

## Alumni Profile

### Matthew Mahutga – Sociology PhD Program



#### Career

Please provide a brief overview of your career path since graduating from UCI.

*I left UCI with a PhD. in Sociology in the spring of 2008. I started a tenure-track position at the University of California, Riverside in the fall of the same year. In 2013, I started the UCR Political Economy Seminar (<http://ucrpoliticaleconomy.ucr.edu>) with my Political Science Colleague Jana Grittersova. I received tenure in 2014, and spent a quarter doing research at the Berlin Social Science Center in 2015.*

*At UCR, I continued the research program I started at UCI. I examine both the causes of economic globalization, and its consequences for a range of socio-economic and political outcomes. For example, some of my papers examine impact of globalized production networks on economic development. Others focus on the impact of these same phenomena for the distribution of income in both rich and poor countries. A more recent project examines the political implications of economic globalization by examining the conditions under which rising imports from poor countries positively impact right-wing parties (and negatively impact left-wing parties) in rich democracies. This work appears in numerous scholarly journals and was supported in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation. You can read all of my work here <http://matthewcm.ucr.edu>.*

How do you hope to make a difference?

*This is a great question, and something I think more about as I age. I certainly hope to make a difference in the lives of my students. I can think of one or two that I helped finish their undergraduate degree and earn decent/redemptive jobs. I can think of a handful more that I encouraged to, and helped, enter graduate programs. But I would like to do more. Fortunately, UCR is chalk full of talented individuals from under-represented racial and socio-economic backgrounds. Unfortunately, the state's decades long withdraw from public education has made it increasingly difficult to get to know any of them (my smallest class an upper-division "seminar" with about 80 students). And, it is a biological fact that I look older/whiter every year, and a social fact that my jokes are more dated every year. Thus I must admit that I feel my influence is waning. But I want to invest more. Please email me if you have suggestions ([mattm@ucr.edu](mailto:mattm@ucr.edu)).*

#### Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

2002-2008

What program were you in?

*Sociology*

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

*I don't have a good answer for this. It was close to the beach and had expertise in my areas of interest (global political economy).*

## **Reflections**

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

*I was raised by a single mother. We were poor. I was not a good student. I had a ~2.0 GPA when I left high school, and little intentions of college. After a year of getting what that got me, I enrolled in community colleges before transferring to an urban four-year institution with little in the way of an academic reputation. But I realized that I liked my classes at community college and did well. At my four-year institution, a now retired Professor of African American Studies (CJ White) pulled me aside after grading our in-class midterms and asked me if I'd ever considered graduate school. I stared blankly at him and explained that I had not and didn't even know what it was. That was the beginning of a long mentoring relationship between he and I. He encouraged me to pursue my intellectual interests through my institution's individualized degree program, and used his networks/resources to secure me a job in the tutoring center. He also allowed me to serve as a "TA" (it was very informal) for one of his larger undergraduate courses. This relationship gave me the confidence to trust that I had a sincere, internally-driven motivation for my subject matter and to believe I could earn a graduate degree. I will forever be grateful to Dr. White, and pay it forward whenever I see the same potential that he saw in me.*

## **Alumni Life**

How did your education at UCI benefit you in your current life?

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who is just getting started with their graduate career at UCI? (Examples – *Podcast: Happier with Gretchen Rubin*; *Book: Who Moved my Cheese*)

<https://heterodoxacademy.org/half-hour-of-heterodoxy/>

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who has just graduated and is transitioning to the working world? (Examples – *The First 90 Days*)

<https://heterodoxacademy.org/half-hour-of-heterodoxy/>

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

*For the new graduate student, I would encourage them to hold loosely to their presuppositions upon entering graduate school. In my first year, David Meyer (then graduate director) told us (my cohort) that we were making a big transition from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge. It took a long while for the real meaning of that to sink in, but eventually I took it to mean that I bear a tremendous responsibility when I research and publish (it also meant that graduate school was a fundamentally different animal to my undergraduate experience in terms of acquiring the requisite skills for success, but that's another story). Why? Because certainly other academics, probably students and maybe the general public should and will take my findings as an accurate (more or less) statement of the reality of things. And, some will use my findings to formulate their own research agendas, career goals and political attitudes/behavior, at least in part. That is a lot of responsibility. I would also say that, if one does graduate school right, they will become exposed to a much larger world than they believed exist upon entering. A UCI mentor (A Kimball Romney) once told me that, for him at least, his cumulative social-scientific discoveries only convinced him of how little he actually knew. I must say my (much shorter) experience is the same.*

What advice would you give to a current graduate student as they look towards their future careers?

*For students who wish to enter academia, I would say two things. First, the academic job market is much tougher now than it was when I entered it (Fall of 2007; the year before the financial collapse). There was a whole five-year cohort (at least) of PhDs that either found no job or were "under-placed" in the period from 2008-2012. Since then, we've had a slow rebounding of open positions, but there are (probably) more than twice as many folks looking for each job than in 2007. You will be competing against both your contemporaries and a lot of really smart people who had a head start on you. And, the baby-boomers are retiring much more slowly than everyone thought they would. So it is really important that you produce high quality research that is marketable. Be clear on what methodological and theoretical rigor mean in your areas of interest, and learn how to speak to a broad sociological audience. The second is that you shouldn't go into academia unless you absolutely love research and teaching. However busy you feel now, you will be **much** busier in a tenure-track position. And your workload **increases** as you progress through the ranks.*

How do you balance work/life?

*This is really important. I am very intentional about doing this, but my strategies have changed over time. I try to collect mentors (both professional and "other") who are willing to listen and share their thoughts on my problems. I try to draw a pretty crisp boundary between work and non-work time (this has gotten easier with time). For example, I almost never work on weekends and try to resist the temptation to check email when I am engaged in non-work related activities. But perhaps the most important piece of this for me was realizing that who I am and what I do are not the same thing. This helps me accept scholarly criticism and relate with the rest of the world as a normal human being.*