I like the “herding cats” line, old as it is, for its whimsical sense of the difficulty of managing human action. I like it mainly because it allows the herded subject a degree of dignity too often missing from the talk of managers. Cats, after all, don’t particularly care that you are trying to herd them – they are not morally deficient or stupid but simply – empirically - don’t have your sense of priorities. Wisdom, to the extent it is part of the scene at all, is clearly on the side of the cat: the would-be cat-herder is acting against nature and ought to know better. It is hard even to imagine a circumstance where cats should be herded in the first place, which is the management position I wish more managers had.

So too with faculty – a most particular kind of cat to be sure. We should be appreciated for what we are (or can be with proper nourishment) and that is more or less the extent of the management we require. Left to our devices most of us could even nourish ourselves and the key point is that an inclination toward such self-direction is ingrained and has served us well. Other metaphors are more romantic or heroic – the lone wolf, the knight errant and so on but they imply a moral superiority which is not sustainable. I am (we are) more or less cat to be sure – I may prefer to sleep 16 hours a day or 20, I may prefer to express myself through purrs or howls, I may take some comfort in the pride though even there I largely want to be left alone. But make no mistake – I have evolved to be quite good at what I am good at.
This tautological accomplishment begs the question of the value of my qualities to other cats and to potential human keepers of various sorts. Does the cat mouse (a verb) sufficiently well to justify his place in the farm’s larger order? That is a fair question but if he is also asked to paint the barn and darn the farmer’s socks, one of the parties is being goofy and it is not the cat.

So what do faculty do well and what is reasonably expected of us? Teaching, research and service are the shorthand labels for the overlapping sets. How much, what kind and with what results are the details that must be worked out, though probably not too carefully (what really counts, after all, is not always countable). But should faculty also be public relations men or crafters of household rules? These are tricky questions. A cat may make an attractive or an unsightly display to represent the household to others (I remember a tousled old boy who slept in the sunny window of a used-book store) but he is not generally interested in the job or competent to determine its details (when, to whom and in what light should the display be made). Similarly, cats are not generally good at writing constitutions or developing rules of operation for themselves much less for others. There is such a thing as a hierarchy among cats but it is far less important than it is among bees or ants or bureaucrats. The occasional cat turns out to be a darn fine bee but that is at best an accident and at worst becomes an aspirational model for impressionable junior colleagues. The lesson is not to work (manage) harder to force the adaptation but to let cats be cats and decide if you value their work.

Reviewers of journal articles are a particular breed of cat within the larger community. Again, some value is accorded to their work and it is one of the rare times in which one part of the community does depend on another. Author-cats would prefer that reviewer-cats act less cat-like: sleep less, play with their food less and meet some deadlines. This is reasonable at the same time that it is ... ironic. The authors are also the reviewers and while they can take up or set down these functional roles, they cannot stop being cats. There may be a larger lesson here – even apart from the obvious one contained in so many fables that we are who we are – my personal favorite is the frog and the scorpion as the stakes are so high and the humor is therefore so dark. The other lesson to which I allude is that diversity is a powerful source of good and the respect for diversity – for folks who are “other than” we – is a tremendous asset to the group. I take this to be Levinas’ point that it is the recognition of difference (alterity) rather than sameness in the face of the other that calls to us, that requires response and ultimately is the basis for ethics. When we actually try to understand differences as strengths rather than as problems to be remedied or contained (herded) we have flourishing for the individual and in the community. We can learn a lot from cats – like students they remind us of the limits of our importance and of our influence - and while we can’t change them very much, we may love them anyway.
Awards:


Grants:

Chien-Juh Gu:

• 2015, Research Grant ($2,500), Midwest Sociological Society.
• 2015, Support for Faculty Scholars Award ($2,000), Western Michigan University
• 2015, CAS Discovery and Dissemination Award ($1,500), Western Michigan University

Publications:


Awards Presented by the Graduate Student Association:
- Outstanding Student Researcher, MA: Olivia McLaughlin
- Outstanding Researcher, PhD: Jessie Sullivan
- Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant: Brooke O’Neil
- Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor: Matt Reid
- Outstanding Student Mentor, MA: Olivia McLaughlin & Kevin Nester
- Outstanding Student Mentor, PhD: Matt Reid
- Outstanding Faculty Mentor: Dr. Whitney DeCamp

Departmental Awards:
- Graduate Research & Creative Scholar Award, PhD: Rebecca Sevin
- Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award, MA: Brooke O’Neil
- Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award, PhD: Simon Purdy
- All-University Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award Winner: Simon Purdy

Recognition for Presenting or Publishing Research:
- Cleran Hollancid
- Tracie Joseph
- Jennifer Marson
- Melinda McCormick
- Olivia McLaughlin
- Daniel Patten
- Matt Reid
- Amanda Smith
- Karolina Staros
- Jessica Sullivan
- Codie Stone
- Andrew Verheek

Recognition for Teaching:
- Dr. Joseph Abbott Jr.
- Alexander Fether
- Jennifer Marson
- Melinda McCormick
- Daniel Paten
- Simon Purdy
- Matthew Reid
- Brian Rossana
- Robert Roznowski
- Heather Schild
- Rebecca Sevin
- Karolina Staros
- Codie Stone
- Jessica Sullivan
- Kristen Witzel

It is with distinct pride that we announce that Jenne Marson has received the Gwen Frostic Fellowship. This fellowship is given to assist recipients with the completion of doctoral dissertations in all disciplines.

Northcentral Sociological Association Conference, April 2015

Men’s Language of Romance and Sexual Orientation, Matt Reid (PhD Student, WMU) & Olivia McLaughlin (MA Student, WMU)

Gender Inclusive Spaces: Breaking Down Systematic Barriers One Classroom at a Time, Codie Stone (PhD Student, WMU), Tracy Hall (WMU) & Kelly Faust (Ohio U, PhD from WMU, 2012).
Department of Sociology students stayed in prison for several hours with professor, Aaron Kinzel, for a field trip to the Cell Block 7 museum in Jackson, MI. This trip gave students a real life look into a penitentiary, which is not just a replica or a likeness; it's a real prison, where thousands of convicts have done hard time. Kinzel said that this was a rich learning experience for his students to physically walk past the shadows in corrections of the criminal justice system.
The Department of Sociology’s 2015 Presidential Scholar, Caleb Fiorini

Not present:
The Departmental Criminal Justice Scholar for 2014-2015, Brittni Rohrig.
The 2014-2015 Kercher Center Scholar, Deborah Taplin.
Hello from Angie Evans
Message: just a quick message to say hello to the Sociology Department. I am a 2000 graduate (PhD) - I see lots of new faculty faces since I graduated. I am still Director of Institutional Research at Southwestern Michigan College, a small rural community college in Dowagiac, Mi). Well, just wanted to say hello. Hope all is well in Kzoo.

Rest in Peace
Tim Gallagher

Death Announcement

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Timothy Gallagher. Tim received his PhD in Sociology in 1993 from WMU. He was a professor of sociology at Kent State University for the past 19 years. Funeral Services were held on Tuesday, April 28, 2015 at St. Mark Lutheran Church, 158 North Ave., Tallmadge, Ohio, with Pastor Bill Michaels officiating. Notice will be in the Akron Beacon Journal Sunday and Monday, and forthcoming through the American Sociological Association. Tim always spoke highly of WMU's Sociology Department and his time there.

Department of Sociology

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Dr. Sara Brightman, PhD, 2012