From the Chair

As my third and last year as department chair comes to a close, I am pleased to note the marks of progress we, as faculty, students, and staff have achieved. We are proud of our 20 graduating BA students, who all participated in the College of Arts and Sciences Research Conference in March, and three of whom are graduating from the University Honors Program. We also take pride in the accomplishments of our MA students, four of whom presented papers at the 2010 meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society and were awarded conference travel funding both from the College of Arts and Sciences and Alpha Kappa Delta, the international sociology honor society. Two of our doctoral students have completed their dissertations and will be graduating this May.

Our faculty members have continued to distinguish themselves in terms of participation and leadership in professional organizations, scholarly awards, and university and community service. Many of their recent achievements are detailed elsewhere in this newsletter. They have included organizing an international conference, organizing a new section of the American Sociological Association, presenting many papers, publishing several journal articles and books, leading students on an Alternative Spring Break, spearheading the formation of new interdisciplinary programs and initiatives, and winning a Fulbright award. As a milestone for the department we note that Russell Stone is retiring after a distinguished career as professor of Sociology, director of the Center for Israel Studies, and former associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Our alumni now number almost 1,500, including more than 75 PhDs, many of whom have especially distinguished themselves in their professional recognition for their publications, leadership, and service in their respective professions. We value their achievements and wish to remain in contact with them to track their careers and lives.

The future of the department looks very bright. We are launching an exciting special emphasis on the sociology of health. The department will be led in this initiative by Professor Kim Blankenship, who comes to us from Duke University. She will chair the department and lead in the development of a new research center related to health, risk, and society. The next few years promise to be rewarding as the department adds faculty positions related to health while maintaining strength in the areas for which we have built our reputation, especially those related to the many forms of social inequalities and their consequences, locally, nationally, and globally.

I would like to thank all my colleagues and most especially our administrative assistant, Sandra Linden, for their great cooperation and contributions in making the achievements and plans we have been able to build together.

-John Drysdale
Esther Chow
Co-organizes International Conference on Gender

Esther Ngan-ling Chow and Tan Lin (All China Women's Federation) co-organized an international conference, “Gender and Social Transformation: Global, Transnational and Local Realities and Perspectives,” held July 17-19, 2009, in Beijing, China. This conference was cosponsored by the Women's Studies Institute of China and the China Women Research Society and financially supported by the American Sociological Association (USA), the Sociologists for Women in Society (USA), the China Academy of Social Sciences, and ten major universities in China.

Five AU faculty members and doctoral students presented their refereed papers at the conference. These papers included: (1) “Globalization and Locality: The Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Migration, Gender, and Work in China,” by Esther Ngan-ling Chow; (2) “Black Senior Women and Sexuality” by Bette Dickerson; (3) “Examining Gender Differences in Perceptions of Environmental Issues in China: Safety Concerns, Economic Salience, and Postmaterialism,” by Chengyang Xiao; (4) “Barriers Impacting Church Leadership in the Global Community: Women, Gender, Power and Patriarchy” by Cynthia Bragg (PhD candidate); and (5) “Transnational Women’s Activism: Intersectionality and Global Networks” by Laura Toussaint (PhD ’07).

Evita Bynum (PhD ’00), the executive officer of the Association of Black Sociologists, also attended the conference.

Dr. Chow is currently co-editing a book based on the conference papers titled Gender and Social Transformation in the Era of Globalization, to be published this year by the Social Science Academic Press of China in Beijing.

Kim Blankenship
Joins the Department

In Fall 2010, Kim Blankenship will join the department as Professor of Sociology and will also serve as department chair. She will also lead the formation and operation of a new research center on health and risk.

Blankenship has a BA from the College of William and Mary, and an MA and PhD from Duke University. She was at Yale from 1986–2008, first in the Department of Sociology and then as an associate research scientist in the Department of Internal Medicine and the Yale School of Public Health. She also served as the associate director of Yale's Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS from 1998–2008. Most recently, she has been Associate Research Professor in the Department of Sociology and Duke Global Health Institute.

Her research interests focus on social and structural determinants of health (the intersection of race, class, gender and health), health disparities, structural interventions for addressing health, health and development, and the policy dimensions of health. In particular, she has focused her attention on broader social inequalities impacting HIV risk among women, drug users, and minority communities. Her work also analyzes the implications of social inequalities for policymaking and interventions in public health.

