



## Sociology Newsletter

spring 2009

### SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS AND FACULTY ATTEND THE NORTH CENTRAL SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING



Becki Faunce presenting her senior research project at NCSA

On April 15-19, 2009, Sociology Department faculty including Susan Alexander, Leslie Wang, and Carrie Erlin accompanied three sociology majors to the North Central Sociological Association's annual meeting in Dearborn, MI. The students included senior sociology majors Ashley Bruce, Rebecca Faunce, and Anita Moo. The students presented their senior comprehensive research papers.

The theme of the 2009 NCSA meeting was "The Sociological Way of Looking at the World: Research, Teaching, and Application." Irving Zeitlin, Faculty Associate in the Centre for Ethics and Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto, gave the keynote talk titled "Education for Democracy in Pierce, James, Dewey, and Mead."

At this meeting, Susan Alexander was appointed the Public Relations Coordinator for NCSA. She is now responsible for all the media related projects for NCSA including editor of the *North Central Sociologist* (NCSA newsletter), the NCSA website (go to: <http://www.ncsanet.org/>), and all other media related projects.



### 2009 Donald N. M. Horning Senior Comprehensive Paper Award Recipient Anita M. Moo



Anita Moo is the recipient of the 2009 Donald N. M. Horning Award for the Outstanding Senior Comprehensive Research Project. Anita's paper is titled, "What Happened to Ch'i'ibalil ["family" in Mayan]? Changing Family Structures in Ucí, Yucatán."

According to Anita, the experience of an immigrant can be difficult. Previous researchers have told the story of immigrants living in the United States. However, the stories of family members who remain behind are largely untold. For many immigrants, extended family is a central component of their identity. Anita's study examines the changing family structures in Ucí, Yucatán, a result of migration from Mexico to the United States. Based upon interviews with long-time residents of Ucí, Yucatán, Anita found that for individuals who migrate from Ucí, family needs drives many to seek financial security in other places. Yet, the hope for a better financial future simultaneously separates families across a border, thus creating new family structures and relationships based upon a "border identity." Their stories relate the difficulties of being left behind when family members leave in search of financial opportunities.

## NEW SOCIOLOGY MAJOR STRUCTURE

The Sociology major and minor have been restructured this year. The major is now 34 credit hours and includes introductory level courses, core courses, courses that focus on "Social Institutions within the Social Structures," courses that focus on "Social Relationships: Structures of Power and Oppression," and a Sociology elective. In an effort to offer students with the most current sociological information, we are introducing a number of new sociology courses.

### NEW SOCIOLOGY COURSES: SOC 340 Juvenile Deviance and SOC 330 Gender and Law

by Carrie Erlin



Two new courses focusing on the sociology of law and criminology have been added to the Sociology Department curriculum.

Juvenile Deviance (SOC 340), which will be taught during the Fall 2009 semester, examines the intersection of deviance and age from a sociological perspective. We will approach deviance as a socially constructed concept, thus definitions of "deviance" change over time.

Any change in the definition of deviance allows sociologists to consider new ideas about what constitutes deviant action, who is labeled as deviant, and which laws should be enacted to "deal" with deviance to change as well. For example, in the 1800's it was not unusual for a 15-year-old child to marry and individuals who were not married at relatively young ages were considered to be acting outside the guidelines for normative social behavior. Today, there are laws in most states preventing the marriage of teenagers, at least without parental consent, and those who do marry very young are the ones most often considered deviant. While the Juvenile Deviance course looks at how criminal law deals with deviant actions of youth in cases of juvenile delinquency, the course also examines how non-criminal deviance, such as non-conforming behaviors, attitudes, and appearance trends can spark concern over 'deviant youth.'

An additional concept emphasized in the Juvenile Deviance course is how power and privilege influence definitions of deviance and deviant be-

havior, and how social concepts such as race, gender, and class shape what we believe to be deviant. For example, are girls judged – and therefore sentenced – differently than boys for the same criminal activity? Are certain groups more likely to be labeled deviant by the juvenile courts and by society? If so, how does a deviant label affect the children involved, particularly taking into consideration the developmental stage of the child in question?

A second sociology course rooted in law that has been added to the departmental course offerings is Gender and Law (SOC 330), which is also cross-listed as a Women's Studies course. This course will be taught during the Fall 2010 semester. Gender and Law explores how gender intersects with the construction and application of laws and policies, both civil and criminal. One area of examination is how the application of laws have influenced the social construction of gender. For example, historically rape within marriage was not considered a criminal activity. How did the removal of the marital rape exemption change social ideas of what the role of wife constituted and, in turn, how does this change affect other roles held by women?

Both of these courses include a strong applied component; students will examine multiple data sets, including statistics from the Bureau of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in order to assess whether theoretical ideas match actual outcomes concerning deviance and law. Additionally, pending resource availability, students will have the opportunities to visit prisons, jails, and courtroom settings in order to view abstract legal processes in concrete form.

## NEW SOCIOLOGY COURSE: SOC 345 Sociology of Poverty

By Mary Ann Kanieski

How is it that poverty flourishes in one of the wealthiest countries in the world? How do we define poverty? How does poverty impact people's lives? These are some of the questions students will explore in my new course on the Sociology of Poverty.

Last year, I taught an experimental course called "Interrogating Poverty: Race, Class, Gender and Globalization" to explore these questions. Because of the success of the course, I decided to create a permanent course which will be taught every two years. The new course will have the more simple title of "Sociology of Poverty" and will serve as a category two elective on Social Relationships for Sociology majors and minors.

The course will be cross-listed with Social Work

so that Sociology and Social Work students will have the opportunity to learn from each other.

In the course, students will learn about different measures of poverty, different explanations for poverty as well as possible solutions for poverty. I hope to invite some guest speakers who work on these issues to offer diverse points of view. By offering this course, I hope that someday there will be no need for a course on poverty, except maybe in the history department.



## NEW SOCIOLOGY COURSE: SOC 230 Social Inequality in Education by Leslie Wang



Education is both a social institution and an agent of socialization within sociology. A major focus of the newly approved Social Inequalities in Edu-

cation course is to analyze the differences in access and opportunities provided to subcultures; these include members belonging to different social classes, race/ethnicity, and gender within the United States. By using a sociological lens to constructively critique our education system by looking at social trends and patterns, the course will allow students to examine their own educational experi-

ences to those of the larger social world. Further, we will examine social programs and policies (Equality of Education Opportunity, Title IX, etc.) and court cases (Brown v. Board of Education, Affirmative Action, etc.) and provide a theoretical lens to understand their consequences. This course aims to attract students interested in sociology, education, and the intersection between the two fields of study. The course is also cross-listed with Inter-Cultural Studies.



**BEST WISHES  
FROM THE SOCIOLOGY FACULTY AND STAFF  
Mary Ann, Carrie, Kathy  
Leslie, and Susan**

# CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2009!

The SMC sociology class of 2009 includes (back row left to right):



Ashley Bruce  
Amanda Deja  
Becki Faunce  
Meg Frechette  
Anita Moo  
and  
Monica Velarde

Faculty in Front Row (Left to right)  
Dr. Mary Ann Kanieski, Dr. Leslie Wang,  
Dr. Carrie Erlin, and Dr. Susan Alexander

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