on methodology over theory. "I knew I already had the substantive knowledge," he explains, "but I didn't know anything about methodology. So I thought, 'Even if I don't know coding and might end up hating social analytical methods, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.'"

The degree is about so much more than sociology. It's much bigger than that.... It gives you the tools to explore and be unbiased about knowledge, and leaves you feeling like you can find a solution to anything.

Shortly after he seized that opportunity and began the program at Brown, Elhajjaji hit a major setback: He got very sick towards the end of first semester and, given the intensity of the program, quickly fell behind. Worried about his inability to keep up with the workload while dealing with his illness, Elhajjaji turned to MSDA Program Head **David Lindstrom** for advice. Fortunately, "David was really there for me," he says. "He listened to me, and when I was questioning whether this field was right for me, he gave it to me straight. It's not for the weak, he said, but he inspired me and really believed in me."

Elhajjaji attributes his newfound ability "to see things differently" and more holistically to pivotal courses he took at Brown such as *Geographic Information Systems*, *Spatial Analysis for the Social Sciences*, and *Mixed Methods*. "For me, taking mixed methods courses instead of focusing on one side of research was extremely helpful," he says. As an MSDA student, "you're exposed to advanced research and analysis methods that are all completely different," an experience he found very intellectually stimulating. "And you get so much dense knowledge in every course," he adds.

Elhajjaji is now close to completing an MBA and holds an executive position at LMDK as head of both research and analysis and communications strategy/creative direction for the organization's multifaceted advocacy work in the areas of development, entrepreneurship, sustainable ecosystems, social justice, human rights, and green energy, among others. That means he may be tapping into analytical tools to track hate speech or gentrification while at the same time overseeing the launch of a complex website on Tunisia's green hydrogen strategy by helping his team to shape and optimize content and deliver the best possible UX experience.

"Without the rigor of the experience at Brown, I wouldn't have been able to push myself to do the work I do now," Elhajjaji explains. "The degree is about so much more than sociology. It's much bigger than that. It makes you work ten times more efficiently than if you went through a regular master's program and it equips you for managing yourself. It gives you the tools to explore and be unbiased about knowledge, and leaves you feeling like you can find a solution to anything."

Looking ahead, Elhajjaji hopes to further his education by earning a PhD from a university in Europe and settle somewhere abroad—in a country more supportive of his own personal and professional growth. "I don't want to earn a lot of money and live in a big house," he admits. "But I do want to build a bridge between academia and what's happening in the field"—while continuing to advocate for social justice. And in the meantime, he's keeping his global options open and has launched an educational consultancy in Tunis where he offers "free services for disadvantaged students so they can understand how to find scholarships and get into school and navigate college life," either at home or abroad. 🌍

Atypical Grad on Her Way Up



AFTER BEING GRANTED A "FULL RIDE" at the University of South Florida, **Jasmine DiLorenzo** ScM '24 became the first person in her family to graduate from college—and suddenly began wondering what was next. She had completed a major in psychology with a minor in criminology, but hadn't yet settled on a career path. "I definitely liked the lifestyle I had in college and knew I wanted to keep working to access upward mobility," DiLorenzo explains. Having earned her undergraduate degree debt-free, she wanted to be equally strategic about next steps and avoid taking out student loans for grad school. "When you go without for so long," she says, "you become creative about how you're going to access resources and make enough money to support yourself."

DiLorenzo had been born and raised in Rhode Island before her parents moved the family to Florida when she was in high school. Eager to return north, she applied for jobs in Providence, and soon landed a position as a project coordinator at the family courthouse. That entailed more research than she had anticipated or felt fully equipped to handle, but it got her thinking. Remembering how much Brown had loomed large as she was growing up, she soon applied to the university—not as a grad student but as an employee. Six months after she began working as a re-

Working full time while enrolled was challenging but rewarding. I was really learning on the job every day and being supported by my coursework.

search assistant at Brown's School of Public Health, she seized the opportunity to take tuition-free courses while working full time for the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies.

"At first I just wanted to strengthen my knowledge and skills so I could be a better research assistant," DiLorenzo explains. But the Sociology courses she had begun taking—one a semester—soon "turned into a passion" as she discovered direct connections between her studies and the intense human-centered work she was doing with clinical trial participants. Courses in sociological theory and research methods helped her better understand the "why" behind addictive behavior and "ignited a fire" in her to continue to take targeted classes in Sociology. "In retrospect I realize I was looking for a mixed methods approach but didn't even know what that term meant at the time," DiLorenzo says. Once she felt certain that the MSDA program would be the right fit for her, she was crestfallen when she initially failed the *Introductory Statistics for Social Research* prerequisite essential to further study in the field.

