



Wisconsin Update

Department of Sociology • Summer 2015

For Sociology Alumni of the University of Wisconsin–Madison

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Jesse Kearns: Sociology Major, Sperka Award Winner, Nontraditional Student

How many of our undergraduates have worked in roughly 75 jobs in 25 fields? Only **Jesse Kearns**, who has been everything from a photographer's assistant, to a union boilermaker, to a bartender and a retail manager—and many things in between.

At the age of 33, having lived in Hawaii for many years, the Wausau native enrolled at University of Wisconsin–Marathon County (one of the 13 two-year colleges in the UW System), with plans to finish his bachelor's degree at a UW school close to home. After three semesters earning top grades, however, Jesse transferred to UW–Madison, thanks largely to the support and encouragement of his professors at UWMC.

Jesse says that attending UW–Madison was not in his plans. "But I'm here because of my experiences at UW Colleges–Marathon County. I felt that UW–Madison was beyond my reach, based on both my upbringing and my previous educational experiences." He acknowledges that while his background is unique on this campus, he appreciates the bonuses of his age and wisdom in the classroom and while conducting research. Roughly 3 percent of the campus's undergraduate enrollment is composed of students over the age of 24.

As the 2015 Sperka Award winner, Jesse thanked Carol Sperka, saying "I will do everything I can to ensure that this gift is a part of a future that is dedicated to being worthy of such generosity. . . . All I can do now is say thank you, and continue to dedicate my time and energy in a way that Andrea might have



Jesse Kearns (left) and Carol Sperka

Continued on next page



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Autism Research Looks at Clinician Interactions

While infectious diseases can frequently be prevented by vaccines or cured with antibiotics, and while many cancers now respond successfully to treatment and go into remission, autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are, mysteriously, escalating. Since the early 1990s, there's been an enormous upsurge in ASD diagnosis: The number of children diagnosed with autism was roughly 1 in 2000 in the 1970s and 80s, but according to the Centers for Disease Control, it's currently 1 in 68. Network and epidemiological studies account for much of the increased prevalence, but—until now—little attention has been paid to the ways that clinicians and children engage in the examination process; how clinicians consult with one another about their findings, determine a diagnosis, and present it to parents and other caretakers; and how a variety of social factors may affect a diagnosis.

Professor **Doug Maynard** and a team of graduate students, including **Elizabeth Denhup, Matt Hollander, T A McDonald, David Schelly, Trini Stickle, Adam Talkington,** and **Jason Turowetz**, are undertaking a sociology of ASD testing and diagnosis. With support from the Science & Technology section of the National Science Foundation, they're studying verbal and embodied interactions among clinicians, children, and caregivers in the testing and diagnostic process. Their research has the potential to lead to greater inclusion



Doug Maynard, Jason Turowetz, and Trini Stickle review video of a family-clinician interaction.

of people with ASD in society.

The project involves analyzing video recordings of the examination process in an effort to understand the social interactions and collaborative skills clinicians use to engage the children in question-and-answer tasks. The team then analyzes the narrative structures of conversations the clinicians have as they share findings with one another so that they can tell parents the diagnosis and make recommendations about schooling and other issues. Finally, researchers explore how both clinicians and caretakers understand the social contexts (e.g., family, legal, educational, and economic factors) surrounding an ASD diagnosis.

In spring 2015, after two years in the field, Professor Maynard and his students finished collecting data on 48 families and children. As the graduate students finish their theses, and the team completes several joint publications, the next tasks include transcription and analysis. They hope to discover unanticipated avenues for future research into the causes, consequences, and treatment of ASD.

The annual *Wisconsin Update* is prepared by the Department of Sociology publications committee:
Monica Grant (chair) and
Tina Hunter (editor), with
contributions from Ted Babcock,
Joe Conti, Charlotte Frasca, Ellen
Jacobson, and Dana Rasmussen.

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Jesse Kearns (continued from page 1)

found worthy." The Andrea Michelle Sperka Fund was established by Carol and Michael Sperka in memory of their beloved daughter who, as a senior sociology major, lost her life in Botswana following a study abroad experience. In addition to carrying a demanding academic load and working to meet expenses, Andrea volunteered with homeless children in Madison and South Africa. Recipients of this award exemplify the outstanding qualities that Andrea possessed and keep the memory of this bright and caring young woman alive.

Of Jesse's talents, Sociology Professor Mike Massoglia says, "Jesse is always meticulously prepared, makes important contributions to class discussions and has among the best scores in the entire class. He is a remarkable asset to other students and is one of the best students I have ever had the pleasure of working with."