Blankenship is currently the principal investigator on a research project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) that analyzes the implementation and impact of community mobilization interventions addressing HIV risk in female sex workers in India. In addition, she is project director for a BMGF funded study involving a consortium of institutions analyzing the collective impact of HIV prevention programming on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in India.

She is also the principal investigator on a National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) funded study analyzing the impact of movement between the criminal justice system and the community on HIV risk and the extent to which this movement may help explain race and gender disparities in HIV/AIDS. In addition to her research and teaching activities, Blankenship has served as the chair of the Health, Health Policy, and Health Services Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, on the Editorial Board of Gender & Society, and as a member of the CDC's Concept Mapping Working Group studying structural interventions in HIV.

HIV/AIDS in New Orleans: Dynamics and Disproportionate Effects

Nine students, including Carimanda Baynard (MA candidate), participated in AU’s Alternative Spring Break 2010, HIV/AIDS in New Orleans: Dynamics and Disproportionate Effects (from March 6–13). It was co-led by current AU students Amber Jolla (School of International Service) and Mobola Oyefule (College of Arts and Sciences, and a New Orleans native). Professor Bette Dickerson served as the faculty advisor.

The New Orleans region ranked 2nd for AIDS case rates among the largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. in 2007 and has historically had the highest number of HIV/AIDS cases in Louisiana. African Americans continue to be disproportionately affected, constituting approximately 32% of Louisiana's population but 75% of all new diagnoses. The number of cases in the Latino/a population is small, but it is noteworthy that the number of cases has increased each year since Hurricane Katrina.

Participants volunteered with nonprofit organizations focused on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, attended lectures given by HIV prevention specialists, and took part in a tour of the damaged areas directly affected by Hurricane Katrina. During the week, the participants were introduced to the rich culture and history of the city.
Professor Russell Stone to Retire After 19 Years of Service

Russell Stone is retiring from the department in summer 2010 and will become Professor Emeritus of Sociology. From 1991–1996 he was associate dean for graduate affairs in the College of Arts and Sciences, and from 2002–2007 he chaired the Department of Sociology. During this time, he guided the department in institutionalizing its emphasis on public sociology, which has become a foundation for its emerging focus on health and social inequalities.

Serving as professor of sociology and director of American University’s Center for Israel Studies combined two important career foci. His interest in Israel society dates back more than 45 years, and his familiarity with the country and its academic community spans much of the history of modern Israel. He studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as a graduate student in the 1960s. As a visiting professor to the university in the 1970s and again in 2006, Stone engaged in research comparing first Israeli, and later Palestinian, public opinion polls at various times in the peace process.

Throughout these years he developed and maintained a wide network of contacts among social scientists and public opinion pollsters in Israel and Palestine and among scholars worldwide who have a research interest in Israel. He has been director of AU’s Center for Israel Studies since 2006. Each year, the center hosts visiting Israeli scholars to teach in AU’s newly established undergraduate minor in Israel Studies. It has also established a successful series of cultural and educational events for the AU community and the general public. He was founding administrative officer of the Association for Israeli Studies, an international academic association for the study of contemporary Israel, and advising editor of the Israeli Studies book series published by the State University of New York Press, with over 80 books on contemporary Israeli society, politics, and history.

Two of his own books focus on Israel: Social Change in Israeli Attitudes and Events, 1967-1979, a study of the impact of major events on indicators of social and psychological well-being of Israelis, and Critical Essays on Israeli Social Issues and Scholarship, a collection of reviews commenting on issues in Israeli culture, literature, politics, scholarship, and society. His research, writings, and activities are enduring contributions to the sociological understanding of contemporary Israeli society. Other scholars have applied his interest in public opinion research to the study of environmental issues in the U.S. and abroad, including the Love Canal, near his former teaching position at the State University of New York in Buffalo, and Taiwan, where he works with former doctoral students.

Events

In December 2009, the Department of Sociology and the Department of Environmental Science co-hosted Riley E. Dunlap, Regents Professor of Sociology at Oklahoma State University. Considered the founding father of environmental sociology, Dunlap presented a lecture titled “Climate-Change Denial and Conservatism in the USA: Exploring the Connections.” Dunlap and Chenyang Xiao (see photo) co-authored an article entitled “Validating a Comprehensive Model of Environmental Concern Cross-nationally: A USA-Canadian Comparison,” published in Social Science Quarterly (June 2007).

