Sociology at Illinois Celebrates its Centennial

By Anna-Maria Marshall, Associate Professor of Sociology

The Sociology Department commemorated its Centennial this year with an afternoon of panels and talks that both honored the department’s proud tradition of teaching and scholarship and looked forward to another century of achievements.

Two distinguished speakers helped the department with its celebration. The first, Jeffrey Alexander, is the Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor of Sociology and the Co-Director of the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale University. Professor Alexander has written widely in the areas of sociological theory, culture, and politics and gave a presentation tracing the history of American sociological thought back to the Founders in the 19th century. He argued that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson – both as political philosophers and as men of the Enlightenment – understood that while humans were capable of creativity and reason, they were also capable of excesses that needed to be restrained. Even now, these tensions between human agency and the constraints of social, political and economic life are reflected in American sociological debates.

Clark McPhail, Emeritus Professor in the Sociology Department, provided some historical perspective on how the department’s areas of expertise have changed over the years. In addition, Sociology graduates also described their experiences as undergraduate and graduate students. Kenna Davis Quinet and Janet Lauritson, both criminology professors themselves, described the department as offering a supportive and collaborative environment that prepared them for a career in the academy. Leslie Vermillion, a director of development at UIUC, and Amy Suda, who worked for a Leo Burnett company, discussed the way that their sociology degrees prepared them for their careers.

The celebration also offered presentations on the future of sociology and the department’s role in that future. Our second distinguished speaker, Giovanni Arrighi, is Professor of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University. Based on his recent book, Adam Smith in Beijing, his remarks focused on the important role of sociology in understanding the effects of globalization on our social, political and economic institutions. Arrighi noted that the American pre-occupation with the Middle East has created space for China to expand its market-based economy without simultaneously expanding political and civil liberties for its citizens.

The event concluded with current faculty members, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Assata Zerai, and our newest addition, Brian Dill, offering their visions for the future directions of the department.

Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
By Tim Liao

This academic year began with a significant event for the Department. On September 7, 2007 we celebrated the Department’s centennial with two keynote speakers, an alumni panel and a current faculty panel, topped up with a photo shoot and a reception. By all accounts, we had a grand time, and some of us continued the partying (and for a few, inebriating) in The Office (no, not the main office in Lincoln Hall, but a local bar in Urbana). See the article by Anna-Maria Marshall for a more complete description.

We also launched a month-long centennial exhibition in the Main Library, showcasing some of the highlights of the Department’s past 100 years, with some interesting documents and profiles, including a letter from Herbert Blumer to Florian Znaniecki. A few days before the celebration, The American Sociology Association (ASA) sent us a scanned file of the 1954 program of the American Sociological Society (the name that the ASA used back then) when the annual conference was held on our Urbana campus. Please visit our website (www.soc.uiuc.edu) for an online version of the exhibition.

In the past year, we ran a successful search in transnational sociology and hired Dr. Brian Dill, who had a BA in English and American Literature from the University of Washington and an MA in the same discipline from San Francisco State University, and completed his PhD earlier this year under the direction of Professor Ronald Amizade, the University of Minnesota, with our former colleague Michael Goldman also on his committee. Brian’s dissertation is titled, “Democracy, Development, and the Paradox of Associational Life in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.” He is already teaching Soc 122, Africa in World Perspective, contributing not only our transnational program but also the campus’s African Studies program.

Our other search last year, jointly with the campus’s Latina/Latino Studies Program with a 50-50 split appointment, continued into this year. When you read this newsletter, we should be conducting campus interviews, or better still, with a candidate of our choice agreed to joint us in 2008!

Last year, we had three faculty on leave: Jan Nederveen-Pieterse was on sabbatical fall 2006, did a tour of Asia, witnessing changes and impacts of globalization first-hand; Andy Pickering held a fellowship in Center for Advanced Study in the Behavior Sciences, and Moon-Kie Jung did a fellowship in Ethnic Studies at Stanford University, both for the entire 2006-2007 school year. This year, two faculty are on sabbatical leave: they are Shin-Kap Han (fall) and Anna-Maria Marshall (spring). Away for the year on a Russell Sage Foundation fellowship in New York City is Gillian Stevens.

Our PhD students have continued to do well in securing good jobs. In the last two years, you saw the profiles of Xavier Escandell (Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Northern Iowa) and Zakia Salime (Assistant Professor of Sociology, Michigan State University). Other Sociology PhDs from Illinois in the past few years whom we have not profiled include Christobel Asiedu (Louisiana Tech University), Alin Ceobanu (University of Florida), Amit Prasad (University of Missouri), and Srirupa Prasad (University of Missouri). While these went on to teaching jobs, our PhD graduates also have taken research positions. For example, Hiromi Ishizawa is currently a postdoctoral research associate at the Minnesota Population Center, the University of Minnesota.

