

# Sociological Practice and Public Sociology (SPPS) Newsletter *Spring / Summer 2017*

## **Leveling the Sociology Playing Field in Higher Education: Public Sociology at Radford University**



**By: Kathleen Odell Korgen, William Patterson University  
& Elizabeth Lyman, Radford University**

As tuition rates rise and colleges and universities face closer oversight and critiques about the quality of teaching on campuses, academic departments of all disciplines have begun to incorporate more active learning into their majors. Students learn more and perform better when actively engaged in (and out) of the classroom (Bajak 2014, Killian and Bastas 2015). For several years now, from the highest levels of government (e.g., The President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology advocated for more active learning in 2012) and higher education administration (e.g., approximately 1100 college and university presidents have signed their schools up as Campus Compact members), academic departments have received the message to create more active learning opportunities for their students.

Among the 15 highest-ranked liberal arts colleges in the U.S. with sociology majors, all but one (93%) offer sociology courses (above and beyond internships and required methods courses) that include active learning experiences (U.S. News and World Report 2016<sup>1</sup>).

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Editor: Dennis Watson, PhD

## Leveling the Sociology Playing Field in Higher Education: Public Sociology at Radford University *continued from cover*

For several years now, from the highest levels of government (e.g., The President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology advocated for more active learning in 2012) and higher education administration (e.g., approximately 1100 college and university presidents have signed their schools up as Campus Compact members), academic departments have received the message to create more active learning opportunities for their students.

Among the 15 highest-ranked liberal arts colleges in the U.S. with sociology majors, all but one (93%) offer sociology courses (above and beyond internships and required methods courses) that include active learning experiences (U.S. News and World Report 2016<sup>1</sup>). The mode, mean, and range of the number of such course offerings among the 14 departments were 4, 3.6, and 9. Students at these schools see among their sociology courses a plethora of opportunities to do hands on work in various areas of sociology.

What, however, about students at non-elite colleges and universities? Do sociology students at these schools have access to active learning opportunities equal to that at the more highly ranked institutions? Not yet. Thirty-six percent of a sample<sup>2</sup> of AASCU (American Association of State Colleges and Universities) with sociology majors now offer courses that include active learning (above and beyond internships and required methods courses). Eight percent have created applied/public sociology concentrations<sup>3</sup> (other than social work or gerontology) or declared their entire major applied/public sociology. The sociology programs in these schools offer their students experiences in their courses that most students at elite schools can now take for granted. In doing so, they help level the playing field in higher education today.

As the numbers of applied and public sociology undergraduate programs continue to grow, some have sought accreditation to distinguish themselves and show that they follow the best practices in the field. If departments choose to do so, they can apply for accreditation of their public or applied sociology program (at the BA, MA, or PhD level) through The Commission of the Accreditation of Programs in Applied and Clinical Sociology (CAPACS). For example, after years of internal conversation about the place and value of a public sociology distinction, Radford University, a public university in Virginia, received accreditation for its Program in Public Sociology from CAPACS in 2014.

In the case of Radford University, the Department of Sociology first began discussion about accreditation in earnest in 2009, at a time of a university program review and a revisiting of the department mission and its role relative both to the discipline and to the university. At that time, Radford sociology students were already active in communities and research through course work and internships, and their senior seminar was taking shape as one aimed at helping students connect their sociological skills to their own communities and the labor market they would enter upon graduation.

The mission of the department already emphasized developing sociological knowledge and skills to help students use their sociology education in their post-graduate lives and careers. With agreement among the faculty that they already shared a vision for their students that was in alignment with CAPACS (both strength in academics and application of knowledge through experience), and that they already had a good foundation in place in terms of course structure, offerings, and outcomes, they decided to embark on the process of accreditation.

It was after two years of thorough examination of the department programming—from mission statement and curriculum revisions to developing outcome assessment measures—and a dialogue between the department and the university about institutional support in terms of resources and recognition of accreditation, that CAPACS accepted Radford's application for accreditation in 2011. In the years between the application submission and the CAPACS site visit in 2014 (part of the accreditation process), faculty revised courses as needed to reflect the public sociology mission of the entire department and to allow for reliable measurement of outcomes. While a painstaking process, as any time a unit reevaluates its vision and mission, the accreditation process created an opportunity for faculty to reflect on how and what they were teaching and how well it supported its goal of graduating students with both strong academic and practical sociological skills. At the culmination of the process, in 2014, the Radford Department of Sociology became an accredited Program in Public Sociology.

