A researcher is born

Undergrad sheds light on childhood poverty

This past spring, Laura Dague, '07, presented her honors thesis, "Impact of Four Labor Market Measures on Child Poverty Rates in the United States," at KU's annual Undergraduate Research Symposium, where her project won one of three top awards. During Dague's KU years, she received support from eight different KU Endowment scholarship funds, primarily the Farel R. Lobaugh Memorial Scholarship Fund, created in 1976.

I knew that if I decided to go to graduate school, I had to be sure about it. My advisor told me to think about completing an honors thesis as a way to get an idea of what grad school would be like.

I worked on my thesis with Donna Ginther, an associate professor of economics. She was great; it has been a big help to have someone around who is knowledgeable about the subject matter. She was able to offer advice dealing not only with my specific research, but also with my future plans.

I was interested in figuring out why poverty rates change and what makes them decrease or increase. For my research project, I wanted to focus on child poverty specifically because child poverty rates in the United States are significantly higher than the poverty rates for any other age group. It is sad because poverty is out of a child's control.

Some of the data I used, from the U.S. Census Bureau, were already constructed; some I constructed from a raw set. I took a close look at unemployment rates, female labor force participation rates and wage rates. I loved conducting the research and compiling the information.

Among my findings were that recent economic growth has not provided relief for children in poverty. Higher overall unemployment rates cause child poverty to increase. Also, the more women in the work force and the higher their salaries, the lower the child poverty rate.

My KU Endowment scholarships enabled me to devote a lot of time to my education and to this research thesis. I wouldn't be at KU if I hadn't gotten all of the scholarships that I did — I just can't imagine that.

This fall, I begin graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where I will start my Ph.D. in economics. Right now, I think I would like to be a research professor.

— Megan Lewis