Jesse intends to continue studying sociology as a graduate student in ethnography, bringing his knowledge and experience to another generation of young sociologists.

Tackling Academic Inequality with the Wisconsin Idea

Recent events in Madison and across the United States have increased public awareness of educational inequality. Professor **Eric Grodsky** (Ph.D. '02) decided the time was right to use the classroom to address these issues head on, bridging academic research on education and social stratification with a policy perspective. In Fall 2014, his class, "Academic Achievement and the Lives of Children: Social Determinants of Educational Inequalities," examined how processes of social stratification contribute to inequality in academic success and educational attainment.

Professor Grodsky has "always wanted to lead a course with a more explicit focus on social policy. The time for this seemed right." Grodsky worked with the students to develop a reading list for the class. In addition, Grodsky developed relationships with people in state government, local schools, and the community of Madison and sought their insights to help the students understand the barriers to academic success and the policy interventions that might make things better.

Students generated term papers that reviewed the literature on a topic of each student's choosing, an executive summary of their review written for a lay audience, and an eight-minute presentation. The final result was a diverse set of papers covering everything from unequal access to quality early child care and education to the consequences of parent involvement in education and school discipline.



With support from the Wisconsin Center for Education Research and the Center for Demography and Ecology, the class presented to a group of more than forty invited guests. Guests included colleagues from across campus, representatives from government agencies, and members of local school boards. Donna Tarpinian, vice president of the Stoughton Area School District Board of Education, commented on the presentation: "The wide variety of research caused me to reflect on the inequalities faced by the children in my community and renewed my passion for working toward improving their chances for academic success." Grodsky hopes that the work will have a lasting influence. "The course was a great learning experience for me and a wonderful way to focus on inequalities in academic achievement and potential remedies to those inequalities."

The Wisconsin Longitudinal Study: Gut Microbiota Data

The human body hosts trillions of non-human microbes that recently have been recognized as playing fundamental roles in human life processes. Estimates suggest that the average human body carries three times more bacterial cells than human cells. The largest population of microbes in the human body resides in the gut. These microbes, collectively referred to as the gut microbiota, provide functions that human beings can't accomplish on their own. For instance, gut microbiota digest certain compounds that human cells don't, allowing people to eat a wider variety of foods. And recent studies have demonstrated how changes in the composition of gut microbiota are associated with different diseases, including type 1 and type 2 diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, obesity, cardiovascular disease, autism, and cancer.

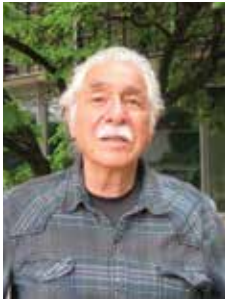
To better understand how environmental and social factors affect the composition of gut microbiota, Pamela Herd, professor of public affairs and sociology and principal investigator of the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS), and Federico Rey, assistant professor of bacteriology, have been collaborating on a pilot study to collect fecal samples from participants in the WLS to characterize their gut microbiota. The WLS has followed the life course of 1 in 3 Wisconsin high school graduates (n=10,057) from the class of 1957, as well as many of their siblings and spouses, through repeated surveys and links to administrative data for about 60 years. By collecting samples of gut microbiota and linking them to WLS life course data, including where respondents have lived across their lives, this study will produce the largest existing human microbiota data set.

This data set will be used to study important, but largely unexamined, questions about the human microbiome and health. For instance, social engagement is a form of environmental exposure; when we hug, shake hands, or kiss someone, we exchange thousands of microbes. The consequences of these microbial exchanges to our gut microbiota are not known. With these data, the researchers can examine, for example, differences between those with high and low levels of social engagement to see how these differences associate with variation in the gut microbiota. The data will also allow Herd and Rey to examine how the impact of early life conditions, such as growing up in poverty or living on a farm, affect health and mortality across the life course. The study will make important contributions to our understanding of the relationship between social life and human health.

Go Green!

Would you prefer to Go Green and receive your annual *Wisconsin Update* exclusively via email? Just contact Tina Hunter (thunter@ssc.wisc.edu) to opt in and Go Green!

Havens Center's New Activist-in-Residence Fellowship



The Havens Center for Social Justice, in cooperation with Madison's Link Family Foundation, has established a new Activist-in-Residence fellowship. The international fellowship program brings public intellectuals engaged in social justice issues to Madison for a semester-long residency during which they write, lecture, participate in Havens Center events, and collaborate with Madison activists and scholars. While in residence, the

activists live in the Link House, a nearby residence situated on a hillside bordered with thick woods. The Link family has a long history of peace and social justice activism in Madison. The current generation inherited the house from their parents, who wanted the home to be used for this purpose. The house is maintained by the Link Family Foundation.