While many Radford students participated in internships and practica before the accreditation, now all do so, as the practice experience became a requirement for all sociology majors. The department advisor and internship coordinator work with students individually to identify internships or practica that most suit their interests and career or graduate school goals. All courses, including theory and methods, have components that build both knowledge and skills in doing sociology. Students may work in the department's Center for Social and Cultural Research, assisting faculty on research projects that assist various organizations including the Women's Resource Center in the city of Radford and the Radford University SAVES office (Substance Abuse and Violence Education Support). In their senior seminar, students do research on the professions that interest them and learn how to tailor and "package" their sociological skills to them through activities such as professional presentations on their coursework and careers, networking events with sociology alumni, and resume writing in a way that bridges their major with their skill strengths. In their senior exit survey, students remark that they feel that they have learned a great deal both in terms of course content and preparation for using their sociological skills after graduation. Students also indicate that they get their knowledge and confidence from *all* parts of the Program in Public Sociology: substantive courses, theory and methods courses, practice experiences, work in the Center for Social and Cultural Research, and the senior seminar. Like students in the most highly ranked liberal arts schools in the nation, they have learned sociology by *doing* sociology.

The reflection and attention to public sociology through the accreditation process encouraged a holistic process that has benefitted not just Radford students, but also the department and university. Radford sociology students have strong job and graduate school placement rates and the major and minor have grown throughout the post-recession period of uncertainty in public universities and the liberal arts. Having CAPACS accreditation has also helped the department as it works to gain institutional support and assures parents that, yes, students can get a job with a degree in sociology.

<sup>1</sup> This figure comes from looking at the course offerings of the 15 highest ranked schools in the National Liberal Arts College Rankings by U.S. News and World Report that offer stand-alone sociology majors.

<sup>2</sup> The sample consisted of departments offering a stand-alone sociology major from a random selection of 50% of all AACSB colleges,

<sup>3</sup> This included those described as “public” or “applied” sociology majors or concentrations and some concentrations with titles like “social Policy,” social welfare,” and social justice,” if they included applied/active learning courses.

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Mark Killian<sup>1</sup> and Hara Bastas. 2015. “The Effects of an Active Learning Strategy on Students’ Attitudes and Students’ Performances in Introductory Sociology Classes of the Scholarship.” *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 15 (3): 53-67.

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## Update from a Former William Foote Whyte Award Winner

Don Light, who won the William Foote Whyte award some years ago for applying sociology to forms of injustice and discrimination, is still at it, currently as a co-author with Melanie Terrasse of an analysis of how the ACA (Affordability Care Act or ObamaCare) entrenches some forms of discrimination against certain categories of immigrants, redresses others, and has made health insurance policies more just for anyone who qualifies. Their paper develops a framework that may be useful to others that extends Tilly's concept of durable inequalities based motives by the power elite to hoard opportunities and exploit the vulnerable, to include categorical forms of redress based on compassion, protest, and injustice, and categorical forms of retrenchment in counter-response.

This work was presented at the 2015 ASA meetings. A unique part of the research traced forms of institutional inequality back to the Confederacy and ways in which the white power elite reinstitutionalized forms of racism, oppression and poverty between 1865 and 1890, which then shaped future federal reforms. The paper traces this 150 years of institutional inequalities and is called, "Immigrant Access in the Affordable Care Act: Legacies of the Confederacy." It is headed for publication in a special issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.

This fall, Don was at the Institute for Advanced Study, outlining a new project on the pernicious effects of patenting drugs and on a real, functioning alternative that develops better medicines using open science and non-commercialized trials, finding low-cost manufacturers, and then uses IP rights to ensure low prices and maximize access. In other words, there is a viable alternative to having Big Pharma control research, IP rights, manufacturing, and sales to maximize profits through high prices. The project's working title is "Patents for Public Health, not Profits." Anyone with expertise and interest who would like to work on this can reach me at [lightdo@rowan.edu](mailto:lightdo@rowan.edu). For the 50th year, Don will be at the ASA meetings the entire time and on the program twice. He looks forward to meeting colleagues.

## Message from the Chair – JOIN US IN MONTREAL!

The ASA Section on Sociological Practice and Public Sociology (SPPS) is committed to supporting sociologists who are not only in academic positions but also in applied settings or integrate sociological analysis into public conversations through blogs, social media campaigns, and public policy recommendations. Members of SPPS represent sociology departments committed to applied sociology and community-based research; program administrators in non-profit and governmental organizations; researchers at government agencies, university centers, and hospitals; and individuals carrying out research as part of large and small social science think tanks and consulting agencies. Through this commitment, we highlight the many organizations that utilize sociologists in their research and the applicability of sociological research skills and knowledge in many occupations.

Applied research skills and an emphasis on contextualizing social problems to develop comprehensive solutions are central to the development of sociological knowledge and public policy. As sociologists, we are able to bring these skills to bear in developing grounded research plans, providing contextual analysis, and producing recommendations for effective intervention and change. Public sociologists are also able to translate empirical knowledge for a broader audience.