Chenyang Xiao facilitated a workshop at AU, entitled “How to Present an Academic Paper at a Professional Conference,” in the spring 2010 for undergraduate and graduate students.

Hashim Al-Tawil, professor and chair of art history at Henry Ford Community College, presented two lectures: “Visual Representations of the Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Time & the Formation of Islamic Art” and “Lost Culture of Iraq: The Abuse and Destruction of Public Monuments, Artworks, and Other Cultural Materials Since the U.S. Invasion in 2003.” Al-Tawil is an artist and art historian who researches the history of Arab and Islamic art and culture. The lectures were held in March 2010 and were cosponsored by the Arab Studies Program, the Department of Sociology, the Department of Art, the Middle East Studies Program, and the Mohammed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace.

The Epsilon Chapter of Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD), the International Sociology Honors Society, inducted 14 of the department’s undergraduates and 4 of its graduate students in a ceremony held as part of Experiences in Sociology Day on April 27, 2010. The national AKD holds events at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Society and supports students and individual chapters regarding assistance with student travel expenses to meetings, honoraria for speakers, student paper prizes, and other activities. AKD provided travel expenses for those graduate students who presented papers at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society in Boston. Susan Hoecker-Drysdale serves as the faculty advisor and chapter representative for AKD.
Department of Sociology News and Notes

FACULTY

Andrea Malkin Brenner took on the role of undergraduate advisor in the Department of Sociology in 2009 and continues to fill this position, as well as the roles of honors coordinator and AU Abroad advisor for the Department of Sociology. Brenner focuses her academic work on teaching sociology and sociology of family studies. She recently published her work in Sociology Through Active Learning with Pine Forge Press, and served on the 2010 Editorial Review Board for SOC, an introductory sociology textbook published by McGraw Hill. Brenner presented a talk, entitled “Building Resilient Kids in Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Families,” in April 2010 at the Barker Foundation’s Annual Conference. She received a Faculty Award from the GLBTA Resource Center in 2009.

Esther Ngan-ling Chow continues to supervise many of the department’s doctoral students. She will attend the International Sociological Association’s 17th World Congress of Sociology meeting to be held in Sweden this summer, where she continues her role as copresident of Research Committee 32, “Women in Society.” She also just copublished Contour of Citizenship: Women, Diversity and Citizenship, with Ashgate (2010). She strives to engage in transnational feminist praxis through school constructions and scholarships with the True Light Foundation, Inc., for which she is a cofounder. Sociologists for Women in Society re-named their Women of Color Dissertation Scholarship as Esther Ngan-ling Chow and Mary Joyce Green Dissertation Scholarship in 2010. Chow received the Feminist Activism Award from the same organization in 2008.

Bette Dickerson has been traveling extensively in the last year, attending a conference in Beijing, China; Alternative Break in New Orleans; and, for a second time, an Alternative Break to South Africa. In December, Dickerson returned to South Africa to copresent with Jennifer Fish (PhD ’03) at the Beyond Reconciliation: Dealing with the Aftermath of Mass Trauma & Political Violence conference held at University of Cape Town. The pair presented a post-conference symposium and were invited speakers at the South African Domestic Service & Allied Workers’ Union’s program commemorating Domestic Workers World Mobilizing Day. Dickerson coauthored a chapter, titled “Black Senior Women and Sexuality,” with Kent State University’s Nicole Rousseau, in Black Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and Policies (Rutgers University Press, 2010). They also coauthored “Ageism through Omission: The Obsolescence of Black Women’s Sexuality,” an article published in the Journal of African American Studies. Next year, Bette will be on sabbatical, engaged in a book project on Black senior women and sexuality. She continues her participatory action research on the intergenerational trauma evidenced through South African grandmothers’ experiences of confronting HIV/AIDS in the aftermath of apartheid, among a host of other things.

