Soaring Higher

As classes are over and summertime approaches, our department looks back at the 2014-2015 academic year with pride and optimism. This second part of the Spring semester was busy and very productive. Let’s acknowledge everybody’s contribution to making the department a place to grow and learn, as scholars and as human beings.

Recent Happenings:

- **Alumni News:** Congratulations to alumnus Jason Manning who received the North Central Sociological Association’s Scholarly Achievement Award for his article “Suicide as Social Control” published in *Sociological Forum*.
- **Colloquium Guests:** Professors Annette Lareau and Elizabeth Armstrong visited our department and shared their work with us.
- **Professional Workshops:** Graduate students organized a successful professional workshop on securing research funding. Another success was the faculty-organized seminar on getting started with the dissertation.

For Contributions: Email the editorial board Joris Gjata (jg2nk@virginia.edu), Sarah Mosseri (sem2gw@virginia.edu) or Anna Cameron (acc4ff@virginia.edu).
Grad Student and Faculty Achievements

Our Megan Swanson, Tonie Gordon and Brice McKeever defended their dissertations. Congratulations!

Our Claire Maiers received the Presidential Fellows in Data Science Award from the University’s Data Science Institute for the proposal “A Data Driven Approach for Uncovering Patterned Life Cycles of Ideas and Methods within the Sciences” as well as the Departmental Teaching Award for this year.

Our Joris Gjata successfully completed her work under the Praxis Fellowship.

Our Julia (Schroeder) Ticona won an IASC Fellowship.

Our Denise Deutschlander, Mike Ed Fowler, Hexuan Zhang, Sarah Mosseri and Candace Miller received the Quantitative Collaborative fellowships and presented their work at the QC poster sessions.

Our Josh Chen received a Society of Fellows fellowship.

Our Catalina Vallejo Pedraza was accepted for an internship at Brown University.

Our Jaime Hartless was awarded the Jeffrey L. Reider & Charles F. Otis Endowed Scholarship, by the Serpentine Society and the Outstanding Service recognition from our department.

Our Fauzia Husain was awarded an Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) Summer Research Award for pre-dissertation research in Pakistan and also published a blog post entitled “Burka Avengers and Pakistan Gender Structures” on the well-known Gender & Society sociological blog.

Our Kara Dewhurst was awarded the Environmental Resilience and Sustainability Fellowship for a proposal on Geothermal Energy & Corporate Social Responsibility in Colombia.

Our Sarah Mosseri received the departmental Best Colleague Award and also became part of the 2015-2016 Organizations, Occupations, and Work section’s Editorial Team.


Our Allison Pugh has her book The Tumbleweed Society: Working and Caring in an Insecure Age officially released from Oxford University Press and a related article in The Atlantic.

Our Michele Darling is working as the Director of Evaluation at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) - a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership association serving the chiefs of state and territorial health agencies and the more than 100,000 public health staff that work in those agencies. She directs the evaluation of a wide-ranging portfolio of 150+ health-related projects funded through the Centers for Disease Control and private foundations, the evaluation of ASTHO-wide initiatives and performance measures. Michele is also taking over responsibility for the oversight, administration and analysis of eight large-scale quantitative surveys with ASTHO members, alumni, affiliates, and staff.

Why Sociology?
Undergraduate perspectives

I am Eli D. Stacey. I picked Sociology as my major, because in sociology we are given specific enough frameworks to competently understand the issues of society. While in the same breath, we keep a broad brush approach to our view that enables us to use multiple forms of methodology in tandem. In other social disciplines they focus on a few ways of understanding societal trends, yet in sociology we use tools such as ethnographic research, longitudinal survey data, and interviews in sync. This enables sociology majors to be able to see structural problems from the global level to the family level. In my own life sociology has helped me deal with the realities the children I have mentored face with hope. That is why I choose Sociology as my major.
Simone Polillo joined the department in 2008 and is currently an Associate Professor of Sociology. Professor Polillo is interested in economic and political sociology, social theory, world-systems theory and the sociology of the self. He has published in the American Journal of Sociology, the American Sociological Review and Theory and Society, among other journals. His 2013 book, Conservatives Versus Wildcats: A Sociology of Financial Conflict, takes a conflict approach to capitalism and traces how the strategies employed by two distinct groups of bankers influence notions of creditworthiness and the market more broadly. His joint project on the history of the concept of liquidity, with Brad Pasanek, in the Journal of Cultural Economy was also published as a book in 2013. He teaches classes such as Sociology Methods, Sociology of Self, Economy and Society, Sociology of Money and the Sociology of Globalization at the undergraduate level and Economic Sociology, Political Sociology and Social Theory at the graduate level.

