



Miami University Department of Sociology and Gerontology

Summer, 2009

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Chair's Welcome

By Dr. Jean Lynch

Greetings from the Department of Sociology and Gerontology! As the new chair of the department, this is the first newsletter I have had the pleasure to produce. But it is YOUR newsletter and the first biennial newsletter ever sent to Sociology and Gerontology alumni. Faculty members often wonder about the students they taught—and I assume alumni sometimes think about their past instructors. We hope this newsletter will keep you up to date on faculty member and student accomplishments. In this issue we focus on teaching. Some of our faculty members teach outside the U.S. borders (e.g., Ted Wagenaar's essay talks about his experiences teaching in Luxembourg), whereas others work on bringing "engaged learning" to the classroom (e.g., Marty Jendrek summarizes her participation in COPEL, an exciting new teaching philosophy).

As chair, I am privy to the projects, courses and activities that engage the department's faculty members. I am impressed by the amount of time and energy professors put into teaching excellence. That is Miami's reputation and in our department, I believe we have some of the best teachers around. I am intrigued by the varied and creative strategies instructors develop to explain material to their students. Discovering new and better teaching techniques is a challenge that continually confronts instructors—how can I best explain and how can my students truly comprehend this concept, this theory, this sociological experience, or gerontological issue? How can I make my classroom an exciting place where students feel challenged and engaged and where, when they leave, they leave wanting to know more? In this newsletter, Fauzia Ahmed describes one such strategy she developed and used in her WMS/SOC class this semester.

Despite the reputation that academia has—where professors live the good life, teaching a few hours a week and engaging in nothing more strenuous than deep thinking the rest of the week—the teaching that takes place in the classroom is but one of the ways faculty members interact with students and share knowledge. Professors spend many hours mentoring students as well. Mentoring occurs on many levels and encompasses a variety of topics—from delving more deeply into some scholarship covered in the class to career advice and beyond. Jennifer Kinney is one of those talented mentors and she writes about her enjoyment of mentoring.

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Dr. Othello Harris

Some of you know Othello Harris who will be joining the Department of Sociology and Gerontology from Miami's Department of Kinesiology and Health. Dr. Harris' research interests include race relations and social stratification as well as race, gender and sports involvement. He enjoys teaching courses that cause us to reevaluate the ways we think about our world and our place in the world. He is the co-editor of two books, *Encyclopedia of Ethnicity and Sports in the United States* and *Impacts of Incarceration on the African American Family*; and he publishes in journals such as *The Black Scholar*, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *The Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *Journal of African American Men*, *Masculinities*, and *Sociological Focus*.

Dr. Jiexia (Elisa) Zhai

Jiexia Zhai grew up in Shandong, China. She earned her B.A. in sociology from Peking University, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in sociology from the University of Texas at Austin. After her Ph.D. research, she has worked at the Institute for Studies of Religion and Sociology Department at Baylor University. Her primary research and teaching interests include comparative studies of religion in Chinese societies in the U.S., marriage and family issues, Asian immigrants in the U.S. and overseas Chinese Diaspora.

Besides sociology, she is also a musician. She has played the Chinese string instrument *Pipa* since she was six, and has performed throughout China and in Texas.

Kudos and Congratulations

This past April, the Department of Sociology and Gerontology handed out several undergraduate awards. Congratulations go out to our award recipients!

Outstanding Sociology Major:

Sean Kavanagh
Jennifer Ball

Outstanding Sociology of Law Minor:

Kristin Pondel

Outstanding Criminology Minor:

Carly Sellers
Lesley Lee

Sociology Service Award:

Jennifer Robison

Outstanding Graduating Gerontology Major:

Kelly Cabana
Stefanie Schroth

Outstanding Gerontology Junior:

Veronica Chasser
James Maruthi

Outstanding Gerontology Minor:

Jennifer Mouch
Leah Siekemeyer



AΦΣ-Alpha Phi Sigma

Alpha Phi Sigma is the only National Criminal Justice Honor Society for Criminology and Criminal Justice Programs. The society recognizes academic excellence of undergraduate and graduate students of criminal justice, as well as juris doctorate. At our undergraduate awards ceremony this spring, the following students were inducted into the honor society.