In addition to chairing the department, John Drysdale has served as President of the District of Columbia Sociological Society for the academic year 2009–2010. He has written a short essay on Max Weber as an entry in the Blackwell Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology, forthcoming in 2010. He is continuing work on the influence and relevance of Weber’s methodological ideas concerning concept formation. He is also examining connections between the tradition of critical sociology and the current emphasis on public sociology.

Katherine Frank, scholar in residence, taught Feminist and Gender Theory in spring 2010 for the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program. In addition to teaching at AU, she gave talks at the University of Lethbrige (Department of Psychology and the Women’s Centre), the University of Oklahoma (Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies), and the University of Chicago’s Sex Panic Workshop. She has recently published three book chapters: “Stripping: The Embodiment and Creation of Sexualized Fantasy” in Routledge Handbook of Sexuality, Health, and Human Rights (Routledge, 2010), “Deconstructing Monogamy: Boundaries, Identities and Fluidities Across Relationships” in Understanding Non Monogamies (Routledge, 2009) and “Thinking Beyond Gender in Strip Shows” with Michelle Carnes in Sex for Sale; 2nd edition (Routledge, 2009). She is also working on two book manuscripts based on her research on consensual non-monogamy in the U.S. and was reappointed to the Board of Directors of CARAS, the Community-Academic Consortium for Research on Alternative Sexualities.

Susan Hoecker-Drysdale, research professor in residence, is continuing her research and writing on the feminist contributions of women and men in the founding and historical development of sociology, with related projects underway including a book under contract with Wiley-Blackwell. She recently completed a revised and expanded chapter on Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) for a forthcoming two-volume collection on classical and contemporary sociological theorists edited by George Ritzer. Last July, she presented a paper on Harriet Martineau at the Annual Meeting of the Martineau Society in Boston. She has been named to the editorial board of The American Sociologist.

Susan McDonic is visiting assistant professor at American University. Her research interests include contemporary religious movements, international development, Africa, Asia and globalization. Specifically, she has studied one of the world’s largest development organizations - World Vision, a Christian Development organization. Her multi-sited work spans Canada and Ghana, West Africa, and considers the connections and complications between them. Her book, Material Faith: Contending with Development, Belief, and Truth in World Vision International is forthcoming from University of Chicago Press. Future research projects expand upon her interests in religion and development and begin to explore Buddhist development practices, specifically in the Tibetan diaspora in Northern India. Toward this end, she will be taking 11 students on a trip to Dharamsala, India, this summer with AU’s Alternative Break program.
Michelle Newton-Francis joined the faculty in fall 2009. Currently, she is revising two of her dissertation chapters into journal articles. The first elaborates a temporal model that people use to reveal potentially stigmatizing information. The second, co-authored with Gay Young, examines the culture industry of Hooters Restaurants and the production of the “Hooters Girl.” In 2009, she published a book review in Contemporary Sociology and a photographic essay in Contexts. She serves as a referee for Teaching Sociology, a journal published by the American Sociological Association, and in January 2010 was appointed to its editorial board. She is active in the D.C. Sociological Society, where she serves as the editor of their newsletter.

Celine-Marie Pascale was promoted to associate professor, with tenure, in 2009. Her second book, Cartographies of Knowledge: Exploring Qualitative Epistemologies, is forthcoming from Sage Publications. Meanwhile, she is at work on two new books. In January 2010, she was invited to coauthor a book entitled The Changing Politics of Race & Ethnicity with France Winddance Twine of University of California, Santa Barbara (SAGE Publications, expected 2013). In addition, Pascale is working on an edited book, entitled Power & Privilege: The Politics of Representation in a Global Landscape (under consideration with Pine Forge/SAGE Publications). Pascale has a forthcoming article, “Language & Sociology,” in Baratina: Revista Castellano-Manchega de Ciencias and a book review in the American Journal of Sociology—both of which will be published later this year. In 2009, she published “Commonsense, Gender, and the Politics of Queer Visibility” in Advances in Gender Research, Vol. 13. She also published “Nowhere to Fall: Facing the Economic Crisis in the U.S.” with then-undergraduate sociology major Katie Beran in Z Magazine. In January, Pascale was elected president of the Language and Society Research Committee of the International Sociology Association (2010–2014). She received an International Travel Award from the College of Arts & Sciences to attend the International Sociological Association’s 17th World Congress of Sociology meeting in Sweden this summer. When she returns this fall from her leave, Pascale will continue to teach in the Honors Program.

