From the Chair

Greetings! The year has been a very busy one for me personally as I continue to learn all of the responsibilities of being a chair, and also for the department, as we move forward with implementing our strategic plan to expand the research culture in the department and develop our expertise in health and society. In the fall, we were busy conducting searches to fill two open positions, one assistant professor in demography with a specialization in health, and the other at the associate level, with a record of scholarship and funding in the social determinants of health. Happily, we hired Jimi Adams, from Arizona State University, as an assistant professor; he will start in August 2012. Our search for an associate professor continues—so if you are interested, or know someone who might be, please contact me or Gay Young (chair of the search committee).

This spring, we started a new departmental research seminar at which we share our work, benefiting from the feedback of our colleagues and developing a shared sense of our many strengths as a department. We also continued to expand the Center on Health, Risk, and Society (CHRS), aimed at building an interdisciplinary group of scholars at AU interested in the social aspects of health and facilitating the development of related collaborative research projects. Finally, under our leadership, American University has become one of six institutional affiliates of the DC Developmental Center for AIDS Research (DC D-CFAR). This has opened access to many new resources for conducting HIV/AIDS related research at AU.

We are proud of our 26 minors and 63 majors, 22 of which graduated with a BA this past spring. As in the past, our majors were a substantial presence at the spring student research conference of the College of Arts and Sciences, presenting papers on topics as diverse as the media construction of neighborhood desirability, racial identity in adoption, the tea party in the media, masculinity in graphic novels, hoarding, and the experience of incarcerated trans women. Twenty students were inducted into Alpha Kappa Delta, the international sociological honor society, and four students were presented awards at our annual Sociology Day the first day of May. Our 15 masters students have excelled as well; and all but one of our remaining doctoral students completed their degrees in the summer or 2011.

In the pages that follow, you will see that our faculty have contributed extensively to the discipline, publishing books as well as articles in some of the top journals in their subfields, successfully competing for grants and contracts, presenting at professional meetings, taking leadership positions in professional organizations, excelling in the classroom, mentoring undergraduate and graduate students, working hard to serve local, national, and international communities, and winning awards for their work. Sadly, we acknowledge the passing of one of our former colleagues, Gert Mueller. We are planning a special event next year to highlight the significance of sociological theory, in his honor.

Finally, I would like to thank each and every one of my colleagues for their support, guidance, and commitment to the department. Two very special thanks; one goes to the faculty who worked so hard in getting our last PhD students successfully through the program; the other goes to Sandy Linden, whose responsibilities have grown exponentially, even while the time she has to accomplish them has remained the same, and yet, she manages to keep us on track!

-Kim Blankenship
American University Department of Sociology Newsletter

Gert Harald Mueller: In Memoriam

By Joseph R. Pearce (PhD '94) and Jorg K. Segalblader, Professor Emeritus, American University

Gert Harald Mueller, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at American University, died at the age of 89 on October 23, 2012, in Washington, DC. Mueller was born in Dresden, Germany, on July 20, 1922. After WWII, he was admitted to the Freie Universität of West Berlin. He received his PhD from the University of Münich in 1954. The title of his dissertation was “The Structure of Pure Dialectics.” He subsequently returned to Berlin to pass his first state examination, which entitled him to teach history, philosophy, and French in the German gymnasia system, where he taught from 1954 to 1962. After spending several years as a private scholar, he accepted a position as assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh, where he taught sociology from 1968 to 1972.

In 1973, he became an assistant professor at American University, where he advanced to full professor and taught sociology until his retirement in 1991. As an emeritus professor, he remained active in pursuing his research and writing on sociological theory up to the time of his death.

Mueller’s work in analytical sociological theory was the fruit of more than 50 years of scholarly research. His work in theory was the product of a painstaking curiosity leading to exhaustive studies in religion, philosophy, history, and sociology. The body of Mueller’s work bears witness to a lifelong passion for uncompromising scholarship and intellectual craftsmanship in the pursuit of sociology as a rigorous science.

He was a scholar in the classical mold whose breadth of knowledge reflected a singular dedication to scholarship. He came before him, theorists like Aristotle, Comte, Hegel, Marx, Weber, Husserl, and Wittgenstein. He argued that reality (physical, biological, social, moral, linguistic) is constructed to map and test the relationships between what he called “emergent and dominant superstructures.”