New Members

Nicole Bennett – President
Kaci Lapp – Vice President
Caty Daniels
Robert Davis
Brett Gilbert
Brad Hammond
Taryn Finelli
Rachel Hilliard





Teaching Global Citizenship

Fauzia Ahmed, Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology and Gerontology
Women's Studies Program

Two key questions frame my teaching philosophy and pedagogy. What does it mean to teach sociology in a globalized world? How can I, as a feminist, help my students build character in an increasing complex environment?

Teachers teach as they have lived. As the courses unfold, I draw on my multidisciplinary academic background, my work as a social activist with grassroots NGOs, and my experience as a policymaker with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, India, the United States, and my native Bangladesh to share insights with the students.

I teach students to examine their assumptions, become bridgebuilders, and work for social change in a globalized world. The imperatives of globalization also mean that students need to develop an ethical sense of what it means to be a global citizen. According to Professor Sissela Bok, empathy is an important aspect of moral reasoning. They need to link global citizenship with increasing inequality in the globalized society. I, therefore, adapted the "Hunger Banquet," an advocacy tool that I learned during my community work, to create a special module. At the Hunger Banquet, students draw lots to determine what kind of dinner they will receive. The "rich" are treated to a full three course meal which is served to them. The "middle class" get beans and rice, and the "poor" get nothing except water. Each group then completes an in-class assignment that involves preparing a detailed structural biography that represents their group. Given the power outage this semester, I arranged for the "poor" group to work in a room without electricity, so they had to complete their assignment by candlelight. Students were given a homework assignment which helped them analyze their group and their feelings. This analysis was further expanded in the next session within the context of global inequality.



Teaching in Luxembourg

Theodore Wagenaar, Professor
Department of Sociology and Gerontology

Taking courses at our Luxembourg campus has many opportunities. For one, you get to study in a castle! For another, you get to live with local families. This experience helps integrate you into the local culture. Third, you get to study with European as well as Oxford faculty. The combination provides you with insights and study opportunities unavailable on your home campus.

In fall 2009 I taught a course on sociology and the news at our Luxembourg campus. We read news sources from throughout the world, which enabled students to see how globally connected our world is. Our study tour took us to the Netherlands, where we met with editors at the top newspapers. The editors provided us with unique insights into how the published news reflects the local and regional cultures. We also had lunch in a small town school with adolescent students in an advanced English class. Community members joined us for a catered traditional Dutch dinner and engaged conversations. In Amsterdam, our class took over an Indonesian restaurant for a traditional rijstafel dinner, which included about three dozen dishes. We also had time for sightseeing in Amsterdam.

Luxembourg students also have numerous travel opportunities. Miami arranges some trips to local cultural and historical sites, and students arrange their weekend travel to the cities they wish to visit. Luxembourg City also provides many opportunities for concerts, museum visits, and local sightseeing. For example, we attended a local fair.



When Jean Lynch, the Chair of our Department, asked me to write an article on mentoring for this newsletter, it gave me a chance to re-visit a topic that I wrote about last spring (as part of a Miami-University sponsored Undergraduate Research Forum). I wrote about the transformative role that a psychology professor at Kent State University, Mary Ann Parris Stephens, had on my life when I was a junior in college, struggling to find a major, let alone a pathway to my own life. I also wrote about how much more confident today's students appear to be; that students seem far more ready to engage in a collaborative relationship with faculty than I was at their age. But, looking back on my words, they just don't "ring true."

On the one hand, students today are far more savvy than I was as a student three decades ago—technologically, socially, globally. But at the same time, I think they are more worried—and understandably so. As children they watched 9/11 on television; as adolescents they witnessed the Sri Lanka tsunami one summer and Hurricane Katrina the next. And they are preparing to enter the job market in a time that some experts suggest economically rivals the Great Depression.