Natalia Ruiz-Junco has been an invited speaker at several events this academic year. She was invited to speak about social movements by the Bread and Roses Heritage Committee and was an invited panelist at the University of Maryland’s Creative Dialogues, where she participated in a panel called “Outcasts and Society.” She is this year’s sociological theory editor of the American Sociological Association Digital Library. She is also the secretary of the D.C. Sociological Society (DCSS) for 2009-2010. Dr. Ruiz-Junco is happy that she has been granted a junior faculty teaching release for the spring semester of 2011, and during this time she will be working on a book manuscript.

Salvador Vidal-Ortiz was appointed to the boards for the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and the American Studies programs at AU. Along with Andrea Brenner, he received a Faculty Award from the GLBTA Resource Center in 2009. Outside AU, he achieved, as liaison/inaugural chair the approval of a new American Sociological Association (ASA) section titled the Sociology of the Body and Embodiment. His coedited book, The Sexuality of Migration, was published in 2009 by NYU Press; he is currently working on his manuscript on sexual minorities in Santería. For Fall 2010, he is presenting a paper about autoethnographic work and feminists of color at the ASA meetings in Atlanta, and another one on practitioners of Santería at a gender and sexuality panel for the Latin American Studies Association in Toronto. Next year, he will serve as cochair of the Graduate Committee. During Spring 2011, he will teach at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia, and conduct internal migration research about LGBT communities, under a Fulbright.

Chenyang Xiao was invited to the World Bank Headquarters to give a presentation titled “Gender Differences in Environmental Behaviors in China” on March 10, 2010. This presentation was based on an article with the same title that was recently accepted by Population and Environment. Xiao has accepted an invitation to teach a course on structural equation modeling at Renmin University of China in Beijing this summer. In August, he will present a paper, titled “The Structure and Social Bases of Environmental Concern in China,” at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. In the 2010–2011 academic year, Xiao will be on partial teaching leave.

During her sabbatical year in Jerusalem (2008–09), Gay Young followed-up her 2004–05 Fulbright research on women’s / feminist peace activism in Israel. The movement's diverse strategies - challenging masculinities in Israeli society, contesting government policies and practices, and engaging the international community in opposing the occupation - are among the most vibrant elements of critical, feminist actions for peace. She continues a long-standing practice of working with former students to develop their work for publication and has projects ongoing with junior faculty member Michelle Newton-Francis and Nkiru Nnawulezi, a former Women’s Studies and McNair Fellow who is now a doctoral student at Michigan State University. Her book manuscript, Gendering Globalization on the Ground: Mexican Women’s Feminized Work and Democracy at Home, is forthcoming from Routledge. The book illuminates the connection between Mexican women’s work and gender relations in the context of ongoing processes of globalization. Through thoughtful unpacking of those concepts - “globalization,” “gender relations,” “women’s work” - she analyzes the situation in northern Mexico and locates it in a larger global context.

GRADUATE STUDENTS


Gina M. Finelli (PhD Candidate) is a lecturer of sociology at the University of Baltimore.

Melissa Gouge is serving as student editor for the D.C. Sociological Society newsletter.
Tara Mancini served as the 2009-10 president of the College of Arts and Sciences student council. She also presented a paper titled: “The Role of Social Location in Shaping Male Clients’ Perceptions and Reported Treatment of Female Sex Workers” at the 2010 Eastern Sociological Society meetings.


**UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS**

Jessica Arencibia (senior) was selected to participate in the Teach for America program.

Maggie Campbell (sophomore) was awarded the outstanding 1st/2nd year award by the AU Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Ally Resource Center.

Meredith Jachowicz (senior), an Honor’s sociology student, had her capstone paper selected for a poster session at the Honors Conference held on April 14, 2010. The title was “Courage, Charm, and Compassion: Gender Roles in Newbery Medal Winning Books.” Meredith received a 2010 Honors Capstone Research Conference Honorable Mention award for her poster.

Rachel Lynne Smith is co-leading an Alternative Summer Break to Dharamsala, India, in summer 2010 (with Susan McDonic as faculty advisor). Sociology major Kathleen McKenna will also attend. The trip will focus on the effects of the Chinese invasion and the Tibetan Diaspora on the culture, religion, gender, education, and government of the Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala.