With our emphasis on applied and publically accessible sociology, SPPS strives to support sociologists in a wide range of positions from new sociologists interested in applied work to those who want to make a change from traditional academic positions to applied roles. This year, SPPS is making a concerted effort to expand our efforts in mentoring for applied research outside of traditional sociology. To that end, we have multiple events at ASA to support individuals interested in applied sociology careers.

### **Preparing for Applied Work Outside of Sociology: Lessons in Translation**

*-organized by Kathleen Oberlin, former SPPS council member*

What should one consider when transitioning from graduate school to an alternative academic position/applied position? What are some of the best practices for how to approach 'translating' one's skill set? Or, simply how should one talk about skills and experience for a broader, applied audience? What is useful, what's valuable, and what needs to be developed further for certain types of positions?

In this professional development workshop, facilitators will lead interactive discussions to help participants prepare for the applied job market. One discussion will focus on translating academic experience for a skills-based resume (bring your CV). The other discussion will focus on questions to ask – and not to ask – when interviewing for a non-academic position. Participants will have an opportunity to take part in both discussions with time for open dialogue at the end.

### **Mentoring Match for Applied Sociology**

*-organized by Caren Arbeit, current SPPS council member and Kimberly Fox, SPPS chair*

To provide one-on-one support for people interested in applied sociology positions, we are setting up a mentoring match program for the ASA meeting. This will allow people interested in applied positions to learn from the experience of those already doing applied work. Graduate students interested in applied positions and professionals interested in making a switch will be matched with volunteers from applied positions. These pairs can then meet for coffee, a meal, or a drink during the meeting. WATCH FOR MORE INFORMATION IN THE COMING MONTH.

### **Roundtable on Mentoring for Applied Sociologists Inside and Outside the Academy**

*-organized by Catherine Mobley, current SPPS council member*

Join this roundtable to learn more about the possibilities for applied and public sociology from a university-based applied sociologist, a publically engaged sociologist and a non-academic applied sociologist. The leaders will answer questions that undergraduates, graduate students and junior faculty may have about strategies for success inside and outside the academy.

In addition to these specific mentoring activities, SPPS panels provide opportunities to learn about the sociological practice and public sociology activities of members of ASA from academic and non-academic institutions. Our section day is Tuesday, August 14 so plan on staying to the end and supporting the work of the SPPS program committee and the dedicated sociologists working for change. For a full list of sessions, see page 11.

Please join us at these events and at our reception on Monday, August 13 at Tapas 24. The reception is always a nice time to catch up with old friends and meet new members.

See you in Montreal!

Kim



## **Section Member Announcements and Comments**

### **Race, ethnicity, and the Census**

**By: Nancy Lopez, University of New Mexico**

What is the Census Bureau Afraid Will happen when we examine how race is correlated to poverty, segregation and other civil rights outcomes? The Distinction Between Race and Ethnic Origin Is Real! E-racing the reality of race among latinos is part of color and power evasiveness and it can jeopardize the targeting of resources for our most vulnerable communities! See Hogan, Howard. 2017. "Reporting of Race among Hispanics: Analysis of ACS Data." in D.A. Swanson(ed). The Frontiers of Applied Demography, for a brilliant analysis of the value added by separate questions on Hispanic origin and race for interrogating inequalities such as poverty among Hispanics.



### **In the news**

The work of section member Jeni Cross and her colleagues at Colorado State University was featured in a Huffington Post article. Their work “found that the majority of dementia and Alzheimer’s participants experienced an unexpected reversal of cognitive decline from listening to classical music.”

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/attending-the-symphony-reverses-cognitive-decline-study-finds\\_us\\_58405d56e4b09e21702d3948](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/attending-the-symphony-reverses-cognitive-decline-study-finds_us_58405d56e4b09e21702d3948)

### **Challenges of speaking and writing on inequality**

**By: Youyenn TEO, Nanyang Technological University**

In this essay, based on a presentation I gave at a journalism conference, I reflect on the difference between portraying vignettes of poverty and telling stories of inequality. I argue that it is easier to provide vignettes than it is to tell stories. The inequality story is hard to tell for both academics and journalists. There are at least three challenges. A first challenge is that the inequality story is a nuanced and complex story. It is not always photogenic, it is not linear, and its complexity and nuance cannot be captured until we have looked in many different places over some period of time. Time is a luxury many storytellers – whether academics or journalist – do not often have. A second challenge is that talking about inequality requires speaking truth to power. We can’t always take the risks. We don’t always have the courage to do so. It is not always smart to take risks, and it is also not always clear how to make smart decisions. This is a formidable challenge as individual scholars/journalists and also for the various institutions and organizations in which we do our work. Finally, we face a challenge in our selves. For many of us who are in positions of relative class privilege, telling the inequality story requires us to confront our deservedness. Telling the inequality story requires us to examine and disrupt our internal narratives. With the challenges in mind, we still need to do this. Poverty is everywhere posed as a problem that is seeking solution. But how people come up with solutions depends on our diagnosis of what the problem is. If our diagnosis is wrong, we should not be surprised when our solutions do not solve. If I, and many other scholars, are right to say that the problem we face is not just a problem of poverty, but a problem of inequality, then we would need very different ways of imagining solutions. Telling stories about inequality is an important start to this.