The first Activist-in-Residence Writing Fellow was **Bill Gallegos** from Communities for a Better Environment in California, the country's largest environmental justice organization. Gallegos has forty-five years of experience in developing

community-based organizations and coalitions. As an Activist-in-Residence, he wrote about the power of organized frontline communities to effectively address climate change through a case study about a campaign for environmental justice that took place in Richmond, California, in the San Francisco Bay Area. Richmond is home to a 3000-acre oil refinery owned by the Chevron Oil Company, the largest corporation in California. Chevron proposed a massive expansion of its refinery in order to refine dirtier grades of crude oil. The project would have released significant amounts of harmful toxic emissions, further endangering the health of mostly lower-income residents living near the refinery. Health problems include higher-than-county average rates of asthma, cancer, respiratory diseases, heart disease, low birth weights, and miscarriages. A campaign that lasted from 2008 to 2011—largely led by African American, Latino, and Laotian community members living near the refinery—successfully blocked its expansion.

By writing this case study, Gallegos seeks to derive lessons from the Richmond campaign that will be of value to college and university environmental programs, sociology classes, the environmental justice and mainstream environmental communities, and the environmental philanthropy sector.

Reschke Scholarship Winners

Luvella K. and Alfred Reschke Social Sciences Fund

The Reschke Scholarship honors the late Alfred Reschke, a former student and assistant in our department. Endowed by a generous bequest from his wife, Luvella K. Reschke, the scholarship supports outstanding undergraduates in sociology. Students must demonstrate outstanding academic performance and financial need. Preference is given to those whose future plans include teaching or working in the social sciences, social services, or the ministry.

About the 2015 Reschke Winners

Pablo Montes is a sociology major with a 3.8 GPA and the president of the Working-Class Student Union, currently working on student housing insecurity. Pablo's goal is to earn a Ph.D. in sociology, making him the first in his family to hold a doctorate

Jennifer Webster is a sociology major interested in ethnography. Sociology has helped her to "understand the cultural experience of what it means to be American and how specific social phenomena can be considered normalized or marginalized." She is a research assistant on Professor Alice Goffman's project on immigrant assimilation and plans to apply to graduate programs to earn a Ph.D. in sociology.

Yunzhe (Melody) Yao: Coming to UW–Madison from Nanking, China, Melody was aware of social stratification as a child. Her city's division by the Yangtze River was both geographical and social, and she grew up in the "decaying north." Her interest in criminal justice stems from a First-Year Interest Group on racial and ethnic disparities, and from her internship with the Criminal Tribunal of Pukou District, China. Melody will be going to the London School of Economics for a year, and then returning for her final year at UW–Madison.



Undergraduate award winners join new honor society inductees, Department Chair Pamela Oliver, and donor Carol Sperka at an April awards ceremony honoring their achievements. These awards are the result of generous contributions from and in honor of former members of our department.

Bianca Schroeder is majoring in sociology and communication sciences and disorders. After she graduates next spring, she plans to go to graduate school to become a speech-language pathologist. She's interested in the social aspects of language and how background and socioeconomic status can affect language development. She works in Professor Jan Edwards' Learning to Talk research lab in the Waisman Center, and she will be working on a senior thesis next year comparing socio-phonetic and lexical-phonetic language development. She hopes to use her sociology background as a speech-language pathologist to work with children of lower socioeconomic status and cultural minorities.

Minority Recruitment and Retention Committee

At a celebratory lunch in May, the Minority Recruitment and Retention Committee highlighted the achievements of four stellar doctoral students: Rob Chiles, Christina Diaz, Piko Ewoodzie, and Torsheika Maddox. Each of them will earn a Ph.D. this summer, and they have brilliant careers ahead—thanks to their demonstrated intelligence, creativity, discipline, and commitment, but also because of the efforts of the MRRC. The Committee, now in its twelfth year, works to recruit, retain, and support students and faculty from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Rob Chiles will begin a position as assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education at Penn State University. He was awarded an MRRC research grant that helped him complete data collection for his dissertation: an investigation of the impact of industrial meat production on climate change. He also benefited from the help of a tutor funded by MRRC whose guidance, he noted, was critical to his success in statistics classes. Rob served as Solidarity co-chair and views the monthly Solidarity dinners as “invaluable to students’ socialization and professionalization in the field,” as they provided opportunities to meet visiting faculty of color who spoke about what it takes to be successful in academia.