Mueller left a substantial body of original work in analytical sociological theory, much of which remains unpublished. A selection of these manuscripts can be found on the American University Department of Sociology website (www.american.edu/cas/sociology/aas/index.cfm).

Last year, the department established the Sociology Legacy Fund to honor the contributions to a sociological community—within and outside our institution—of our past faculty including Dr. Mueller. Please visit the following website to find out more about the fund and how to make a donation (http://www.american.edu/cas/news/sociology-legacy-fund.cfm).

Mueller is survived by his first cousin, Soeieg Woelfel of Frankfurt, Germany. In his trust he wrote, “I have no children, living or deceased. My friends have been family to me.” He will be greatly missed by his students and those who knew and loved him.

Editors’ note: This obituary was printed in the February 2013 issue of Footnotes, a publication of the ASA. With their permission, it is reprinted here.

CHRS Continues to Expand

By Monica Boudewin, PhD, Research Assistant Professor and Assistant Director of CHRS

The Center on Health, Risk, and Society (CHRS) continues its expansion with the addition of Assistant Professor Michael Bader in the Department of Sociology. Dr. Bader researches cities and ways in which people interact with the built environment. His scholarship centers on racial and economic segregation, neighborhood inequality, and health and nutrition disparities. In the fall 2012, newly hired Assistant Professor Jimi Adams will also work closely with CHRS (see related story).

CHRS continues to support student research including five MA students in sociology (Cheslie Gordon, Rebekah Israel, Sarah Okorie, Elizabeth Puloka, and Lori Sommerfeld) and one PhD student in anthropology (Ashante Reese). Two undergraduate students, Keys Benyamegn (government) and Erik Jacobson (sociology) worked as interns at the center. For the second summer in a row, CHRS will host interns from institutions across the US as part of our funded summer research program.

Following the success of last year’s “Getting to Know Your Colleagues” seminar series, the center continued the format of a weekly seminar. We invited newly-hired colleagues from across AU, with research interests in health, to present their work and be introduced to CHRS, including professors: Michael Bader of sociology, Nina Yamanis of SIS, and Taryn Morrissey of SPA.

Several guest speakers from outside AU presented their work: Dr. Fernando De Maio of De Paul University presented his ongoing work on the health effects of income inequality in Argentina; Dr. Lasabani Goparaju of Georgetown University presented her research on African-American women’s perceptions of the down-low phenomenon among Black men; Samson Njonoole, an HIV activist from Malawi, spoke about HIV and nutrition outcomes in rural Malawi; Dr. Elizabeth Rigby of George Washington University spoke on the public support for redistribution to address inequality; Dr. Jennifer Huang of Georgetown University talked about her ongoing work on sex work, sex work, and HIV in China; and Drs. Maria-Cecilia Zea, Paul Popen, Carol Reisen, and Fernanda Blanch of George Washington University presented findings from their research on MSWs, internal displacement, and HIV risk in Colombia.

The center also organized some seminars as “work-in-progress,” to allow CHRS-affiliated faculty across AU to get input on grant proposals, papers in the revise-and-resubmit stage and research ideas for future projects. Our seminar/discussions were attended ahead of time and the papers/proposals distributed in advance. Professors Michael Bader, Kim Blankenship, Daniel Esser, and Rachel Robinson received feedback on papers, Professors Maria De Jesus and Nina Yamanis got input on grant proposals; and Tamara Haflfer shared her ideas for a new research project.

CHRS Director and Sociology Chair, Kim Blankenship, has received funding from the NIH to organize a conference in fall 2012 entitled, “Community Disruption and HIV Risk: Re-entry, Gentrification, and HIV/AIDS in the District of Columbia.” The conference will focus on social structural processes critical in shaping HIV/AIDS risk in DC and, arguably, in producing race and ethnic disparities in that risk. Part of the preparation for this conference and to increase collaboration across centers at AU CHRS is working with the Center on Latino and Latin American Studies (CLALS) to include the issue of the health impacts of deportation within immigrant communities.