So what does this have to do with mentoring? Quite a lot, I believe! Although many people think that education occurs primarily in the classroom, those of us who have been involved in mentoring relationships (as mentors, mentees or both) appreciate the importance of what can happen outside the classroom. For years I have lamented to my colleagues that I am far more effective outside the classroom than at the front of the room; that teaching is one thing, but that really interacting with students around a shared interest/challenge is another—and even better thing. And what begins as a shared interest/challenge in a particular area of study can be expanded beyond the "merely" academic to include major life decisions. I also find myself wondering if the COPEL project described in this newsletter in some way represents an effort to bring more of a mentoring model into the classroom. I've been participating in our Departmental conversations about the COPEL project, and its key principles of determining where students are developmentally. Helping them to advance to the next level is an important component of mentoring.

Although most definitions of mentoring focus on the experiences/status differential between the mentor and then mentee, I prefer definitions that acknowledge the reciprocal, collaborative and collegial nature that often emerges as a mentoring relationship develops and evolves over time. As a direct result of "mentoring" I have been afforded the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from students—and I hope that they can say the same.

Recently, a colleague in our department, Suzanne Kunkel, who is also Director of Miami University's Scripps Gerontology Center, received a mentorship award from the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. Suzanne has said that "mentorship can be a formal opportunity to honor, preserve, and perpetuate the legacies of generations of earlier leaders; it is also an opportunity to shape the field by contributing to the educational experiences of its future stewards." What a wonderful legacy—for both the donor and the recipient!



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www.muohio.edu/sociology



Community of Practice on Engaged Learning (COPEL)

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By Marty Jendrek

I am delighted to write about my experience in the Community of Practice on Engaged Learning (COPEL) and how that experience creates opportunities for reflection and action within the Department of Sociology and Gerontology.

When I volunteered to participate in COPEL I thought I would learn about internship programs and service learning opportunities because I associated those two activities with engaged learning. By providing faculty and staff with a forum for discussing assigned readings my COPEL experience quickly taught me that my knowledge about and definition of engaged learning were very vague and consequently my two indicators of engaged learning (internships and service learning) inadequate.

Engaged learning means meeting students at their developmental level and then steadily offering students increasing levels of challenge and support until they arrive at the self-authorship stage of learning. Self-authored students are independent thinkers who claim responsibility and authorship of and for their own learning. These students actively engage in learning and do so by linking ideas

from multiple disciplines to create research questions and projects. The self-authored student is motivated by the desire to know and wants to share his or her thoughtful critiques of material with a broader community of scholars. Faculty quickly recognize the self-authored student as he or she is a joy in and out of the classroom. So, how do we challenge and move students to that stage?

In COPEL I learned about the stages in student development and the types of knowledge and skills that students acquire at each stage. Consequently, I am rethinking my classes in terms of engaged learning. Who is the class geared for? Are my readings and assignments appropriate for the student's level? What types of assignments provide students with the needed support to move to the next level?

These questions are the very same questions that Rodney Coates (my co-COPEL partner) and I raise in the department. For example, what does it mean to teach a 100 or 200 or 300 or 400 level class? How do we sequence classes to provide students with increasing challenges and the support needed

to meet those challenges? Research indicates that most students enter 100 level classes at the early external stage of learning, a passive stage of learning where the student relies on authorities to give him or her knowledge and/or truth. If students begin as early external learners then how do we move them to a later stage in external learning, a stage in which they realize and are comfortable with the idea that knowledge and/or truth is ambiguous and that knowledge requires evidence?

My involvement with COPEL provides me with multiple opportunities. Examples of these opportunities include: 1) the opportunity to learn about student development, 2) the opportunity to think about my teaching practices and whether and how those practices encourage student development, 3) the opportunity to apply student learning models to my classes, and 4) the opportunity to share my enthusiasm and concerns about engaged learning with my colleagues so that we, as a group, can think about the integration of engaged learning into our programs. This is VERY exciting!

