



Social Tracks

News and Information from the Department of Sociology • University of Oregon • Fall 2010

sociology.uoregon.edu

Hard Times, Exit Surveys, and Giving Back

For you, what has been the one best thing about the sociology major, your sociology courses, and the department overall?

"Taking classes from professors who enjoy the topic they are teaching to students. It is inspiring to see professors teach with passion and share their experiences with students. I also enjoy that soc classes are discussion-based and everyone brings their own perspective and experiences to the table. This major has also prepared me for life outside of the university setting more than any other major could have in regard to life skills, including respecting others' opinions, critical thinking, and embracing diversity."

"The diversity of classes was the best thing about the sociology program, for me. For example, rather than having to take a lot of basic sociology classes, I could attend a variety, from political sociology to sociology of Africa to urban sociology! I really appreciated the staff in the sociology office; everyone was very helpful, always seemed happy to see me when I came in to ask questions..."

"The best thing about the sociology major was that I gained a broader and more accurate picture of the world I live in. The courses I took taught me about so many different aspects of society from a micro to a macro level. . . . The department is extremely friendly and the professors are obviously passionate about what they teach. Just like the major, the professors had a broad range of the ways they taught and how they engaged their students."

As state budgets shrink and legislators must prioritize, higher education looks more optional than maintaining ports, bridges, and highways. State universities once regarded as foundational to society as state courts are now more like state campgrounds—i.e., fee-based institutions. As tuition increases, fewer bright students can afford college, or they must forego buying a home for much of their adulthood in order to pay off their student loans.

Even as university buildings are less maintained, library acquisitions are slashed, and aging equipment is not replaced, each day the faculty and staff members of the UO sociology department strive to offer the best possible education for our students. There are the basic tasks, of course: instructors locate appropriate readings, create assignments and exams, prepare lectures and in-class activities, guide students' endeavors, build websites, and grade. The staff tracks students' degree progress, answers their questions, manages the budget, and helps students and faculty members in myriad ways.

But we go beyond the basics: We listen and respond as best we can. Graduating seniors in our 2008 exit survey, for example, pleaded for online courses; in 2009–10, we offered our first. They also asked for

one- and two-credit short courses offered on weekends or between terms; we now offer such courses in the week between spring term and summer session and hope to offer more in September 2011, the week before the fall term begins.

Graduating seniors in our 2009 exit survey requested more research assistant opportunities and a greater sense of community. This year the department has a new undergraduate program director, Jiannbin Lee Shiao, whose duties are to "invigorate, coordinate, and maintain quality and consistency in all aspects of the undergraduate major," including student internships, Alpha Kappa Delta, and undergraduate advising. In addition to revitalizing AKD (see page 3), he has created an "academic" internship program in which select undergraduates assist faculty members and graduate students with their research. These are distinct from "career" internships with nonprofit organizations.

Example responses to our 2010 exit survey of graduating seniors are provided at left.

With all this in mind, we hope our graduates they will remember to give back to the sociology department as a way to remember and honor their instructors, the staff, and the program overall.

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Please keep in touch with the sociology department every so often by sending an e-mail to sociology@uoregon.edu. Whenever you change your e-mail address, please keep us on your contact list to inform of the change.

In the past, we mailed an annual newsletter to our alumni, but that is getting very expensive (more than \$10,000 for printing and postage last year). In the future, we would like to send shorter missives via e-mail, but that means you need to let us know when your e-mail address changes.

Don't forget to visit our Facebook page! Just search for "University of Oregon Sociology" on Facebook. We have photographs, notices of upcoming events, and more. Log in, check it out, and be sure to fill us in on what you are doing.



Message from the Department Head

As a social demographer, I engage in the study of populations—how they grow, shrink, and rearrange, with special attention to population composition. A demographic portrait of the populations in the University of Oregon's sociology department reveals a lot.