In addition to providing a space for intellectual engagement among health scholars, the center also licensed software to various analytical programs in the past year. CHRS is now equipped with Analyse-It, NVivo, SPSS, STATA and Ucinet, which are open for use by faculty, staff, and students affiliated with CHRS. The center sponsored a one-day training session on NVivo in May 2012.

The CHRS website now features all faculty affiliated with the center and their specific topical and methodological expertise. Next year, the center will host a conference series in support of the development of grant proposals, organizing groups around specific topic areas, and continuing the expansion of our presence as a center of excellence in health research in the Washington, DC area. To learn more about the center and its staff, or to become involved, please visit the CHRS website (www.american.edu/cas/sociology/chrs).

Emily Parker Wins Eastern Sociological Society’s Undergraduate Research Award

By Abby Baker

As a sophomore, Emily Parker (BA ’12), interned with a social worker at a nonprofit organization that worked with elderly tenants of apartment buildings or subsidized housing in the District to help prevent eviction, mainly due to hoarding issues. When she enrolled in Professor Michael Bader’s Health and the City course, she suggested that she submit an abstract to present at the ESS Parker presented her poster in New York at the conference. “A lot of people were really excited about the topic and couldn’t believe what I said and that there’s never been any sociological research on it,” she says. “My research is trying to initiate a sociological understanding of the subject,” says Parker. She wanted to frame the subject as less of an individual psychological problem and more of an issue that contributes to the larger social factors that manifest themselves in individual behaviors. “These were factors like trauma in one’s life, social isolation, lack of family ties, unemployment, socioeconomic status, and especially aging and how aging in our society in particular can precipitate hoarding behavior,” she explains.

Students Participate in Alternative Break to Haiti

In March 2012, graduate student Rebekah Israel served as co-leader for the Alternative Break to Haiti. The trip explored sustainable development through people as resources, with emphasis on empowering women and youth. The student participants worked closely with two Haitian organizations, the Association of Peasants of Fondefa (APF) and Fondefa, that empower rural communities through microfinance and community led development projects.

Laura Vogler (BA ’12) also participated and served as the official photographer. She saw first-hand the difference these organizations were making. She commented that the provision of “water filtration, gardens, solid houses with tin roofs, job skills, birth control, and community support really transformed the lives of the women and their self-confidence.” Rebekah Israel said that the trip was life changing for her, and that it also allowed her to engage the students in sociological discussions about “structural inequalities and how connecting them to race, class, and gender disparities here in the US and even locally in the DC metropolitan area.”

Editors’ note: Please see expanded story on the department website.
Department of Sociology News and Notes

FACULTY

Over the summer, Michael Bader will continue development of a platform using Google Street View to measure neighborhood environments. The project is funded by a National Institute of Child Health and Human Development grant. He published two journal articles: the first, in City and Community, investigates preferences for redeveloped neighborhoods; the second, in the American Journal of Public Health, examines the relationship between residential segregation and low birth weight births in Michigan metropolitan areas. He was invited to a specialist meeting on the topic of Spatial Demographic in December entitled “Great Cities, Ordinary Lives” at the University of Illinois-Chicago, and presented results from his own work at the Population Association of America meeting in May. This year he is combining Health, the Sociology of the City, and Power Privilege and Inequality.

Monica Biradavolu has a new research project with colleagues from the NIH and the Department of Health. The Washington DC-based research is on the barriers to provision of HIV services for the severely mentally ill in the DC metropolitan area. She has continued her engagement with DC-DCVAR (District of Columbia Development Center for AIDS Research) and is now a member of a Scientific Working Group on mental illness and HIV. As assistant director, she continues to help build the Center on Health, Risk, and Society (CHRS) and work on projects on HIV risk and prevention in India) and one from NIDA (a Community Health Grant). She has been awarded a large subcontract to collaborate with Blair Johnson (Psychology, UCONN, funded by NIMH) in which she is the convener/editor for a creative writing, as an exercise for research. Andrea Malkin Brenner continues to serve as undergraduate advisor, honors coordinator, and the capstone class, she directs internships in the department. She also serves on the general education curriculum committee for CAS. Recently, she published several entries in the Encyclopedia of Du, Dyng, and Dying, including submissions on animism, cannibalism, curses, totemism, and superstition.