Teo, Youyenn. 2017. "Vignettes of Poverty Versus Stories of Inequality." *Media Asia*. doi: DOI: 10.1080/01296612.2016.1274707.

### **Book announcements**

*Boom, Bust, Exodus: The Rust Belt, the Maquilas, and a Tale of Two Cities*, by section member Chad Broughton, won the 2016 WOLA-Duke Human Rights Book Award. Broughton's research on Rust Belt communities and displaced workers was also featured in an NPR Illinois story, Wired magazine, a Finnish newspaper, and in a recent House speech by Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL).

### **Upcoming meetings**

**Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology**, October 5-7, 2017. Cleveland, Ohio. Theme: "Use Sociology." Open to academics, policy, program and project leaders, business, health care and government professionals who use sociology, the meeting will be a point of mutual learning and growth among practitioners in the field and professionals challenged with building systems for human improvement. Other disciplines are welcome to share their strategies, projects, policies and programs for improving the human condition. This is a chance to move beyond the "Sociological Imagination" to "Sociological Creativity." Not just "papers," conference organizers seek innovation and creativity in content and presentation form. Includes undergraduate and graduate student paper and problem solving competitions. For more information, visit: <http://www.aacsnet.net/> and explore the Conferences tab.

### **Searching for a new newsletter editor**

SPPS is searching for a new newsletter editor or co-editors. The position requires the development of two newsletters a year, which include the following primary tasks:

- Soliciting material from section members and the SPPS Communications Committee;
- Reviewing and approving material;
- Organizing and formatting material;
- Distributing the newsletter through the SPPS listserv.

Each newsletter requires approximately 5-10 hours of effort to produce.

If interested, please contact Dr. Dennis Watson at [dpwatson@iu.edu](mailto:dpwatson@iu.edu).

### **ASA Election Results for SPPS**

- ❖ **Chair-Elect:** Leslie Hossfeld, Mississippi State University
- ❖ **Secretary-Treasurer:** Katie Kerstetter, George Mason University
- ❖ **Council Member Elect:** Angela Aidala, Columbia University, Mailman School for Public Health
- ❖ **Council Member Elect:** Jon Norman, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
- ❖ **Council Member Elect:** Mindy Fried, Arbor Consulting Partners

**SPPS AT THE ASA ANNUAL MEETING**

**Sunday August 13<sup>th</sup>**

- Professional Development Workshop. Preparing for Applied Work Outside of Sociology: Lessons in Translation (organized by Kathleen Oberlin for SPPS), 2:30 pm-4:10 pm

**Monday August 14<sup>th</sup>**

- Sociological Practice and Public Sociology Reception, 6:30pm-8:10pm  
--At **Tapas 24**, 20 Notre-Dame Ouest, Local 4, Montréal, Québec H2Y 1V3

**Tuesday, August 15<sup>th</sup>**

- Roundtable Session, 8:30 am-9:30 am
  - Table 01. Bringing Community Based Participatory Research to Scale Co-Production of Research Questions and Research Evidence in Public Health: Bringing CBPR to Scale.
  - Table 02. Improving homeless point-in-time counts with student researchers.
  - Table 03. The Destigmatizing Power of Disease in Practice Problem Gamblers' Engagement with Medicalization Discourses and the Destigmatizing Power of Disease.
  - Table 04. At Risk-ing & Asterisk-ing Native Peoples in Social Science: Settler-Colonialism Made Visible Through Keyword Analysis.
  - Table 05. The Sociological Side of Gordon W. Allport: Social Psychology and Engaged Social Ethics
  - Table 06. Communicating Outside the Academy: Stories and Guidance
  - Table 07. Communicating Outside the Academy: Stories and Guidance II
  - Table 08. Mentoring for Applied Sociologists Inside and Outside the Academy
  - Table 09. Social Activism: Putting Sociological Practice (Applied, Clinical, and Engaged Public Sociology) to Work
  - Table 10. Sociological Practice and Professional Development: Approaches to Training and Education
- Section Business Meeting, 9:30 am to 10:10 am
- Civic Engagement and Action: Culture and Inclusion on Campus and Off, 10:30 am-12:10 pm
- Applying Sociology to Real World Problems, 12:30 pm to 2:10 pm
- Sociological Perspectives on Evaluation Research, 2:30 pm-4:10 pm