That's when she began meeting with Program Director **David Lindstrom** (who teaches the introductory stats course) to discuss her goals and whether or not she was in over her head. "His confidence in my abilities gave me the push I needed ▶▶▶

MARKETPLACE Alumni at Work

MSDA graduates contribute to a wide range of fields, from education and other nonprofit areas to entertainment, finance, marketing, technology, and more. Alumni are currently working at:

- ADMERASIA
- American Express
- American Institutes of Research
- Bento
- BioCentury, Inc.
- CharterUP
- DataReady DFW
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Entertainment + Culture Advisors (ECA)
- EQ.app
- Fastmarkets Metals and Mining
- GAC Motor
- HBO Max
- International Monetary Fund
- JOOR
- Keybridge Public Policy Economics
- Link Logistics Real Estate
- Lenovo
- LMDK Agency
- Marketade
- MetrixLab
- Microsoft
- NewGlobe
- Sony
- The Brattle Group
- UBS Shanghai
- United Way
- Weber Shandwick
- Yale University

Left: photo courtesy of Chouaib Elhajjaji | Right: photo courtesy of Jasmine DiLorenzo



My own lived experience prepared me well for [the] research I'm doing now, but Brown gave me a more formal lens for understanding it and [working with] marginalized communities.

▶▶▶ to be successful," she says, noting that with his one-on-one help and that of TAs and a co-worker, she got a B when she repeated the stats course the following semester. "Dr. Lindstrom's mentorship and support throughout my time at Brown," she says, "is something I'll remember for the rest of my life."

All told, it took DiLorenzo five years to complete the program requirements for the master's. "Working full time while enrolled was challenging but rewarding," she admits. But "the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data feeds in nicely" with her natural propensity for self-reflection and investigation. "I was really learning on the job every day and being supported by my coursework," she says. "It was truly an amazing experience."

In addition to her great respect for Lindstrom, DiLorenzo says that "all of the faculty members in the program left a lasting impression." Professor **Laura Lopez-Sanders**, in particular, "is inspiring beyond words," she says. "She treats each student with respect and uplifts them, holding students to a high scholarly standard without overwhelming them."

Alumni Networking

As our program has grown over the past decade, so, too, has our extended family of alumni. Every year several recent graduates join us for a panel discussion to introduce current students to various career opportunities available to them. Speakers talk about how they use the skills they developed through the MSDA program in the workplace and answer students' questions about job opportunities. The networking among members of our community also continues through our growing group on LinkedIn. Please contact Associate Program Director **Carrie Spearin (see contact info on back page) if you would like to participate in our fall 2025 alumni panel presentation.**



Jasmine DiLorenzo ScM '24 analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact of unrestricted funding on nonprofits dedicated to opening opportunities for underserved populations in Providence, RI.

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Now working as a data analyst for the Providence Equity Fund, a collaboration between the city and the United Way, DiLorenzo analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact of unrestricted funding on nonprofits dedicated to improving social and racial equity, economic mobility, and educational opportunities for underserved populations in Providence. "We're doing reparative justice work in the context of trust-based philanthropy," she says. So it's important to be able to share research data in transparent ways that are intelligible to the communities providing it. She points to MSDA courses such as *Multivariate Statistical Methods*, *Ethnography: Theory and Methods*, *Focus Groups for Market and Social Research*, and *Context Research for Innovation* as being particularly apropos to the work she does now. "It's one thing to read about poverty as a student," DiLorenzo points out, "but it's very different to grow up under resourced. My own lived experience prepared me well for taking on the type of research I'm doing now, but Brown gave me a more formal lens for understanding it and the shared experiences of marginalized communities in Providence."

DiLorenzo says that given her lifelong love of education, she's likely to pursue a PhD in the field in order to push her knowledge to the next level and lead data initiatives that prioritize community-driven solutions to systemic inequities.

"I see myself continuing to work at the intersection of research and advocacy, helping organizations design equitable policies based on data that amplifies marginalized voices," DiLorenzo says. "My ultimate goal is to be part of something bigger than myself, to create systems where data serves as a tool for empowerment and I can ensure that the stories behind the numbers are communicated transparently and make a positive impact on both society at large and the people who need it the most."