Sociology has continued to attract a lot of undergraduate majors. We currently have about 500 majors. As Head of the Department, the best part of my job is to shake hands with graduates at graduation ceremonies, congratulate them, and wish them well in their future pursuits. At the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences convocation, I shook about 100 hands, and I certainly hope I will be able to shake some of these hands more than once when I welcome you back for a visit in the future.
In this article, I speak to a vision for graduate education in Sociology at the University of Illinois today at the level of upcoming changes and proposals for the future progression of our department; potential contributions from our department to our discipline as a whole; and doing sociology that is relevant to communities here and elsewhere.

**Departmental Transition**

The current program is one in transition. For the past few years we have had 4 areas of concentrated study (Social Dynamics and Structure; Networks, Population and Life Course; Race, Class, and Gender; Science, Technology, Environment, and Society (STES); Transnational Studies). We will need to have conversations about whether we wish to further streamline these areas.

Our past director of Graduate Studies, Dr. Gillian Stevens placed her stamp on the program. She held firm to carefully delineated standards in order to preserve the work of her predecessors and integrity of our program and she has put several things in place.

In upcoming faculty meetings we will be approving the revised Graduate Handbook for the Sociology Department. We have a draft of this handbook available on-line. Further, Professor Stevens has submitted a number of course proposals to Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS). These courses will help to mark progress of our graduate students in the program. And they will likely be approved in time to become available to our students in the 2008-2009 school year. They include:

- Soc 510 (currently 590a and 590b), our year long professionalization seminar for the first year cohort;
- Soc 505, which will provide nominal credit for attendance at departmental seminars;
- Soc 597, Readings in Sociology which will provide a marker in the students’ transcript for the time they spend preparing for their qualifying (area) examinations; Soc 598, to document time spent writing and defending the thesis proposal (preliminary examination);
- Soc 599 (a proposed course revision), which will be reserved now only for dissertation credit hours (with 598 noted as a prerequisite); students would not be eligible to register for 599 until after successfully defending their dissertation proposals.

Of course, I just became the new Director so I am still in conversation with colleagues about desired directions for the future. I hope to get the new Graduate Handbook approved by the faculty, including adding sections on the area requirements. And I also plan to work in cooperation with faculty in our four areas of concentration to submit proposals to LAS for the required courses in our areas so we can move away from the numerous ‘596’ offerings. Finally it would be most beneficial to be able to forecast a three-year schedule in graduate course offerings to enable our doctoral students to plan their course work timeline and so that faculty can better coordinate their teaching schedules with their other scholarly objectives. I am aware that we have had significant challenges to compiling a three year teaching schedule in the past. Therefore, I will meet with Directors of Graduate Studies in other LAS departments in order to obtain advice on how they accomplish this goal.

**Discipline/University/College/Communities**

In keeping with the goal to train young scholars that will have an impact upon our discipline, I believe that it is incumbent upon us to push at the boundaries of traditional sociology while maintaining the integrity of our discipline. Our former Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Jesse Delia, understood the importance of bringing in cutting edged scholars in various fields across the college in order to enliven debate and stimulate productivity in the various departments. This has been evidenced by the unprecedented hiring of junior scholars across the disciplines in the college and the attention paid to great gender equity, the increase in scholars from other traditionally underrepresented groups, as well as interest paid to non-traditional scholarship. What is exciting is that our discipline benefits in its goal to understand society and social behavior because these changes, that have been supported by our current Dean Sarah C. Mangelsdorf, mean that we have a diverse faculty with research interests both in the U.S. and around the globe and that we are able, then to attract a diverse set of graduate students with their own creative ideas about how to study society. We have a wonderful environment that is potentially ripe for imaginative inquiry and productive output.

**Conclusion**

So I ask you as our faculty, current and past graduate students, and other friends of the department to partner with me as we think through the future of our graduate program. I welcome your comments and suggestions about how to make Sociology at Illinois a signature program.
Alumni Profile: Ronald W. Maris

Ronald W. Maris received his PhD in Sociology in 1965, with his dissertation focused on an epidemiological investigation of 2, 153 Chicago suicides. After teaching for two years at Dartmouth College, Dr. Ron Maris went on to receive five years of post-graduate training in psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore and had an additional 5 post-doctoral fellowships in psychiatry.

In 1968-69, Dr. Maris was an NIMH post-doctoral fellow in psychiatry/suicidology at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine (JHSM). From 1969-1973, he was an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at JHSM, Director of its MD-PhD training program in behavioral sciences, a Deputy Medical Examiner in Baltimore, and co-administrator of the NIMH suicidology training grant.

