

Devpolicy Research Fellow wins Best Paper prize

by Stephen Howes
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Michelle Rooney, Research Fellow at the Development Policy Centre, was recently awarded the best student paper prize for 2016 by the [Association for Political and Legal Anthropology](#) (APLA) at the [American Anthropological Association](#) 115th annual meeting in Minneapolis, USA. Her paper was selected as the winner from a field of 46 submission internationally. Feedback on the paper noted that the paper provided a “nuanced analysis, which contributes to our understanding of citizenship, human rights, urban development, political ecology, and the paradoxes of the state.”

Michelle’s paper, drawing on her PhD thesis, was titled: *“We Do Not Qualify for Free Education”: Citizenship in The Segregated Political Economy of Service Delivery in Urban Papua New Guinea*. It drew on her research in a Port Moresby settlement and was based on a case study of the Christ the King Primary School in the ATS Settlement. It examined the efforts of the community to access education services and the contradictions of the PNG Government’s Tuition Fee-Free policy.

[According](#) to the APLA Paper Prize Committee:

“Rooney’s paper, which examines the harsh realities of social service delivery in Papua New Guinea, is characterized by methodological rigor, fine-grained ethnography and theoretical sophistication. Through participant observation and interviews with people living in illegal spaces, as well as NGO members, church members, and teachers who provide services that the state refuses to provide, she demonstrates the intricacies of patterns of inclusion and exclusion in Port Moresby. Her innovative portrayal reveals a “segregated political economy” in which those living in illegal settlements seek support from non-state actors to meet their needs, such as water and schools for their children. Through a multi-level analysis, she highlights the contradictions between the discourse of democracy, universality and human rights communicated through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the realities of the state service

provision and citizens' experiences. The paper draws upon a number of inter-disciplinary literatures and contributes to our understanding of citizenship, human rights, urban development, political ecology, and the paradoxes of the state."

The prize for winning this paper included US\$350 prize money and financial support to attend the conference. Michelle has donated the prize money to the Christ the King Primary School for their annual student awards for 2016 and 2017. The awards will go towards male and female students who demonstrate citizenship and leadership in their school community.

Read a blog about Michelle's research [here](#), and a story [here](#).

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/devpolicy-research-fellow-wins-best-paper-prize20161213/>