When speaking to prospective students, DiLorenzo recommends the MSDA program to "anyone who wants to use data as a force for good. It's not just about learning technical skills," she says. "For me it was always about learning how to tell stories that inspire change and how to collaborate with communities in meaningful ways. If you're ready to approach data with both rigor and empathy, this program will be a transformative experience." ■■

Unafraid of the Unknown

WHEN HE FIRST LEFT HOME, Folarin Bandele ScM '22 was still a teenager living in Lagos, Nigeria, and like many of his peers, he was totally into soccer—a game that has helped him feel at home living on multiple continents. Halfway through his high school studies, he was invited to join the first class of international students to attend the United World College (UWC) in Changshu, China. It was an opportunity he couldn't pass up, so even though the culture shock of moving from Lagos to Changshu was significant, Bandele threw himself into his studies, played soccer with classmates from around the world, and got a crash course in Mandarin. "I'm not very good at languages," he laughs, but given the visual nature of the language and the total immersion of living in China for two years, he found it easier to pick up than the Spanish and French he had studied in Nigeria.

Once Bandele had earned his diploma—an international general certificate of higher education—from UWC, it was soccer that again prompted a move halfway around the globe. When his brother's coach at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota invited him to join the team, too, he readily accepted. At St. Olaf he balanced his ongoing love of the sport with studies in sociology and anthropology. But as Bandele was about to graduate, his college career counselors listened carefully to his interests and aspirations, and to his surprise, ultimately recommended pursuing what he describes as "the strange field of economic consulting." It was a field he had never heard of but decided to explore through a summer internship at the Washington, DC, office of The Brattle Group, a global economic consulting firm with multiple practices.

"I already knew that I wanted to continue on and get more education," Bandele says, so as it became clear during the internship that his undergraduate experience in qualitative research lacked the quantitative methodology he needed to really do the job well, he applied to master's programs in data analytics at Brown, New York University and the University of Rochester.

Once Bandele got accepted to all three programs, he made a phone call to MSDA Program Director **David Lindstrom** in search of more information. "Honestly, the one-year program was really attractive to me but after talking to David and looking carefully at the course offerings, Brown excited me the most," he says. "That's what really drew me to the program—courses in GIS, getting introduced to spatial, demographic and event history analysis, those classes really stood out." And although he admits that going over the sometimes cryptic and puzzling course descriptions was "a little bit scary" at that point, he quickly discovered that fellow students in his cohort "felt the same way. None of us really knew what we were getting into but we all jumped into the fire together—and we all came out alive!"

Bandele found the pace of the MSDA program to be "intense" but doable thanks to the "patience and generosity" of the faculty, all of whom he considers "really great professors to learn from" and speaks of with great fondness. The Sociology PhD students who work as TAs "are also super helpful," he reports. "During the lab sessions, they took the time to explain concepts we were learning in class and how they incorporated them in their own research."

Now based in Chicago, Bandele is a senior research analyst with the international arbitration practice group at Brattle, which provides expert testimony and analysis to inform court hearings and judicial rulings on cases involving breach of contracts, contract renewals, disputes regarding mergers and acquisitions, and so forth. "There's a direct correlation between what I studied at Brown and what I do now," he affirms, noting that the program helped prepare him for his current work in both broad and specific terms.

"One of the really great things about the MSDA program is the opportunity to do a practicum," Bandele says, which he did with Professor **Margot Jackson** (see page 1), helping her with data visualization for a book she was working on at the time. The two would have regular check-in meetings to talk about their work in progress and identify any problems or impasses, a practice he continues in his current position. "At Brown I also learned to feel comfortable about not knowing something, as happened multiple times in class, but still showing up and still trying," he says. "That perseverance is a skill that's useful in my current job."



None of us really knew what we were getting into but we all jumped into the fire together—and we all came out alive!

Bandele also values that he continues to learn on the job and notes that his position "really helps you know the industry." Now that he has been promoted to a senior analyst, his responsibilities have expanded to include helping to orient and train newer staff members. "As you teach people, you also learn more yourself," he acknowledges.

While still interning at Brattle in the summer of 2021, Bandele remembers thinking, "I want to go to Brown and get as much knowledge as I can and get comfortable with the tools and then return and hopefully be a better research analyst at the company." Three and a half years later, he's happy to report that "it all really worked out." ■■

above: photo by Thomas Farlow / Alamy Stock Photo | left: photo courtesy of Brown's Department of Sociology

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



BROWN

Department of Sociology

WHY CHOOSE THE SOCIAL DATA ANALYTICS PROGRAM AT BROWN?

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