

Research Assistant in Social Media Analysis Methods

Fixed term for 8 months - Full time

Job Ref: REQ221734

As part of the University's ongoing commitment to redeployment, please note that this vacancy may be withdrawn at any stage of the recruitment process if a suitable redeployee is identified.

We are looking for an enthusiastic Research Assistant with strong interests in social media research, data science, and ethical information management, with a background in (computational) social science or related fields within information science. This role is based at the School of Business and Economics (SBE), Loughborough University campus, although much of the work can and will happen virtually. The postholder will work on an exciting and timely research project: [SCERN – Smart Citizens Enabling Resilient Neighbourhoods](#), and besides working with the team at Loughborough, will also virtually collaborate with other key project partners who are based in Canada (Ontario) and Switzerland (Zurich).

Since 2014, the SCERN team has collaborated to develop innovative methods for urban resilience planning that integrate fine-grained sentiment analysis of geo-social media data in urban settings, as well as community engagement and research to understand local drivers of chronic stress and resilience in urban areas. Our work has drawn on methods from information science, health geography, community and cyber psychology, and public health. Learn more about the SCERN project and team here <https://specialprojects.wlu.ca/scern/>

Job Description

Job Grade: Specialist and Supporting Academic Grade 5

This position is based within the School of Business and Economics, Loughborough University.

Project Description:

Smart Citizens Enabling Resilient Neighbourhoods (SCERN) is an applied research project that will create timely and accessible methods incorporating social media based forms of citizen expression to build knowledge about health, social harms and resilience at the individual and community levels. The project is funded by a grant from the New Frontiers in Research Fund (Rapid Response) and is focused on development of innovative and novel methods of data access and analysis to expand the ability to use digital social platforms as a tool to measure/map stress and resilience, and the responsible and ethical study of interactive effects of physical and digital places, in the context of smart cities. Many social and health indicators suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted some communities more than others, and in profoundly different ways. Pandemic responses, such as stay at-home orders, social distancing and isolation requirements, and impacts on business and employment opportunities, have accentuated harm in already vulnerable communities, and created new harm in other communities. The pandemic has also shed new light on how communities can be resilient and the importance of public and digital places for social interactions, information, recreation, economic activity, and wellbeing. Hence, innovative methods are urgently needed to allow researchers to study such digital places.

Job Purpose

The Research Assistant will support the project by developing and testing relevant digital social platform data collection and analysis approaches; anticipating challenges and troubleshoot solutions; helping to monitor performance of methods in the case study (City of Hamilton, a project partner); and assisting in the documentation of methods for wider dissemination and project activities.

The successful candidate will contribute to the development of a mixed methods approach for integrating geo-social media data and other relevant contextual information to help learn about local drivers of chronic stress and resilience, across communities. A particular focus will be the study of vulnerable communities and potential algorithmic biases, to help ensure algorithmic/analytical equity. A detailed thematic/semantic analysis will be employed, as well as relevant data and innovative approaches to ethical and responsible data collection from digital social platforms about neighborhoods. Approaches allowing collection of historic interactions with online and offline places will be gathered through donations of digital data from participants including their social media posts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yelp) and other information about their digital places (e.g., Google and Maps search histories). Throughout the project activities, the Research Assistant will have opportunities for contributing to research outputs, including peer-reviewed publications and presentations; and participating in interdisciplinary and international meetings with research team members and knowledge users.

Job Duties

- To review existing project documents, academic research, and digital social platforms in-order to identify most relevant data-sources for the project and Hamilton city-specific (Ontario, Canada) case study.
- To assist in drafting guidelines for participant-driven data donations across a range of digital platforms.
- To investigate data export formats across relevant digital social platforms (i.e., data donations), and consider approaches for integrating such data for the project. This may include identifying/applying tools for their automated analysis and/or assisting the supervisory team in their development.
- To conduct a thematic/semantic social media content analysis that captures pandemic-related resilience/hope and stress/anxiety expressions in Hamilton (and other) locales
- To contribute to project initiatives for integrating digital social platform data, social media analysis and community ethnography across other project efforts, including the design of a participatory mapping app (led/primarily conducted by the other project partners).
- To assist in the development of a prototype dashboard that would facilitate users, city officials and project stakeholders to understand key elements of smart citizen communities.
- To assist in evaluating social media data analytics approaches, and citizen/community mapping apps.
- To assist in project management duties, feedback on project progress and prepare reports.
- To participate in relevant professional development and training activities.
- To assist in writing academic journal and conference paper/papers.
- To undertake the project work in a professional and ethically responsible manner.