Patricia A. Gwartney

Our populations are students, faculty members, and courses. Each in turn comprises subpopulations, with differing needs and characteristics. Among students are undergraduate majors working on bachelor's degrees, undergraduate nonmajors obtaining liberal arts credits, and graduates working on master's degrees and doctorates. The faculty includes those in tenure-related positions and those not. Among the former are assistant, associate, and full professors; the latter consist of adjunct instructors and graduate student instructors. The department offers courses at the 200, 300, 400, 500, and 600 levels in three eleven-week terms, plus a summer session with courses lasting one week, four weeks, and eight weeks.

The sociology department's populations have grown remarkably in recent years. In 2009–10, the department offered seventy-two undergraduate courses, filled 6,696 seats in those courses, mentored 685 majors, and delivered 253 bachelor's degrees. For comparison, in 2006–7, we taught fifty-eight courses to 4,977 undergraduates, mentored 478 majors, and delivered 196 bachelor's degrees.

Our growth parallels the UO's, but as a discipline, sociology remains inherently attractive to students, as our graduating seniors

revealed in a recent exit survey. They emphasized the department's diverse course offerings and passionate instructors, plus sociology's potential for advancing socially responsible and informed citizens. Quotes from several seniors may be found in this newsletter.

Sociology's graduate program also grows, but slowly (about forty-five students in all). Faculty members beam with pride at our students' increasing professional participation. More and more receive competitive research grants, present their findings at conferences, and publish in peer-reviewed journals. In the past year, current and recent graduate students published articles in eight peer-reviewed journals, including *Rural Sociology*, *Social Science Research*, *Sociological Forum*, and *Sociological Theory*.

Members of the department's faculty also appeared in top journals in 2009 and 2010, including *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, and *Social Forces*. Examples of two faculty members' scholarship appear on page 5.

Recent faculty turnover includes the partial retirement of Professors Bob O'Brien and Marion Goldman. Professors Ken Liberman and Linda Fuller have completely retired from the department. Combined, these four represent 114 years at the UO. Assistant Professor Yvonne Braun soon transfers to the international studies and women's and gender studies departments, which fit her interests well. Joining the department in fall 2009 were Assistant Professors Jill Harrison and Ryan Light. We also successfully enticed Associate Professor J. Shiao back from

Dartmouth College.

In the meantime, an unprecedented number of baby sociologists have appeared in the department: in February, Fiona Violet Halaska Hollander and Eleanor Aurora Eddy; in May, Henry Harrison Light; and baby Toth-Shiao, born June 14, 2010, graduation day.

One of my goals as department head has been to reach out to our alumni in new ways. Reunion parties for former graduate students and faculty members at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association and Pacific Sociological Association in 2009 and 2010 were well attended. Photos of these and other events are now on Facebook (www.facebook.com/pages/Eugene-OR/University-of-Oregon-Sociology-Department/173215078170).

Working with the college's development officer, Kat Walsh, I met several undergraduate alumni this year—all very successful women of a certain age. When I asked what had been most valuable about their bachelor's degree training in sociology, each said they learned critical thinking, ways to understand different types of people, and how to communicate. Indeed, two have written books and most spent years speaking to groups in various ways. They said sociology's unique ways of understanding gave them an edge in their work.

Building on these experiences, we plan to ask certain alumni to speak with our undergraduates next year about ways to use their sociology degrees in business and nonprofits.

Patricia A. Gwartney

Professor and Department Head



Sociology Begins Online Courses

Based on feedback from recent graduating seniors, the department head appointed Brandon Olszewski, MS '04, PhD '09, to create prototype online sociology courses on an experimental basis last year. His pedagogical knowledge, excellence in teaching, and sensitivity to human-computer interaction ensured he would not create mick ("Mickey Mouse") courses, which appear all too frequently in online curricula. He systematically created and tested a model for sociology's web-based courses and then applied it in winter 2010 for SOC 347 Complex Organizations. Based on that experience and student feedback, he revised the prototype and offered our second online course in spring term, SOC 491 Sociology of Education. The department now has a viable model that can be applied to other courses.