**ALUMNI**

Katie Beran (BA ’09) and Celine-Marie Pascale co-authored an article on Z Magazine titled “Nowhere to Fall: Facing the Economic Crisis in the U.S.”

Walter F. Carroll (PhD ’83), Professor of Sociology at Bridgewater State College, is Acting Coordinator of Asian Studies for the spring 2010 semester. He is working on a project examining sushi, globalization, and Japanese food culture. Along with other BSC faculty members, he traveled to Japan in summer 2008 to work on this project. He gave a talk on it at Kansai University in Japan. The talk subsequently appeared in the Journal of Cultural Interaction Studies, published by the Institute of Cultural Interaction Studies at Kansai University.

Rosemary J. Erickson (PhD ’04) is president of Athena Research Corporation (PhD ’94). As a forensic sociologist, Dr. Erickson conducts research and training in crime prevention for business and government agencies. She also serves as an expert witness nationwide in litigation for civil suits. She also had the honor of serving on President Obama’s campaign policy committee on criminal justice, for which she, along with the team she worked with, prepared several white papers on criminal justice topics.

Jennifer Fish (PhD ’03) and Jennifer Rothschild (PhD ’02) recently published a chapter, entitled “Intersections of Scholar-Activism in Feminist Fieldwork Reflections on Nepal and South Africa,” in The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, and Gender. Fish also co-edited “Women’s Activism in South Africa: Working Across Divides” with Hannah Britton and Sheila Meintjes (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009).

Fahmi Ghazwi studied sociology at AU in the 1970’s and currently serves as Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan.

Esther Fafard (MA ’09) works as a data manager analyst at Westat, a research company in the D.C. metro area.

Kelli Rucker (BA ’00) received our Julius B. Hobson Award for outstanding service to the AU community. Rucker went on to get two Masters degrees, one in public policy in public finance from the University of Chicago, and one in accounting from the University of Virginia. She is now director of financial analysis at the Human Resources Development Institute in Chicago. She is currently applying to PhD programs in sociology.


Jessica Staff (BA ’09) has been accepted into the MA Program in Urban Teaching (The Urban Teachers Education Program) at the University of Chicago for the fall of 2010.

Eliz Storelli (MA ’09) was accepted with a full doctoral fellowship to Boston College’s sociology PhD program. She also presented a paper at the Eastern Sociological Society meeting.

Alissa Tombaugh (BA ’09) published the article “Pretty Dresses and Privilege: Gender and Heteronormativity in Weddings” in the e-journal Sociological Insight in 2009.


Maria Eugenia Verdaguer (MA ’90; PhD ’02) published Class, Ethnicity, Gender, and Latino Entrepreneurship with Routledge in 2009.


We want to hear from you!
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**Please send updates to socio@american.edu**
Professor Chow Builds a Foundation for Education in China

For years, sociologists have been the leaders of foundations, key persons on grant review panels dispersing funds to support sociological projects, or have served in various staff capacities. Esther Ngan-ling Chow saw a need for financial security in order to achieve goals important to her and therefore launched her own small foundation.

Chow grew up in China and attended a True Light school, a special school that identified talented girls who were then given full educational opportunities. Because she was able to receive a quality high school education in Hong Kong and did well as a student, Chow was able to dream of achieving a graduate degree. She came to the United States in 1966 and completed her PhD in sociology at UCLA. She has been a member of the faculty at American University in Washington, D.C., ever since.

In 1955, Chow was one of the first scholarship recipients supported by the original True Light Foundation in New York City. According to Chow, “The six-year scholarship award rescued me from poverty when I desperately needed it to continue my education. It consisted of U.S. $100 per academic year, which was munificently donated by three American women and one Chinese American woman, all of whom resided in New Jersey. Without these generous scholarships, I would not have been able to graduate from high school, let alone go to college and graduate school for advanced studies…and have a professional career like what I have now.”

With six other visionary graduates of the True Light Schools in China and Hong Kong, Chow established the True Light Foundation, Inc., a non-profit membership organization based out of her home. Incorporated in 2004, she has served as the President of this organization since its inception. Having a foundation in place is an effective mechanism to solicit and distribute funds, start new initiatives—some from Chow’s Fulbright research in China—and have an ongoing structure to support women’s education.