Christina Diaz was a member of the MRRC for the past four years and most recently its student chair. She’s keenly aware of the need and demand for diversity in higher education and worked tirelessly to recruit and mentor new grad students. “On a more personal level,” she said, “I enjoyed my time on the committee and have benefited from being part of a small community of allies and friends.” Christina, whose dissertation focuses on migration and assimilation, has accepted a position as assistant professor in the School of Sociology at the University of Arizona, where she will teach statistics this fall.



Newly minted Ph.D. alumni celebrate graduation: Rob Chiles, Christina Diaz, Piko Ewoodzie, and Torsheika Maddox

Joseph (Piko) Ewoodzie received MRRC funds prior to enrolling so he could visit UW–Madison and decide whether to attend graduate school here. Once in Madison, he enjoyed the support of the Solidarity community, which he sees as crucial to the success of students of color. For his dissertation, Piko spent a year in Jackson, Mississippi, following homeless men, young mothers living below the poverty line, middle-income families, and well-to-do professionals to determine how people from different class backgrounds engage with food—locate it, choose what to eat, cook, and consume. This fall he will begin a position as an assistant professor in Davidson College’s sociology department.

Torsheika Maddox, who is earning a combined degree in sociology and population health studies, wrote a dissertation on the origins of the racial health divide in the United States. She reports that, as a member of the MRRC, she collaborated with and learned from other Solidarity scholars who “helped stretch [her] intellectual fabric, build a supportive community in Madison, and champion [her] success.” Torsheika will be working as a research and program associate in the UW–Madison Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement.



Help support our undergraduates’ internship experiences!

Consider donating to the **Joann and Joe Elder Undergraduate Fund in Sociology** (account 132751323). Honor Joann and her (more than) three decades of dedication to our undergraduates, and help our students reach their educational goals.

Did you know?

Babcock Dairy produced a special ice cream flavor in honor of Emeritus Professor Joe Elder.

Joe Elderberry ice cream was a unique treat, befitting the man himself!

Ellen Jacobson: Advisor, Mentor, Supporter

What is a rewarding career path for someone with an advanced degree in English, exceptional problem-solving skills, and a commitment to the success of UW–Madison students? Advising sociology majors!

That's what beloved undergraduate advisor Ellen Jacobson has been doing for 20 years. What sets Ellen apart is not just her length of service, nor her breadth of service, but the depth of her devotion to her undergraduates. And they really are "her" undergraduates. Because sociology has between 350 and 400 majors annually, Ellen has advised at least 4,000 students. She describes her position as being "more than a job. It's an honor to help these students find their way through the major and the liberal arts, and to keep in touch with them as they grow in their careers and lives."

Ellen treats every student in this top-ranked department with the warmth, kindness, and wisdom that she would bestow upon her own child. Matthew Minami, resident principal of the Lara Academy of Chicago and 2008 graduate, describes Ellen's bonds with the students she advises as extending past the traditional advisor/student relationship. Matthew notes, "I have known Ellen for nearly 11 years. During that time, our relationship has evolved from advisor to mentor to a dear friend and constant supporter. In fact, I owe much of my academic success to Ellen."

Sociology board of visitor member and 2005 graduate Aaron Anderson says, "Like many other students, I hadn't given much thought to a career path. I waltzed into Ellen's office expecting to be quickly shuffled in and out, receiving not much more than a course checklist. Over the next two years I met with Ellen numerous times for her guidance, career expertise, and even just kind words of support after a rough week. Ten years



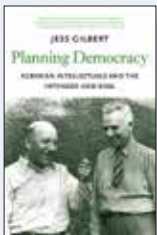
Ellen with husband, Richard, at daughter Miriam's wedding.

later, I can trace my path back to my conversations in Ellen's office. She was a coach, a mentor and a supporter that brought nurturing and expertise to every interaction. Her office was a sanctuary, and she knew everything about the department and UW–Madison."

Ellen says that she is "continually surprised and delighted that information makes students feel good. I can provide a map to graduation, and watch students light up and relax as they realize that I am here to help them succeed."

Two decades worth of students, as well as the faculty and staff of the sociology department, are grateful that Ellen has chosen to spend her considerable talents and energies with us. If Ellen was your advisor and you'd like to let her know what path your life has taken, send her an email: ejacobso@ssc.wisc.edu.