Looking for your professor? Current departmental faculty:

Dr. Fauzia Ahmed (ahmedfe@muohio.edu)
Dr. Bob Applebaum (applebra@muohio.edu)
Dr. J. Scott Brown (sbrow@muohio.edu)
Dr. Jennifer Bulanda (bulandjr@muohio.edu)
Dr. Ron Bulanda (bulandre@muohio.edu)
Dr. Roberta Campbell (campberm@muohio.edu)
Dr. Rodney Coates (coatesrd@muohio.edu)
Dr. Mark Christian (christm3@muohio.edu)
Dr. Heidi Ewen (ewenh@muohio.edu)

Dr. William Flint (flintwc@muohio.edu)
Dr. Lisa Groger (grogerl@muohio.edu)
Dr. C. Lee Harrington (harrincl@muohio.edu)
Dr. Othello Harris (harriso@muohio.edu)
Dr. Marty Jendrek (jendrem@muohio.edu)
Dr. Jennifer Kinney (kinneyjm@muohio.edu)
Dr. Suzanne Kunkel (kunkels@muohio.edu)
Dr. Steve Lippmann (lippmas@muohio.edu)
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Dr. Sree Subedi (subedis@muohio.edu)
Dr. Theodore Wagenaar (wagenatc@muohio.edu)
Dr. Jiexia (Elisa) Zhai (zhaij@muohio.edu)

Chair's Welcome (continued from page 1)

This newsletter provides me a chance to brag about the department and some of the truly amazing ventures we have undertaken. In upcoming newsletters, we will be telling you about faculty members' research, students' achievements, and departmental activities. I urge you to contact us with what you would like to see in the newsletter. Do you want to hear about new department ventures (for example, the new international focus of our Gerontology graduate degrees)? Are you interested in what new classes we are offering? Feel free to contact us—you can use the email address below. We would like you to tell us what you want to hear about rather than decide what we think you might want to hear about!



Dr. Sherry Corbett
1946-2002

(click the picture above for more information on the Sherry Corbett Lecture Series)

As you can imagine, continuing with Department and faculty activities—those outlined in this newsletter and others—is difficult in this time of economic constraints. If you are considering donating to Miami, I'd like to urge you to visit our webpage and direct your Miami donations to the Department of Sociology and Gerontology. The instructions allow you to donate to the Department, or you can provide funds to our Sherry Corbett Lecture Series. Dr. Corbett was a highly valued member of our department, much loved by her students and much missed by her colleagues. After her death, the Department established a lecture series in her name. This lecture series enables us to invite speakers whose scholarship reflects Dr. Corbett's professional interests. Due to the recent economic crises, endowments such as those that support this lecture series have suffered. Your donations could help us keep this very important lecture series alive.

I hope you enjoyed this first issue of our newsletter and I sincerely hope this will not be a one-way street. We would really like to hear from you. We would like to know about your life after Miami! And, of course, we'd appreciate any suggestions on the information you'd like to see in future newsletters.

Look for our second issue following the Fall semester. Until then we wish you a fall filled with good health and happiness.



Dr. Suzanne Kunkel Receives National Mentoring Award

Scripps Gerontology Center Director Suzanne Kunkel received the first Hiram J. Friedsam Mentorship Award at the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education's (AGHE) Annual Meeting and Leadership Conference this past March.

The Friedsam award "recognizes individuals from AGHE member institutions who have contributed to gerontological education through excellence in mentoring to students, faculty and administrators."

Dr. Kunkel, co-author of the widely used textbook (*Aging, Society, and the Life Course*) and scores of articles on aging and demo-graphics, has been director of the Scripps Gerontology Center since 1998 (and a Miami professor since 1986) and is herself a past-president of AGHE. Among other awards, Dr. Kunkel received the Ohio Association of Gerontology and Education's 2006 Educator of the Year Award and the 2003 Ohio Research Council on Aging's Researcher of the Year award.