We were delighted to have the opportunity to sit down with Professor Polillo a few weeks ago to discuss the graduate program, his new co-led course on social networks and his research.

The graduate students recently learned you will be the next Director of Graduate Studies. How do you view this position? What do you hope to accomplish in this role? What is your vision for the graduate program?

I think, first, we have an awesome department. My level of engagement with the graduate students has been very satisfying so far, even without having this responsibility. So, I am looking forward to formalizing that relationship.

Before I draft a specific agenda, I think I need to hear from the graduate students. In terms of broader ideas, I think we can maybe do a bit better in terms of fostering a sense of intellectual discussion in the department. I think the opportunities are there, and it is just a question of how to better involve everyone. Our colloquium series has been terrific, and it would be good to think about ways to extend the conversation beyond the colloquia. The Work in Progress is also good, yet by its nature, it becomes a more specific and targeted conversation. So, we might start thinking about forums where we can discuss things like the latest AJS. It is something I will start thinking about and am open to discussing further.

Obviously, a big part of the position is resources. On that, I am getting trained on budgets and positions. I am getting the sense there is a strong impetus to make decisions that are as equitable as possible, which is very nice. There are a lot of discussions of how to make students’ lives as stable and conducive to conducting research as possible. I am impressed with that. There is a level of support here, and I hope that that comes through to the graduate students.

I also know that graduate school is a stressful experience. You are on your own, essentially, because you are supposed to be doing your own research. Ahead of you lies a process that is really anonymous because that is how the job market is. Then you have various program requirements that, no matter how you sugar coat them, are stressful experiences. While the experience of stress cannot really be controlled, I think a good program turns those into opportunities for growth. So I am thinking of that as well.

You are teaching a new 3000-level undergraduate class on social networks next Fall with Adam Slez. Can you tell us about the class? Who might be interested in this class?

We want to do an introduction to network techniques. We will begin with a brief overview of the history of network analysis, although that could, of course, be a class in its own terms. Then we will focus on the core techniques, both at the level of computation and visualization. The course will end with three or four case studies. Specifically, we plan to look at networks of world trade, corporate networks and romantic and friendship networks.

It is difficult to say who would be interested in the course, but I can think of three possibilities. First, there are the students who want the technical skills.

Second, I think are those interested in the kind of sociology you can do if you pay attention to both the empirical setting and the theories that justify it. One of the interesting things about network analysis is that the technical developments went hand-in-hand with theoretical developments, so the idea is to use the discussion of the various measures as a way of thinking about the related theories. It is the case that people use networks as a data reduction technique. So, it is a way of making sense of complexity. But once you reduce the data you have to make sense of what you reduced. That is usually a good way of getting people to think more theoretically about the issue at hand.

Continued…
The third type of student that may be drawn to the class is one interested in visualization. Visualizations are common in many scientific disciplines, and they are not only aesthetically pleasing but also very meaningful in a simple way. The thing about networks, however, is that you can trick people into believing your story depending how you set up your network, manipulating colors, distances, etc. Sometimes that hides more than it reveals, and so we want to develop a critical approach to visualization as part of this class as well.

Your previous research led to the publication of the book, Conservatives versus Wildcats. Do you have any comments on writing for a book versus an article? Can you provide a brief summary of the book’s main argument?

The book was published a few years ago, and the actual research went on maybe six years before the publication date. It takes that long to whip the argument into shape. It is quite intense. One thing that was helpful in the process was that I did a book discussion workshop. The university has money for that kind of thing. You can invite outside reviewers, and it is a good way of getting you closer to the publication of a book. It is definitely different than a dissertation or an article. You have to find your own voice and also strike the right balance between citing the relevant literature without simply summarizing stuff because you know it, so it is very, very tricky.

The book started as a critique of views of money that see it as a convenient medium within which to organize economic exchange. But, so what? I think that critique then provides an opportunity to think about the ways conflict is central to the functioning of any money-based economy. Once you start thinking about conflict, you can open up the view of the economic process to social coalitions. So, really the book locates the tension among different kinds of economic actors as a central dynamic of credit-based markets. And then since the book is historical, the idea is to demonstrate that the conflict between different types of economic actors varies by context, obviously, but it has general enough qualities that you can actually abstract from the detailed nature of the histories.

What are you currently working on? What is your next project?