Brandon made no secret that sociology's online courses would be just as rigorous as our typical 300- and 400-level courses, yet sociology students have filled them. We look forward to repeating these web-based courses next year and developing more to serve our many students who commute long distances and balance their college educations with families and employment.

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Again, as the UO becomes increasingly privatized, the sociology department will increasingly depend on the kindness of our alumni and their families. You do not have to be rich and famous to give. Indeed, one alumna donates \$15 each month through an automatic transfer to us. Think of what we could accomplish if you all did the same for just \$5 per month!



2009–10 inductees to Alpha Kappa Delta

Alpha Kappa Delta Initiates New Members for 2010

Initiates for 2009–10: Andrea Camille Alcantara, KaLynn Rose Alley, Rachel Lyn Bauman, Christopher Edward Bonn, Jennifer Michelle Bradshaw, Kelsey Olsen Brassil, Benjamin Gerald Camras, Yufei Chen, Jillian Marie Clausen, Samuel Coggeshall, Kathryn Schaitel DeMarsh, Alexander Benjamin Epperly, Chelsie Elizabeth Fish, Sara Elizabeth Gomez, Celeste Amanda Gray, Samantha Christine Haglund, Adam Harold Hanby, Andrea K. Holt, Sadie Lee Hoxmeier, Baronica Izaguirre, Stacey Renee Jochimsen, Melissa Ann Duffy Kaiel, Jonathan Austin Kam, Sarah Anne Lazzeroni, Margaret Anne Maletis, Charlotte Katherine Marco, Joana Katy

Marschman, Spencer Munos, Erin Christine Munson, Tristan Sabri Oker, Robert Edward Moore Pickett, Maggie Amanda Price, Mary Evangeline Quest, Akira Jeran Robinson, Courtney Blair Santoro, Heather Elizabeth Simcox, Kelsey Jean Trapp, Alice D. Turpen, and Erika Michelle Wright.

This year's officers:

Sarah Lazzeroni

Vice President

Alex Epperly

Vice President for
Community Outreach

KaLynn Alley

Vice President for Student
and Faculty Relations

Department of Sociology Vision Statement

Faculty members of the University of Oregon Department of Sociology are united in seeking to provide a high-quality educational program for our undergraduate and graduate students. We seek to equip students with a sound academic foundation that helps them to question critically, think logically, communicate clearly, act resourcefully, and live ethically. Our graduate program further aims to develop thinkers, leaders, and innovators whose subsequent efforts will benefit the human social world and life on the planet. Our research ranges from broad, global sweeps of social change to microlevel social interaction, using an array of theories and methods. We generate new knowledge through our scholarship. The results of our research help people to understand the evolving social, political, economic, technological, and physical environment, to respect the dignity and essential worth of all individuals, to value a diversity of opinions and ideas, and to formulate public policies that reject discrimination, bigotry, and violence.





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Please consider making a gift to the Department of Sociology

Contributions of any size make a real difference. Your gift enhances educational opportunities for our students or research and instructional facilities for our faculty. We invite you to use the form below if you would like to contribute. Donations can be made by check, made out to the UO Foundation–Sociology, or by credit card and mailed to the UO Foundation, PO Box 3346, Eugene OR 97403-0346.

- The price of two tickets to a rock concert will supply snacks for twenty-five at an Alpha Kappa Delta gathering.
Four \$25 gifts will support a student achievement award.
Four \$100 gifts can support an undergraduate working on a faculty research project part-time.
\$400 will help an honors student attend the Pacific Sociological Association annual meeting.
\$4,000 will purchase an audio transcription station—a mobile cart for transcribing interviews onto a computer using automatic voice recognition software, qualitative data analysis software, and digital voice recorders with headsets and foot controls.
\$5,900 will give a graduate student one term off from teaching to focus on writing their dissertation.
Any amount designated to the Charles W. Hunt Excellence in Teaching Fund will honor adjunct instructor Chuck's decades of inspirational teaching to thousands of students.

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