Estar Ngan-ling Chow, Professor Emerita, made a presentation, “Feminist Strategies for Creative Retirement,” at the winter meeting of the Sociologists for Women in Society (SFS). She co-edited a book, Sexual Production and Reproductive Rights, published in May. She also continues to serve as the faculty advisor for the Alternative Break Program and will travel to Northern India for the third time. Additionally, she is the faculty advisor for Students for Tibet. This year she was part of the speakers and events committee for the department.

This summer, Michelle Newton-Francois will be conducting fieldwork on erotic labor in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Expanding on her research in the US, she is beginning comparative research, with Salvador Vidal-Orejuela, on Hooters in the US and Colombia. She continues to serve on the board of the Embodiment section of the ASA, and chairs an award committee for the DCSS.

Brenda Kirkwood served as Instructor of Sociology and Assistant Director of the Public Health program. In addition to launching AU’s new public health major and minor, Dr. Kirkwood remains active in national initiatives aimed at undergraduate public health education. She received the 2012 Distinguished Alumni Award from the American Public Health Association and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. In 2012, she completed her doctoral degree from the George Washington School of Public Health and Health Services. We wish her well in her new endeavors.

Rachel Robinson is forthcoming this summer (with Sage). The book is expected to be published in 2013.

Marta Sánchez Junco is a forthcoming book, “Milltown Emotions” was presented at the 2011 annual conference of the International Society for Research on Emotions in Kyoto, Japan. She submitted three entries to The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Social Science (forthcoming 2012) including those on the readjusters, the greenshiners, and place, space, and class (with co-author Dwight Billings).

Bette Dickerson continues her service-learning and community engagement work with community partners in South Africa as the faculty sponsor of AU’s Alternative Break South Africa. She also developed the 8-week Community-based Learning and Service Program: South Africa: Community Engagement and Service. Her work in South Africa was featured in articles published in AMERICAN MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN (May 2012) and AU: American MIDAGE (Dec. 2011). She is a member of the Planning Committee for the 2012 annual meeting of the International Association of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement. This year, she presented papers at the ESS and the Southern Sociological Society. In addition to coediting two books (Black Women's Race, Age, and Sexuality and Notions of Family: International Perspectives), she has a forthcoming book chapter in the book, ‘Social Inequalities in a Global Landscape: The Politics of Representation’ forthcoming this summer (Sage). This year, Natalia Ruiz-Junco was quoted on voluntourism in the UK in EJ magazine. In addition, she continues to examine identity construction in the Spanish environmental movement was published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography. She also published on self-empowerment in Current Perspectives in Social Theory. She was an invited panelist at the Centre International de l'Ethnologie (CEI) 2012 Annual Conference in - Adriennes in Gender Research. Currently, she is on the advisory board of a significant conference titled “Women’s search for and Political Engagement” funded by the National Science Foundation.

Kate Frank, scholar in residence, is currently working on a book manuscript examining representations of the global South through the World of Group Soc. The book is expected to be published in 2013. She continues to teach the Feminist and Gender Theory course for the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) program.

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Sanusi McDoine continues her exploration into Buddhist International development processes and philosophy. This year she initiated and organized the annual first “Ten Days for Tibet” on campus, featuring various events organized in cooperation with Tibet House. Her continuing work as the faculty advisor for the Alternative Break Program and will travel to Northern India for the third time. Additionally, she is the faculty advisor for Students for Tibet. This year she was part of the speakers and events committee for the department.

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With an international team of eight scholars, Celine-Marie Pascale is applying for a European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Basic Research Grant to examine how the standardization of education systems (colleges and universities) in industrial and service sector call centers both facilitates work and maintains linguistic hierarchies of race, class, and gender. This year, Pascale presented papers at the International Institute of Sociology (IIS) 40th World Congress in Delhi, India, and at the Second Sociological World Forum in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her second book, Cartographies of Knowledge, won the 2012 International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry Award for an Emerging Scholar. In addition, her book has an important contribution to the field of qualitative inquiry for “charting new territories.” Pascale’s newest book Social Inequalities in a Global Landscape: The Politics of Representation is forthcoming this summer (Sage).