While at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Maris did both psychotherapy with suicidal patients and basic suicide research, as a member of in-patient treatment teams, in the outpatient clinics and the ER. Maris also had clinical training at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center (1968-69), and was a WHO Fellow in psychiatry in West Berlin (1971). Dr. Maris received over $2 million in basic federal suicide research and training grants from 1968 to 1973 (from the NIMH, NSF, National Institute of General Medical Sciences, and the Grant Foundation of NYC).

Research Award for his research monograph, Pathways to Suicide: A Survey of Self-Destructive Behaviors (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). From 1981 to 1996, Maris was the Editor-in-Chief of the scientific journal, Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior.

From 1985-2001, Dr. Maris founded and directed the University of South Carolina Center for the Study of Suicide (an official SC State agency). From 1993-present, Maris has served on the scientific advisory committee of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in NYC. From 1996-99, Dr. Maris was the Editor of the Review of Suicidology.

In 1986, Maris was awarded the Killam Fellowship in psychiatry at the University of Calgary Medical School (Alberta, Canada). He was made a Fellow (1990) in the International Association for Suicide Research, a Fellow in the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (1994), and a board-certified Forensic Examiner (1996).

Dr. Maris is primary author or editor of two other important suicide books. In 1992, Assessment and Prediction of Suicide (Guildford Press) was published, and in 2000, the Comprehensive Handbook of Suicidology (Guildford Press).

Maris has cumulated much clinical and legal professional experience, and has testified in 34 states and four foreign countries, including the investigation of the deliberate crash of EgyptAir 990 in 1999. He retired from full time work at the University of South Carolina in July of 2001. His current work focuses on education, treatment, publication and consulting in forensic suicidology. He continues to teach part-time in Psychiatry and Family Medicine at the University of South Carolina Medical School, as well as teach some undergraduate honors suicide and psychiatry courses.

(Profile based on information at the website www.suicideexpert.com)

Alumni Profile: Leslie Vernick

By Leslie Vernick

From an early age, I knew that I wanted to help people. While at the University of Illinois, I loved learning about culture, families, individuals and society. I volunteered as a big sister in Urbana and was actively involved in Campus Crusade for Christ. After graduating with a major in sociology in 1974, I completed an MSW at the Jane Adams school of Social Work, majoring in clinical social work.

Over the years I’ve held various social work positions. I worked as a medical social worker, developed a child abuse identification program as well as provided supportive counseling services to patients and their families in medical crisis. While raising my two children, I worked part-time in a mental health agency doing counseling. Presently I have a full-time private counseling practice in Pennsylvania, specializing in individual and marital counseling.

In addition to counseling, I speak at women’s seminars, couples retreats and professional conferences around the country on enriching and healing our relationships. I’ve also had the privilege of traveling abroad, teaching counseling skills and enrichment classes in the Philippines, Siberia, Russia, Romania and this past year in Iraq.

The biggest surprise of my professional career was when I began to write. My fear of writing a dissertation kept me from pursuing my PhD but I now have five books published as well as numerous articles in magazines and professional journals. Perhaps it was one of my professors at U of I who wrote “well written” on one of my term papers, which planted the seed that has now flourished. You can visit my website at www.leslievernick.com
Graduate Feature Profile
By Erica Alane Hill

Nearly five years ago I left a career as an elementary school teacher in California with my sights set on continuing my graduate education at the University of Illinois. Never would I have imagined that since beginning my graduate career here that my scholarly interest in Africa would afford me the opportunity to travel to Ghana, Togo, Benin, Cape Verde and most recently Tanzania.

Interestingly, my introduction to Africa and subsequent scholarly inquiries were prompted by neither the works of sociologists or historians. Instead, my interest in the vast continent began with my love for the poetry and prose of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance during my adolescence. From Langston Hughes’ “A Negro Speaks of Rivers” to Countee Cullen’s poem “Heritage”, where the poet eloquently poses the question “What is Africa to me?” I became intrigued with the literary images of what I only knew to be the distant homeland of my ancestors. Through this engagement with the literature of the 1920’s I was introduced to the works of one of the most significant contributors to American sociological thought, W.E.B. Dubois. In fact, it was in large part through Dubois’ investigation of the “souls of black folk” that my interest in sociology grew.