I am interested in the ways that disciplines talk to each other. The literature on interdisciplinarity is rich and growing, but I think that it can be made more empirically sound. One thing I would like to do is start with the level of how we teach and see how disciplines differ from each other in terms of whether or not they borrow from similar types of traditions. Do sociology and anthropology look similar? Is economics an insular discipline? I think that could be an interesting project, and I would like to systematically select syllabi and do topic modeling. I also think this is a project that I could involve students in some way.

Another empirical project I am working on now is to trace the evolution of pedagogical approaches in financial economics. One of the big questions about financial econ is that it ultimately is about producing models that have very limited practical limitations. This gets a little tricky. The models are used to create markets, and so there are parts of financial econ that are really consequential, and there is an entire literature on performativity that makes that connection very clear. But some of the theories that justify financial economics as a discipline are very, very distant from what financial practitioners actually do. Historically, there is a reason for that: financial economics had to distance itself from practical concerns so as to become a legitimate discipline. I am really interested in how that contradiction gets worked out over time, and I think that textbooks could be a way to look at that.

Finally, I am looking at awards. As you can see, I am trying to get at this problem from all sorts of different points of view. So, I have been collecting a dataset of different kinds of awards that are given to academics and practitioners in finance. The idea is to try to figure out the differences in what it takes to win specific awards. What does it take for you to win Best Paper Award, and are those the same dynamics that allow you to win a Career Award? How do we think about these different levels of assigning prestige, and how does this line up with the discipline? On one level, you might think of the field as creative and that would lead to certain predictions regarding what it takes to be successful. On the other hand, you can have a very political economy approach, in which the financialization of the economy is what makes the discipline successful. If you look at how awards are distributed, you can get insight about how these different approaches interact.

In academia, summer is a critical time as it offers the chance to work on your research with fewer interruptions. Do you have any advice for getting the most out of the summer months?

When you have a lot of time, time takes the quality of disappearing very fast. While it sounds monastic, I think it is important to develop viable practices to make yourself accountable to your projects. Essentially, you have to break down the time into manageable units and come up with a realistic plan. Being realistic is important. You are not going to be able to write something of good quality for very long—maybe two or three hours and even that requires training. I think keeping track of your progress is a central component to having a successful summer. Planning goes a long way.

Especially with writing, a regular practice is important. Not writing over an extended period of time means that you have to waste a lot of effort trying to get back on the page where you stopped. Writing is a skill that dies off quite quickly without practice. I think the same is true with reading as well.

I also think the summer is a time to pick up other things. It is good to be hyper-focused, but you want to also be creative. You can’t force creativity, but you can create the conditions where creativity is more likely to happen. I think using the summer to read stuff that may not be entirely relevant to your work can be a useful tool for thinking about things differently. Fiction, also, can be really provocative. It doesn’t have to be sociology. At the same time, catching up on the field at a more general level is also valuable. Ultimately, you have to convince a broad audience that what you are doing is useful. In order to do that you have to have a sense of where people will go with your ideas. Reading broadly within the field during the summer can help you to develop necessary cultural capital and create a path for moving forward with your work and career.
Sociology-Inspired Art
Lives in sociology and Sociology in our lives

Did you know about The Hockey Sweater?
By Anna Cameron

Roch Carrier’s short story “The Hockey Sweater” was originally published in 1979, and it quickly became an iconic part of Canadian culture, beloved by Francophones and Anglophones alike. The book is autobiographical, telling the story of the winter of 1946 when the author had the misfortune to receive a Toronto Maple Leafs sweater instead of a Montreal Canadiens sweater. The story exemplifies not only Canada’s passion for hockey, but also the tensions between English and French Canada that continue to exist today. This story is widely read in Canadian schools, and the National Film Board created animated short film versions in 1980 in both French and English (English: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYuDsFGypo & French: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slyFWU8pCzg). Starting in 2001, the opening lines of this story were printed on the Canadian $5 bill. In 2013, this tribute was replaced by a depiction of the Canadarm, Canada’s contribution to the NASA space shuttle. This decision has been criticized by some who view “The Hockey Sweater” as having greater symbolic value in Canadian culture.

The Hockey Sweater from Roch Carrier’s (1979) The Hockey Sweater and Other Stories, translated by Sheila Fishman

The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places—the school, the church, and the skating rink—but our real life was on the skating-rink. Real battles were won on the skating-rink. Real strength appeared on the skating-rink. The real leaders showed themselves on the skating-rink. School was a sort of punishment. Parents always want to punish children and school is their most natural way of punishing us. However, school was also a quiet place where we could prepare for the next hockey game, lay out our next strategies. As for church, we found there a question of God: there we forgot school and dreamed about the next hockey game. Through our daydreams, we would ask God to help us play as well as Maurice Richard.