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Anna-Beit Coe (MA '99, MA '98) is currently in a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at the Umeå Center for Gender Studies (where she received her PhD in sociology in 2010). For the post-doc, she is completing research that compares youth and adult feminist activists in Peru and Ecuador. This year, she returned to Ecuador to share and discuss the findings on youth activism on sexual and reproductive health with young activists as well as policymakers.

Joanna Dees (MA ‘10) currently serves as the Director of Corporate Relations and Supplier Diversity at the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.

Rosemary Erickson (PhD ’94) was recently quoted in USA Today on crime near train stations and airports. She was also interviewed on two television programs, 20/20 and the Dr. Phil Show, on the importance of not resisting in a robbery.

Tekisha Everette (PhD ‘11) is the managing director of federal government affairs for the American Diabetes Association.

Tara Mancini (MA ‘10) is a research assistant at the Georgetown Health Policy Institute, Center for Children and Families, whose focus is strengthening public health insurance programs, such as Medicaid and CHIP, and implementation issues related to the Affordable Care Act.

Susan Archer Mann (MA ‘75) is professor and associate chair of the department of sociology at the University of New Orleans. Her book, Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity, was published this year by Oxford University Press.

Enrique Pumar (PhD ’99) currently serves as the sociology department chair at Catholic University, where he is also a fellow and executive board member of the Institute for Social Studies. In 2011, he was elected to the Sociology of Development Council for the ASA. This summer his edited volume, Latino Sociology, was published. He also has two manuscripts forthcoming; one in Theory in Action and the other in the LDC Law Review journal. Recently, he was awarded a grant to advise the Smithsonian Office of Latino Affairs on a project of Hispanic migration to DC.

During his first year of the doctoral program at the University of Texas, Austin, Brandon Robinson (BA ‘99) has an article forthcoming in Sexuality Research & Social Policy. This summer, he will present two papers at the ASA meetings, one at the sexualities mini-conference (pre-ASA) and the other at the sexualities roundtables.

Rituja Sabhny (PhD ’96) published Maid’s Crossing: Domestic Workers in the UAE in March 2012. The book explores the treatment of domestic workers in the UAE.

Eliza Storelli (MA ’99) finished coursework and exams for her PhD in Sociology (Boston College) and is now working on her dissertation proposal. She is back in the DC area and works part-time in the Development and Volunteer Coordinator at Community Family Life Services, a non-profit providing housing and social services to homeless and low income persons in DC.

IN MEMORIAM

With sadness, we report the death of Merhaf Mashayekhi (PhD ’92) who passed away in October 2011. Born in Iran, and a scholar on post-revolutionary Iran, he taught at a number of schools in the DC metropolitan area and was most recently a visiting professor at Georgetown University.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Natalia Ruiz-Junco was invited to speak (in November 2011) at the Humanities and Social Sciences Institute of the prestigious National Autonomia de Mexico (UNAM), an important research-based university in Mexico City and the country as a whole. She spoke to the work of Marianne Weber, a feminist social theorist who made an important theoretical contribution in the area of gender and inequality. Weber is considered one of the “women founders” of classical social theory. Ruiz-Junco’s presentation was entitled “The Women Founders in Sociological Discourse and Interpretive Theory.” With UNAM sociologist Maya Aguiluz, Dr. Ruiz-Junco continues to build collaborations to think about classical sociological theory in these transnational conversations.

Do you have news to share? We want to hear from you! Please send updates to socio@american.edu
Welcome, jimy adams!

In fall 2012, the department welcomes Dr. jimy adams (PhD, Ohio State University) as Assistant Professor of Sociology. He will also work closely with the CHRS. Most recently, he served as Assistant Professor in the School of Social and Family Dynamics at Arizona State University, where he was affiliated with the Center for Population Dynamics. His research interests are in social networks, health, and demography. His work focuses on social networks as they pertain to (1) information diffusion within and across organizations and (2) the spread and control of infectious diseases. Much of this work has focused on HIV-prevention in high-risk populations. In the fall, he will teach the undergraduate social research methods course and an honors course on social networks.

Help Us Nurture Sociological Imaginations

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

☐ Sociology Legacy Fund
☐ Sociology Department’s General Fund
☐ Kianda Bell Award
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