My experiences as a graduate student in both the department of Sociology and the Center for African Studies can be characterized as nothing short of a series of amazing intellectual and personal adventures. In fact, I began the 2007 fall semester traveling to Tanzania to conduct preliminary research for my dissertation. Though the intent of the trip was to secure research affiliations and gain access to the national archives, what proved to be most fruitful were the impromptu meetings with scholars and students at the University of Dar es Salaam and the warm reception of Tanzanians throughout the capital city and the neighboring coastal town of Bagamoyo.

The hospitality of so many resulted in numerous informal conversations with museum docents, taxi drivers, hotel workers, market women and elders, particularly during my visit to Bagamoyo. Thankfully, being awarded the Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship during my first four years of graduate study proved helpful beyond measure. Though I may still have a long road ahead to becoming fluent in Swahili this preliminary research trip proved that the acquisition of a second language is by far one of the most useful and rewarding tools that scholars can acquire. While it may sound cliché, learning the lingua franca of East Africa opened up a world to me that I otherwise would not have had the opportunity to know. I truly believe that had I not attempted at every turn to practice my Swahili while in Tanzania, I would not have had the opportunity to meet the various people who were willing to share stories about the rich history of Bagamoyo. Coincidentally, it was from these conversations that I was able to begin drafting a plan for a new dissertation project that has already proven to be much more sociologically engaging than I could have ever imagined.

My dissertation project intends to examine collective memories of slavery among three generations of slave descendants in the former slave port town of Bagamoyo. I am most interested in how these memories have constituted the social identities of these descendants and impacted the negotiation of social relations in the community. My hope is that the project will contribute to scholarship on both the legacy of slavery in East Africa and intersectional research in the African Diaspora.

Since my return, I have found that I am more driven and excited than I have ever been about a project. The preliminary research trip taught invaluable lessons that could not have been learned while sitting in seminar, perusing textbooks or elsewhere for that matter. For sure, during my time in Tanzania I learned that in order to be a good scholar you must be open to change, even if that change means starting over from scratch and that traveling alone in a foreign country teaches you more about yourself than you would ever think possible. Finally, though this may sound peculiar I know now more that ever that I am forever indebted to my mother who taught me how to read and by extension, introduced me to the writings of Hughes, Cullen and Dubois whose works introduced me to the wonders of Africa.

Lincoln Hall Renovations

Lincoln Hall is on track for its long overdue renovation project. We will be moving our offices out of Lincoln Hall to the University’s Computer Applications Building on Springfield Avenue this spring. The renovations will call for large-scale gutting of the interior. While much will be changed, the project is expected to preserve the detailing in the hallways and classrooms. Lincoln Hall Theatre will be preserved as much as possible, while being updated to meet with accessibility standards. The crumbling plasterwork shall be restored and repainted using the same colors as in 1930. This three year long project is set to break ground in Fall ’08 and set to be completed in time for Lincoln Hall’s 100th anniversary in Fall 2011.
I began my college career in Tennessee in 1990. For many reasons, I dropped out of college my senior year to support my daughter. Years went by and my schooling went to the waste side with absolutely no desire to finish. I began working at the University of Illinois in 2000. With a lot of support I was encouraged to finish my degree. Returning to college, especially a large university, was very nerve wrecking. I had many fears that I had to face. It had been over 10 years since I had been in school. The University of Illinois made my transition very smooth.

I never intended to return to school to finish my degree, let alone from the University of Illinois. I never had the desire to finish but with the support from the College of LAS and the guidance from the Sociology Department, I will finish. My dreams of graduating with a BA in Sociology are going to come true in May 2008. I never felt as though I was on my own to make crucial decisions about my course work. Someone has always been willing to answer my questions and offer me guidance. I have enjoyed my experience at the University. In my own experience, the advisor, the records officer, and the deans have all been very patient, understanding, and compassionate to my situation.

I have been content with the idea that I would have to settle for just any job. Now, with my degree insight, I am excited about the opportunities that lay ahead. I know that I will have a career in a very rewarding field. I will be able to show my daughter how important an education is; how important it is to finish something you’ve started. I did not realize how important and relevant my sociology courses would actually turn out to be in my daily life. I love working with people, in any capacity. Now I have a new passion for diversity and inequality. Sociology has taught me to open my eyes.
Faculty Feature Profile  
By Ilana Redstone Akresh

I have been an Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department since August 2006. I received my Ph.D. in Demography and Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania in August 2005. Two of my recent studies, described below, look at diet-related changes and their relationship to immigrants’ health and examine the extent to which immigrants who choose to come to the United States are in better health, on average, than the overall health of people in their home countries (known as positive health selection). I have been working with data from the New Immigrant Survey, a survey of immigrants granted legal permanent residency in 2003.

