

Former UNM sociology student wins award for dissertation

March 28, 2016

A Ph.D. graduate from The University of New Mexico Department of Sociology has been awarded a major prize for his dissertation by the University's Office of Graduate Studies.

Benjamin Waddell, Ph.D. in Sociology, was recently named the [2016 Tom L. Popejoy Dissertation Prize](#) recipient for his manuscript, "The Political Economy of Remittance-led Development in Guanajuato, Mexico." Completed in 2013, the dissertation combines ethnographic and statistical analysis to examine the long-term effects of mass emigration on migrant sending communities in central Mexico.

"I listened in disbelief as the department chair, Rich Wood, informed me that the committee had selected my dissertation for the award," said Waddell, who was pulling into the entrance of Mesa Verde National Park with wife, children and mother when he received the call. "It was a truly beautiful moment."

The Tom L. Popejoy Dissertation Prize was established as a permanent memorial to the late Tom L. Popejoy, President of The University of New Mexico from 1948 to 1968. The award recognizes and encourages the highest level of academic excellence and is given on a rotating basis. This year's award recognizes the best dissertation in the social sciences from the last three years.

Since leaving UNM, Waddell has gone on to become a faculty member at Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado. He credits his parents, neither of whom graduated college, for his academic success.

"My mother, in particular, spent endless hours with me working through homework assignments growing up," he said. "In middle school I even remember her studying ahead of me in my book during the day so that she could help me with my work in the evening. In this sense, she was the first of many great mentors that I have had the fortune of having by my side over the years."

Waddell's dissertation helps researchers understand how immigrants continue to influence their homelands and communities of origin even after they've moved away. His findings have important implications for migrant sending communities in Mexico as well as other parts of the world. In particular, Waddell's dissertation provides insight into how communities in Mexico can use remittances in their favor to improve the overall quality of life of those left behind.

Waddell said the study, and its success, would not have been possible without his dissertation committee, which included Richard Wood (Dept. of Sociology), Matias Fontenla (Dept. of Economics), Bob Fiala (Dept. of Sociology) and Manuel Garcia y Griego (Dept. of History).

For more information on awards offered through UNM's Office of Graduate Studies, visit their [website](#).