Recent Faculty Books



Mustafa Emirbayer and **Matt Desmond**
2015. *The Racial Order*. University of Chicago Press.

Jess Gilbert
2015. *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal*. Yale University Press.

Daniel Lee Kleinman and **Kelly Moore** (eds.)
2014. *Routledge Handbook of Science, Technology, and Society*. Routledge.

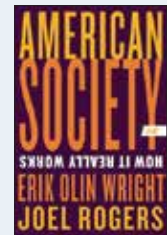
Erik Olin Wright
2015. *Understanding Class*. Verso.



Daniel Lee Kleinman, **Karen Cloud-Hansen**, and **Jo Handlesman** (eds.)
2014. *Controversies in Science and Technology*, volume 4. Oxford.

Lisa Wade and **Myra Marx Ferree**
2014. *Gender: Ideas, Interactions, Institutions*. W.W. Norton & Co.

Erik Olin Wright and **Joel Rogers**
2015. *American Society: How it Really Works* (second edition). W.W. Norton & Co.



Retirements



Nancy plans to spend more time outdoors, particularly with the Sierra Club.

Nancy says, "My passion is wilderness camping. I plan to lead more canoe trips for the Sierra Club into the Wisconsin Northwoods and Quetico Provincial Park in Ontario. I especially like camp cooking/baking and fishing. Otherwise, I plan on doing the usual retirement activities: spending more time with family, traveling, staying in shape, vegetable gardening, and volunteering." Nancy adds that she would like everyone to know how much she enjoyed her time here and how much she will miss everyone. And we certainly will miss Nancy!



Jeff with his wife, Mary

ment, just not busy coming to work." Having worked with eight CDE directors and three associate deans, Jeff notes that he was entrusted with a good deal of independence and treated with great respect. He adds that the professional staff he's worked with here have been consistently superb. We all wish Jeff a great retirement.

Nancy McDermott

Nancy McDermott, director of the Social Sciences Computing Cooperative, has retired after 23 years at the UW. Recently honored by Community Shares of Wisconsin as a Backyard Hero, Nancy is a Sierra Club–John Muir Chapter outings leader and the treasurer of the outings program. This group strives to protect Wisconsin's natural landscapes. Nancy

says, "My passion is wilderness

Jeff Petersen

Jeff Petersen, director of Social Science Research Services, has retired after 32 years. Jeff says that his retirement plans include "playing music, traveling, spending time with family including (currently only one, but hoping for more) grandchildren, losing golf balls, etc. I have a very busy life now and expect to have a very busy one after retirement,



Alberto with son Giordano and wife, Lora

Alberto Palloni

Alberto Palloni retired this year, almost 35 years after first joining the department. Among his many accomplishments, Alberto served as the past-president of the Population Association of America, director of both the Center for Demography and Ecology and the Center for Demography of Health and Aging, and on research panels for a wide range of

organizations, including the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the Pan-American Health Organization, and the National Research Council. Alberto has published more than 120 articles and book chapters and has been recognized as a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. According to his dissertation supervisor, Samuel Preston, such an accomplished career was not unexpected. "Alberto stood out from the very beginning as exceptionally intelligent and deeply committed to the highest standards of inquiry. When he was in the classroom, you'd better be ready to defend yourself and be fully conversant with every feature of every article on the syllabus. It was a foregone conclusion that he would have a brilliant career, and he has certainly lived up to that expectation."

Not one to relax in retirement, Alberto's first goal is to finish writing a book on the history of population in Latin America since 1900. This fall he will begin work toward a Ph.D. in evolutionary biology. Alberto's most recent research has considered epigenetics from an evolutionary perspective, and he looks forward to gaining the technical training that will allow him to make a major contribution to this area of research. We wish him luck as he enters the next stage of his career.

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. . . you can use a uwalumni.com email address if you are an alum? Go to **www.uwalumni.com**, choose Alumni Benefits and Services, and sign up. It's free!



Welcome back to Madison, Dr. Cora Marrett!

Cora is a national leader in science policy and has a big-picture view of how sociology sits in the scope of federal funding for social science. In addition to holding leadership posts with several colleges and universities, she was the Deputy Director of the National Science Foundation from 2011 to 2014. We are honored that Cora, a Ph.D. alumna of our department and an emeritus professor who taught here from 1974 to 1997, will be actively involved in the department again.



Members of our Board of Visitors enjoy a moment during our fall 2014 meeting with Department Chair Pamela Oliver, Professor Jim Raymo, and members of WFAA. Our BOV plays an integral role in the department's success as we move into a new era of alumni engagement and development.