As a firm believer in “making a difference” by taking social action, Chow points out, “The mission of the foundation resonates with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, established in 2000, to strengthen education as a basic dimension of human rights and to reduce the disparity between boys’ and girls’ education so rampant in the developing world. China is a country in need of such educational changes.”

The foundation has launched True Light Project Hope, which raises funds to provide scholarships for needy boys and girls in poverty-stricken areas of rural Western China. Her foundation has been able to tap generous donors in the United States to fund 295 scholarships that help support girls seeking to continue a three-year high school education past the nine years of universal education offered by the Chinese government. The cost of a girl’s education is quite modest, $100 USD a year to subsidize school expenses that parents must pay for their daughters.

The foundation recently enacted a new initiative that has supported an additional 60 scholarships in the past three years for boys and girls at all school levels in the Sichuan province who have a disabled parent. In the global economy, parents often do out-migration jobs and subsequently return to their villages due to job-related injuries. In her field research, Chow interviewed several of these disabled migrant workers in a remote rural region. “Uninformed of workers’ rights, many injured workers either receive little or no workers’ compensation and their families struggle for survival with limited assistance from local governments,” says Chow. Her action research project documented the vulnerability and struggle of these families and assessed the kind of help they needed, including the education of children, to provide for the family.

The foundation’s latest plan is to build schools in remote rural China, where dropout rates for girls are higher than for boys. Poor school environments with limited resources and facilities often discourage poverty-stricken parents from keeping their children in schools. Son-preference further seriously shortchanges daughters in education. The True Light Foundation has concentrated its efforts in the most impoverished areas with the highest rates of illiteracy among women in China.

In spite of the fast pace of change in China, Chow reminds us that universal education extends only through 9th grade. Girls are unlikely to have educational opportunities to even that level, much less beyond. The empowerment of girls through education is key to social change and to eliminating gender inequality and social injustice, which is the Foundation’s mission. In every True Light Foundation brochure, the commitment to “education as the key to break the cycle of poverty” stands out. The True Light Foundation, growing in endowment, participation, and gifts, provides a structure to assure continued support of Chinese women’s education. Chinese-American women like Esther Chow are working valiantly and giving generously to educate girls who would have otherwise been left behind.

This article was written by Carla B. Howery prior to her untimely death. She served as Deputy Executive Officer of the American Sociological Association (ASA) for many years. Adapted from the article with the same title originally published in ASA Footnotes (November 2008) newsletter, with permission of ASA and Dr. Chow.
Help Us Nurture Sociological Imaginations

I want to support the AU Department of Sociology with a gift of $_______ to the:

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American University, College of Arts and Sciences
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Questions? Call 202-885-2435 or e-mail Liz Raymond at raymond@american.edu.

Help Us Nurture Sociological Imaginations

Congratulations to Our Newest Alumni

Undergraduates

Jessica Arencibia
Jacqueline Atrio
Kyrie Bannar
Heather Bauer
Sarah Bernal
Emily Booth
Jennifer Burke
Joanna Carmusciano
Han Chen
Jessica Deary
Lauren Frail
Paula Freedman
Halley Goldberg
Sam Goldstein
Rachel Hiller
Meredith Jachowicz
Jaime L. Kannan
Michael Liptrot

Maureen McCarty
Kathryn Messina
Ariana Muñoz
Ashley Murphy
Emily O’Hara
Francesca Phipps
Sharon Raya
Eric Roe
Matthew Samuels
Colleen Scanlon
Kim Selman
Amanda Simmons
Jessica Staff
Christina Steier
Lauren Tatarsky
Jenna Vaccaro
Katherine Valles
Laura Whiston

Graduates

Carimanda Baynard

Jennifer Gibson
MA Thesis: Reconciling Assimilation Theory and Capital Accumulation in Washington, D.C. Immigrant Communities

Danielle Goodman
MA Project: The Affect of Negative Peer Pressure on the Academic Achievement of African American Pre-Adolescents: Collective Identity and the Burden of Acting White

Quincy Koepf
PhD Dissertation: American Families and Absences: Breaking the Parent-Child Bond

Donna Minnich
PhD Dissertation: The Voices of Dying Subjects on Hospice, Pain, and Dying