Spring in Action

As life and nature begins to thrive outside, our department also began the new year with great energy and good work. This first part of the Spring semester brought exciting news and lively events. Let’s celebrate our collective achievements and hope that more sunlight and colorful blossoms vitalize life, in and out of the department.

Recent Happenings:

- **Alumni News:** Congratulations to alumni Christina Simko and Tara Tober, who accepted positions as tenure-track assistant professors of sociology at Williams College and at SUNY-Brockport respectively. Also, congratulations to our alumni Hephzibah V. Strmic-Pawl (*Sociology of Race & Ethnicity*), and Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning (*Comparative Sociology*) for their recent publications.

- **Grad Council Elections:** The Sociology Graduate Student Council elected a new president – Gabriella Smith. Good luck & we look forward to the realization of her vision.

For Contributions: Email the editorial board Joris Gjata (jg2nk@virginia.edu), Sarah Mosseri (sem2gw@virginia.edu) or Anna Cameron (acc4ff@virginia.edu).
Why Sociology?
Undergraduate perspectives


My first year at UVA, I took professor Pugh’s Sociology of Family class. I instantly realized that I had an attraction to sociology. While I had intended to just major in Government, I quickly found out the Sociology department offered a deeper understanding to the everyday issues for which I was both passionate learning about and furthermore being an active participant in changing. It is in my Sociology classes here that I have learned the most about the world around me and the roots - the structures- that influence our policies, our behaviors, and our interactions. While it can be frustrating and difficult at times to take a deeper look into the society for which I and all of us are embedded in, I know that majoring in Sociology has provided me with a knowledge and understanding of both society at large and my place in society that will carry me far past my undergraduate career.

Outside of my studies, I am active in Madison House and serve as a volunteer and the program director for The Haven, a local homeless day shelter. I also am currently working on a public health research project focused in Appalachia for JPC and enjoy coaching U6 soccer with the YMCA on weekends!

Grad Student and Faculty Achievements

Our Michele Darling successfully defended her dissertation entitled, “We Are All Foodies: Using Cultural Logics to Construct a Self-Reflexive Food Identity in the 21st Century.”

Our Julia (Schroeder) Ticona published two articles this semester: “Strategies of control: workers’ use of ICTs to shape knowledge and service work” in Information, Communication & Society, and “Uneasy in Digital Zion” (with Chad Wellmon) in The Hedgehog Review.


Our Sam Richardson was selected to participate in the Tikvah Fund’s American Judaism Workshop on “The condition of American Judaism: The Denominations and Beyond.” held on Long Island, May 15-17 and gathers Jewish scholars, leaders and others to discuss the continuity of American Judaism.

Our Fan Mai, Francesca Tripodi and Catalina Vallejo received ESS Travel Grants this year.

Our Roscoe Scarborough (and alumnus Allan McCoy) recently made the “Society Pages’ Reading List” with their 2014 Poetics article.

Our Rachel Rinaldo co-edited (with Orit Avishai, Afshan Jafar) Gender & Society’s Special Issue on Gender and Religion in Global Contexts in February.

Our Josipa Roks a was named one of the most influential faculty in public debates of education.

Congratulations also to our Anne Castelvecchi Bloomberg and Joris Gjata-Erol, for the new additions to their families.

Professional Development Opportunities

* On March 19th at 3:30 pm (Randall 212), the Sociology Department will hold the career development workshop Getting Started on the Dissertation directed by professor Simone Polillo.

* The 2015 Three Minute Thesis Competition will be March 16, 2015 at 3:00 pm (Auditorium of Harrison Institute & Small Special Collections Library).

* On March 27: COMPASS will sponsor, Finding your Message Plenary Session (9 am in Nau 101) and Hands-on Workshop (1-3pm in Newcomb Hall). The event helps graduate students identify and refine your research messages as well as communicate findings in social media. Register now!

* On April 2nd at 4pm (New Cabell Rm 504), register and learn about UVA professional development resources and services from Introduction to Graduate Career Services: Planning for Success.

* Attend the professional workshop on securing research funding Thursday, April 16th from 3:30-5:30 (Chem 303)! The workshop will help graduate students find and apply for funding.
Professor Wilcox is an Associate Professor of Sociology, the Director of the Naitonal Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies. Professor Wilcox’s scholarship focuses on family and religion, and his current research explores the contribution that families make to the economic welfare of individuals and societies. He has published three books—Gender and Parenthood: Biological and Social Scientific Perspectives (with Kathleen Kovner Kline), Whither the Child?: Causes and Consequences of Low Fertility (with Eric Kaufmann) and Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands—and has a new book coming out this year titled, Soul Mates: Religion, Sex, Love, and Marriage among African Americans and Latinos (with Nicholas Wolfinger). Wilcox has also published in journals such as The American Sociological Review, Social Forces, The Journal of Marriage and Family and The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. His research is regularly featured in public media outlets such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic, USA Today and NBC’s “The Today Show.”

An undergraduate alumni of the University of Virginia, Professor Wilcox later earned a Ph.D. from Princeton University. After holding research fellowships at Princeton, Yale and the Brookings Institution, he returned to UVa. He is currently the Director of Graduate Studies for the department.

Professor Wilcox sat down with us a few weeks ago to talk about his research, public sociology and the graduate program.

Your work focuses on the growing divide between class groups. What do you see as the most pressing issues facing working and middle-class Americans today?