In a study to be published in the Journal of Health and Social Behavior, I consider the changes in immigrants’ diets after coming to the United States and the subsequent relationship between those changes and Body Mass Index (BMI) and health status. I find that 39% of my sample of 6,637 adults report at least one significant change in their diet. The most commonly reported dietary changes are an increased consumption of junk food and meat. More than 10% of the sample report eating more junk food in the United States, while over 8% said they eat more meat in America than they eat in their home countries. Nearly 15% report eating fewer vegetables, fruit, beans, fish or rice. As a consequence of their acquired tastes, many new immigrants are gaining weight and becoming less healthy. The findings have policy implications particularly related to informing immigrants about the pros and cons of selecting the items in the grocery store that they might not be familiar with. Nutrition education targeting immigrants may decrease this trend and increase the proportion of this population that chooses dietary change associated with a positive health outcome.

In a second study, co-authored with Reanne Frank of Ohio State University, to be published in the American Journal of Public Health, we examine the question of whether immigrants are in better health than the majority of their compatriots. The study quantifies the extent of health selection among contemporary U.S. immigrant groups and evaluates the degree that selection explains variation in self-rated health among U.S. legal permanent residents. We find that, with respect to region-of-origin, all groups experience high levels of positive health selection than do immigrants from Mexico. Differences in the extent of health selection by region-of-origin are not explained by differences in regional health profiles (measured by child mortality), nor is this factor predictive of whether immigrants from a region will be positively or negatively health selected. Instead, differences in the degree of health selection by region-of-origin appear to be strongly related to compositional differences in the socioeconomic profiles of immigrant streams.

Grants, Awards & Achievements

[This is a partial listing]

Faculty Awards, Papers & Publications

Moon-Kie Jung

Gillian Stevens
Russell Sage Fellowship 2007, will complete a book on how non-English-speaking groups are adapting to life in English-language dominated U.S. society. Stevens will analyze census and survey data to show how proficiency in English, or lack thereof, affects everything from socioeconomic achievement, to race relations, to inter-family relationships among recent immigrants. Stevens will also examine how American society is responding to the dramatic growth in the number of non-English language speakers.... (excerpt from RSF website).

Zsuzsa Gille
Fall 2007, Acting Director of European Union Center at UIUC, Chronicle of Higher Education featured her book on July 20, 2007 “From the Cult of Waste to the Trash


Ruby Mendenhall
EITC grant continued from 2006-7

Undergraduate Awards

Sarah Whetstone
The Sociology Undergraduate Paper Award, “The Evolution of the Traditional Justice System”

Graduate Student Awards

Mike Sobczak
2007 SAS Student Ambassador for the Western Hemisphere

Spring Paper

Hyomin Kim
The Graduate Unpublished Paper Award, “Germinating Brown Rice in Korea”

Cheng-Heng Chang
Fellowship for Studying Abroad from the Ministry of Education in Taiwan; Pre-dissertation Summer Travel Grant from EAPS at UIUC

Conference Travel Awards

Spring 2007

Jose Peralta, Holly Slawkowski, & Dan Lord
Fall 2007

Hyonin Kim, Hsiang-Chieh Lee & Judith Vendryzk
Fellowships- AY08

Meltem Yilmaz-Sener
Transnational Fellowship

Jose Peralta
Transnational Fellowship

Kareem Muhammad
Transnational Fellowship

Francisco Vivoni
Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Fellowship

Lisa Asplin
Graduate College Fellowship

Kareem Muhammad
Transnational Fellowship

Jose Peralta
Transnational Fellowship

Dan Hale
University Fellowship

Sandra Weissinger
Graduate College Fellow

Libin Zhang
Departmental Research Fellow

Chunwoong Park
Departmental Research Fellow
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We would like to know about your current activities and the developments in your life and career that you would like to share with others in future editions of this newsletter. You may include pictures for use in future issues. Also, if you know of someone who would like the newsletter and is not receiving it, please send us their address. Information submitted to the Department will be made public unless otherwise noted.

Name________________________________________
Email________________________________________
Address_______________________________________
Position________________________________________
Institution_____________________________________
Major Milestones and Achievements__________________________________________
Other News_________________________________________________________________

The information above can also be sent by email to jwoolsey@uiuc.edu. We are grateful to everyone who has given to the University. If you wish to contribute directly to the Department, giving is easier than ever. The University Foundation has online giving opportunities at www.uif.uillinois.edu (or link from our homepage) as well as phone and mail options. Your giving is not limited to cash or credit; we can accept securities, property, and gifts-in-kind. The Foundation will assist you with directing your gift to a specific scholarship or our general fund, providing important tax forms and notifying us of your giving. Your gifts are tax deductible. You may mail your gifts directly to the Department if you would prefer--

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