



Sociology Newsletter

spring 2008

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



On March 27-28, 2008, Sociology Department faculty including Susan Alexander, Mary Ann Kanieski, Leslie Wang, and Carrie Erlin accompanied four sociology majors to the North Central Sociological Association's annual meeting in Cincinnati, OH. The students included seniors Nicole Loughridge, Meggan Patty, Nikki Witowski and junior major Monica Velarde. The senior students presented their senior comprehensive research papers in regular research sessions.

The theme of the conference was "Common Situations: Complex Realities." The keynote Plenary Address titled "The Practice of Scientific Theorizing in Sociology and The Use of Scientific Theory in Sociological Practice" was given by Jonathan Turner, Distinguished

Professor of Sociology at the University of California – Riverside. In order to make sociological knowledge useful, Turner proposed an "engineering model whereby general theories are translated into *rules of thumb* about basic social processes and then applied by the practitioner to meet a client's needs." Turner's goal is to develop those "rules of thumb," or theories about "generic social forces and processes that are operative when humans behave, interact, and organize." It was an enlightening argument drawn from a classical modernist perspective

SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS WIN NATIONAL PAPER COMPETITION



For the fifth year running, senior sociology majors have won awards in the annual undergraduate student paper competition sponsored by the North Central Sociological Association. The competition is open to all undergraduates in the United States and Canada. This year 27 papers from 18 colleges/universities were submitted.



Dr. Fayyez Hussain, Michigan State University, Chair of the Student Awards Committee, announced the winners.

Two sociology seniors tied for 2nd place: Nicole (Nikki) Witowski (left) and Meggan Patty (right). Nikki's paper is titled "On the Rails: A Content Analysis of Contemporary Hobo Zines." Meggan's paper is titled: "Run, The Cops Are Here!: A Content Analysis of Teen Drinking in American Hollywood Films, 1984-2007." Both student received a certificate of recognition and a monetary award. A complete text of these papers are available at the Sociology Department website:

Go to: <http://www.saintmarys.edu/~socio/SeniorSem%20F2007/CompPresentations-F07.htm>

SOC 380: Applied Sociology and the South Bend Center for the Homeless

By Jessica McManus Warnell
SMC 1998, University of Chicago 2000



Though my full-time position is teaching business ethics and community-based learning at the University of Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business, I had the good fortune to teach Applied Sociology for Saint Mary's College in the Spring of 2008. My students, upper-level sociology majors and minors, incorporated a community-based research project into the class. In teams or individually, each student completed a project for the South Bend Center for the Homeless. Through interviews with Center guests and meetings with staff, the students collected and analyzed data and concluded the project by providing recommendations and areas for future research for the Center. We presented findings on May 30, at the Center. The projects were worth 30% of the course grade. Throughout the course, we explored terms and concepts of applied sociology, using the Center for the Homeless project as our framework.

Applied Sociology allows for the application of sociological theories and concepts to "real-world" contexts. The discipline is designed to explore practical applications of sociology to human behavior and organizations, resulting in tangible outcomes. The course explores the various applications of sociological theory, concepts, and methods to contemporary social behavior and issues. I took my first Applied course at Saint Mary's during my senior year, in 1998!

Sample student projects:

1.) "Using observation and interview methods, how do children at the Center view themselves before and after an organized service project to help others in their community?" We took five young adults (age 12-16) from the Center to Memorial Hospital to distribute gifts to sick patients on the Pediatrics floor. Overall, we received extremely positive reactions to helping others in need. We believe that guests who are actively a part of their community might have a more positive outlook on their own life and a stronger willingness to help not only themselves, but others. Recommendation: "When possible, provide guests of all ages with opportunity to give back to the community."

2.) "Center for the Homeless defines their families as a mother and her children. What about two parent families? Fathers stay in the single men's dorm. How does this separation impact family dynamics?" Keeping the family together is "hindered by the physical structure of CFH. There is no logical place to put intact families." Recommendation: Provide "accommodations for 'family time' and enhance opportunities for intact families."

3.) "How do the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) combined with limited organized physical fitness activities effect the overall nutrition and wellness habits of the guests at the Center for the Homeless? Many guests expressed a negative attitude towards the high-starch, high-carbohydrate foods. Of the 29 guests interviewed, 22 were willing to try an organized fitness program that met his/her needs." Recommendation: Implement "organized fitness activities for men and separate activities for women, promotes an overall well-being and increases an individual's self-worth, energy, and motivation through empowerment. Have guests plan healthy, well-balanced meals with the chef OR invite the chef to discuss how the meals are prepared."



Contact Jessica McManus Warnell at
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UNITE Here! Unions and Social Justice

On January 29, 2008, MacKenzie Smith from the union organization UNITE HERE! gave a public presentation in Mary Ann Kanieski's new course titled Interrogating Poverty.

According to Smith, Unite Here was created when two unions merged in 2004: UNITE (formerly the Union of Needle trades, Industrial and Textile Employees) and HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union). This new organization represents more than 450,000 active members and more than 400,000 retirees throughout North America. The goal is to improve the working conditions, wages, and benefits of the members.

As part of the campaign "Hotel Workers Rising," Smith specifically described some of the changing working conditions for hotel workers that makes the job increasingly more physically strenuous including the increase height of mattress, the increased use of decorative pillows, increased size of bathrooms. Sprains and strains are the most common housekeeper injuries (44% of all injuries in one study) often resulting from demanding tasks like bed making—lifting mattresses, adding extra sheets, and stuffing multiple pillows and duvets—

and pushing heavy carts full of linens and amenities. While the time needed to clean each room increases the rate paid per room has not increased correspondingly.

UNITE HERE represents about 100,000 workers in hotels like Hilton, Marriott and Hyatt across the U.S. and Canada. Ownership in the hotel industry is concentrated

in the hands of a few national and international companies, making it important

for hotel workers across the U.S. and Canada

UNITE HERE has a diverse membership, comprised largely of immigrants and including high percentages of African-American, Latino, and Asian-American workers. The majority of UNITE HERE members are women.



More information can be found at:
<http://hotelworkersrising.org/index.php>

NEW SOCIOLOGY COURSE: CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES

In the spring, Leslie Wang offered a new cross-listed course titled "Critical Whiteness Studies." This course focuses on the leading edge of the new research that asks questions such as: What does it mean to be white in the United States? Who is white? What is white privilege?

In this course cross-listed with the InterCultural Studies Program and the English Department, students examine how the meaning of white skin privilege has changed over time and how various "non-White" / immigrant groups have "become white," often through an assimilation process that involves embracing a racist ideology in which whiteness is privileged.

Course Objectives:

- Provide students with an in-depth examination of the interdisciplinary field of Critical Whiteness Studies;
- Provide students with examples of how scholars and writers are working in Critical Whiteness Studies from a wide range of academic disciplines & interdisciplines;
- Provide students with a thorough history of the formation of race and racial identity in the United States and the legal and philosophical meanings attached to race, specifically white skin racial identity;
- Encourage students to examine their own position in systems of power and privilege.



CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2008!



The SMC sociology class of 2008 includes (left to right):

**Nicole Loughridge,
Meggan Patty,
Nicole Novak,
Nicole Witowski,
Audrey Ballinger,
Kristina Ramos, and
Sr. Stella Mari; Kunihiro**

(missing: Kerri Bowlby and
Stephanie Petty).

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