I think there has been a lot of focus on income inequality in recent years, both in the academia and in the media, but I think what is more fundamental than that is what we might call, “institutional inequality.” That is, Americans who don’t have college degrees—particularly American men who don’t have college degrees—are increasingly disengaged from core institutions of work, marriage and civil society. I think that has important consequences for their sense of solidarity and ability to flourish, by which I mean the capacity to live a life with purpose with a measure of sociability, with some emotional satisfaction and a basic modicum of financial security. It is a sociological point too; we know that people are more likely to flourish when they are integrated into strong institutions, and the unfortunate reality in the United States today is that people without college degrees are less likely to be successfully integrated into these core institutions.

There has recently been some discussion about the absence of sociologists in public debates (i.e. Orlando Patterson’s discussion of the “irrelevance” of sociologists in social policy decisions). As someone who regularly engages with the media, how do you view the role of public sociology?

I think sociologists have an advantage insofar as sociologists are concerned with understanding not just one particular domain of life but basically every domain of life. I think that sociologists have also classically had an appreciation for the role of institutions in society. I think this more comprehensive gaze and institutional awareness can be helpful in many public discussions. Yet, sociologists are limited, in part, from engaging the public square because they tend to be more pigeonholed in the left. I think if there were more ideological diversity in sociology, sociologists would be more likely to garner a hearing in the broader society. I think this might allow people from
a range of perspectives to use sociological insights and tools in service of a more intellectually diverse conversation.

You are also active on social media. In what ways do you think social media is changing the way academic work is communicated?

I think it is easier for scholars and journalists with some kind of presence on social media to highlight studies and get them out to a broader public audience than it would have been ten or twenty years ago. I think it is also easier for scholars active on social media to get the attention of a range of different policy makers, public intellectuals and journalists.

But it also seems like a lot of social media is pretty separated, ideologically. People on both sides of the aisle, so to speak, are engaged with people who share their own worldview. In some ways, it can reinforce ideological divides and prevent people from being challenged by perspectives that they don’t share to think differently about topics of concern for them.

For grad students, I think a modest profile on social media can be helpful, but I think it is better to focus on getting the dissertation done, getting articles out there and polishing your teaching. So, I think it is worth keeping an eye on but not devoting a lot of time to at this point in their careers.

You are currently teaching undergraduate statistics. What do you find most challenging and most rewarding about teaching statistics?

I think there is a lot of math phobia on the part of undergraduates taking statistics. I try to allow them to move beyond those fears about statistics being a topic they cannot understand and show them it is a skill, a tradecraft that is very helpful in understanding the social world. I think once students gain a sense of comfort with statistics, it opens up new avenues for their ability to do good policy work, journalism, marketing, academic research. Once they get beyond that fear—and I think most students do in this class—they can see how much value it affords them in many different professional endeavors they may pursue down the road.

As the current Director of Graduate Studies, where would you like to see our graduate department in five years?

I think we have had a lot of success in getting our students to write strong dissertations, which turn into excellent books. I think we have also done really well with giving our students a lot of experience as TAs and even as Lecturers, so we’ve given them a lot of good experience in terms of teaching.

One area where I think we can continue to improve is in encouraging more of our students to publish articles in some of the discipline’s most eminent outlets. I think that is one area where we can continue to strengthen the department. We are experimenting with this graduate seminar in article writing, and we continue to work on that. I am hoping that the class this fall, with Allison Pugh, will be one more way for us to give students the opportunity to be counseled and guided in the process of producing a publishable piece of writing for a strong journal.

As you know, many students are attending conferences this semester. How do you get the most out of academic conferences?

I think it is important in conferences to really engage professors in the Q&A section for each session you go to. Obviously, not intervening with needless comments or simple questions, but if you have something to say, say it. If you have a question to ask, ask it. Then, follow-up after the session to introduce yourself and make yourself known. I think it is important to network as much as you can with professors doing work in your subfield and do so by asking them questions or sharing insights you think are unique or original. Do so in a modest way, but really try to begin, at this point in your career, to make those connections. At times you can do this in concert with your advisor, who may introduce you to so-and-so. You may also have lunch or coffee with someone, often by getting your advisor to make an introduction.
Two Poems about Space dedicated to Gaston Bachelard
By Fauzia Husain

1.

Remember when we moved into a sandcastle?
We laid out Persian rugs and planted palm trees,
Hung up lace curtains to puff gently in the breeze.
We were so excited we called everyone over-
"Come quick and see heaven by the sea."
Now I can't even remember what mementos I kept in what boxes.
What pages I marked with lines I'd have loved to reread.
Maybe there were journals hidden in those drawers?
Did we have movies on VHS we thought we'd re-see?
It's a blessing to have holes where memories should be.
To wander in the ruins of a past life,
Not a scrap nor a minute to grieve.
Someday I'll sit down and piece it together
The fragments I flew by
the skins I shed
The people I've been
Words will fail me and it will be just as well.
Done done done done
Done with all that I did or will ever do.
Done with all the castles I ever knew.
Done with knowing.

2.

All conversations are the corridors of your home, dear granny.
Bobbing and weaving leaves casting a shade across the sticky sunlight.
And the early morning smell of roasting cockroaches.
Corridors that end in rooms that are locked up to me like dogs in the manger.
Others where love and devotion await like afflictions.
Some rooms too violent to speak of.
And always just beyond my reach that garden with the trees I will one day be tall enough to climb.
Swing in the branches and eat too sour mangoes forever.