We all wore the same uniform as he, with the famous number 9 on our backs, the red, white, and blue uniform of the Montreal Canadiens, the best hockey team in the world; we all combed our hair in the same style as Maurice Richard, and to keep it in place we used a sort of glue—a great deal of glue. We laced our skates like Maurice Richard, we taped our sticks like Maurice Richard. We cut all his pictures out of the papers. Truly, we knew everything about him.

One day, my Montreal Canadiens sweater had become too small; then it got torn and had holes in it. My mother said: “If you wear that old sweater people are going to think we’re poor!” Then she started to leaf through the catalog the Eaton company sent us in the mail every year. My mother was proud. She didn't want to buy our clothes at the general store; the only things that were good enough for us were the latest styles from Eaton's catalog. My mother didn't like the order forms included with the catalog; they were written in English and she didn't understand a word of it. To order my hockey sweater, she did as she usually did; she took out her writing paper and wrote in her gentle schoolteacher's hand: “Cher Monsieur Eaton, would you be kind enough to send me a Canadiens' sweater for my son who is ten years old and a little too tall for his age and Docteur Robitaille thinks he's a little too thin? I'm sending you three dollars and please send me what's left if there's anything left. I hope your wrapping will be better than last time.”

Monsieur Eaton was quick to answer my mother's letter. Two weeks later we received the sweater. That day I had one of the greatest disappointments of my life! I would even say on that day I experienced a very great sorrow. Instead of the red, white, and blue Montreal Canadiens sweater, Monsieur Eaton had sent us a blue and white sweater with a maple leaf on the front—the sweater of the Toronto Maple Leafs. I'd always worn the red, white, and blue Montreal Canadiens sweater; all my friends wore the red, white, and blue sweater, never had anyone in my village ever worn the Toronto sweater, never had we even seen a Toronto Maple Leafs sweater. Besides, the Toronto team was regularly defeated by the successful Canadians. With tears in my eyes, I found the strength to say:

“I'll never wear that uniform.”

“My boy, first you're going to try it on! If you make up your mind about things before you try, my boy, you won’t go very far in this life.”

My mother had pulled the blue and white Toronto Maple Leafs sweater over my shoulders and already my arms were inside the sleeves. She pulled the sweater down and carefully smoothed all the creases in the hateful maple leaf on which, right in the middle of my chest, were written the words “Toronto Maple Leafs.” I wept.

“I'll never wear it.” “Why not? This sweater fits you… like a glove.”

“Maurice Richard would never put it on his back.”

“You aren't Maurice Richard. Anyway, it isn't what's on your back that counts, it's what you've got inside your head.”

“You'll never put it in my head to wear a Toronto Maple Leafs sweater.”

My mother sighed in despair and explained to me:

“If you don't keep this sweater which fits perfectly I'll have to write to Monsieur Eaton and explain that you don't want to wear the Toronto sweater. Monsieur Eaton's an Anglais; he'll be insulted because he likes the Maple Leafs. And if he's insulted do you think he'll be in a hurry to answer us? Spring will be here and you won't have played a single game, just because you didn't want to wear that perfectly nice blue sweater.”

So I was obliged to wear the Maple Leafs sweater. When I arrived on the rink, all the Maurice Richards in red, white, and blue came up, one by one, to take a look. When the referee blew his whistle I went to take my usual position. The captain came and warned me I'd be better to stay off the forward line. A few minutes later the second line was called; I jumped onto the ice. The Maple Leafs sweater weighed on my shoulders like a mountain. The captain came and told me to wait; he'd need me later, on defense. By the third period I still hadn't played; one of the defensemen was hit in the nose with a stick and it was bleeding. I jumped on the ice: my moment had come! The referee blew his whistle; he gave me a penalty. He claimed I'd jumped on the ice when there were already five players. That was too much! It was unfair! It was persecution! It was because of my blue sweater! I struck my stick against the ice so hard that it broke. Relieved, I bent down to pick up the debris. As I straightened up I saw the young vicar, on skates, before me. “My child,” he said, “just because you’re wearing a new Toronto Maple Leafs sweater unlike the others, it doesn’t mean you’re going to make the laws around here. A proper young man doesn’t lose his temper. Now take off your skates and go to the church and ask God to forgive you.” Wearing my Maple Leafs sweater I went to the church, where I prayed to God; I asked him to send, as quickly as possible, moths that would eat up my Toronto Maple Leafs sweater.