Points To Note

The purpose of this job description is to indicate the general level of duties and responsibility of the post. The detailed duties may vary from time to time without changing the general character or level of responsibility entailed.

Special Conditions

All staff have a statutory responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves, others and the environment and to prevent harm by their acts or omissions. All staff are therefore required to adhere to the University's Health, Safety and Environmental Policy & Procedures.

All staff should hold a duty and commitment to observing the University's Equality & Diversity policy and procedures at all times. Duties must be carried out in accordance with relevant Equality & Diversity legislation and University policies/procedures.

Successful completion of probation will be dependent on attendance at the University's mandatory courses which include Respecting Diversity and, where appropriate, Recruitment and Selection.

Organisational Responsibility

Reports to

Dr Martin Sykora

Dr Suzanne Elayan

Person Specification

Your application will be reviewed with respect to meeting the essential and desirable criteria listed below. Applicants are strongly advised to explicitly state and evidence how they meet each of the essential (and desirable) criteria in their application. Stages of assessment are as follows:

- 1 – Application
- 2 – Interview

Essential Criteria

Area	Criteria	Stage
Experience	Good knowledge of social media platforms and their affordances	1, 2
	Experience in using social media analytics tools	1, 2
	Good knowledge of at least one data manipulation tool, such as R Tidyverse, Tableau, Power BI or Excel PivotTables.	1, 2
	Good knowledge of project planning	1, 2
	Report writing	1, 2
	Experience of reviewing academic literature	1, 2
Skills and abilities	Excellent written and communication skills	2
	Interest in social media platforms and related ethical issues	
	Ability to work independently, plan own work and work to deadlines	1, 2
	Excellent interpersonal and organizational skills	1, 2
	Excellent teamwork skills	1, 2
Qualifications	Masters' degree or similar in information/social/computer science subject area	1
Other	Evidence of a good working knowledge of equal opportunities and understanding of diversity in the workplace	1, 2
	Willingness to take further training on research methods and techniques relevant to the project	1, 2

Desirable Criteria

Area	Criteria	Stage
Experience	Experience in using R Tidyverse for data analysis. Further experience with R Shiny and/or R Markdown would be highly desirable	1, 2
	Experience in social media data collection approaches, such as interacting with official public REST APIs to retrieve social data	1, 2
	Experience in writing academic publications (e.g., journal papers, conference papers)	1, 2
	Experience of qualitative methods (content and thematic analysis) and some quantitative methods (multiple regression analysis and related statistical approaches) knowledge and mixed-methods awareness.	1, 2

Conditions of Service

The position is FULL TIME and FIXED TERM for 8 MONTHS and will be 37 hours per week (1 FTE), from February/March to September/October/November 2023. Salary will be on Specialist and Supporting Academic (Research) Job Family, Grade 5, £26,396 - £31,411 per annum, at a starting salary to be confirmed on offer of appointment.

The appointment will be subject to the University's normal Terms and Conditions of Employment for Academic and Related staff, details of which can be found [here](#).

The University is committed to enabling staff to maintain a healthy work-home balance and has a number of family-friendly policies which are available at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/hr/a-z/family-leave-policy-and-procedure---page.html>.

We also offer an on-campus nursery with subsidised places, subsidised places at local holiday clubs and a childcare voucher scheme (further details are available at: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/hr/a-z/childcare-information---page.html>)

In addition, the University is supportive, wherever possible, of flexible working arrangements. We also strive to create a culture that supports equality and celebrates diversity throughout the campus. The University holds a Bronze Athena SWAN award which recognises the importance of support for women at all stages of their academic career. For further information on Athena SWAN see <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/hr/athena-swan/>

Informal enquiries should be sent to either Dr Martin Sykora at M.D.Sykora@lboro.ac.uk or Dr Suzanne Elayan at S.Elayan2@lboro.ac.uk

Applications

Closing date for receipt of applications is **1 February 2023**

Interviews will take place week commencing **13 February 2023**