The Socializer-Fall 2015

Department of Sociology

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Part 1

When pressed about a vision for the department, I deflect the question with a glib response … “My vision ain’t what it used to be.”

That’s a joke (and a concession) about aging but the serious part is that I don’t mean it in the sense of – I don’t see as well as I used to – rather I see differently than I used to. And that is actually an obligation and a responsibility rather than a curse or a weakness.

Asking about someone’s vision for a group is sort of a trick question anyway. How can one have a vision without a working sense of the vision of others to whom one owes attention? What I want or value or have found generally useful only makes or doesn’t make sense in how it comes together with all of those things for you – individually and collectively – and with the exigencies of our environment.

If all of this were an allowance to abstain from thinking about vision it would be almost a wholly negative stance. But indeed and fortunately, it does place positive demands on me and on my colleagues. If an individualized vision is only part of what we must think about, then we are required to agree to work hard to talk to each other and to hear each other in ways that will lead to action. My vision is therefore one of dialogue – open, honest, data driven, inclusive, generous – with colleagues who are similarly inclined and feel similarly responsible.

That said – there are some substantive, albeit general, content areas that we already know will and should be parts of the vision. But most of the “what we want to do” stuff will inevitably change. For me, the key question is always, “How will we pursue change?”, and the key words are “we” (collective responsibility) and “how” (process focus).

The most important caveat is that commitment to dialogue cannot be an excuse to give up or to have never held core values and relatively immovable principles and goals. I’ve already mentioned that some of these are processual such as a commitment to open, informed, critical and inclusive dialogue. Whatever we do it will be through this sort of process, this commitment to real dialogue. Some are substantive such as intransigent commitments to opportunity, equality (these are not the same by the way), global engagement and sustainability. Whatever we do it
will be with positive attention to these needs and a recognition that unintended consequences are so common. And some are moral such as fairness, respect, empathy and hope. Whatever we do we cannot act against these values and we should when possible be motivated by and toward them.

I hope that I remain committed to these things even as that which we understand each of them to be inevitably changes - sustainability is a good example - at the same time that I am changing. But my and our fundamental responsibility is to withhold judgment as long as is practically and humanely possible so that we can better understand and act. After all, and before all who may hold us to account, that is our job, our role, our value. To study with the evolving tools of our multidiscipline the core and attendant problems of our many communities.

Our methodological and theoretical tools, the problems we study, the understanding we obtain and the use to which we put our understanding are all the (social) constructions of limited ignorant and easily fooled creatures – of people including working scientists – in historically and economically and culturally contingent positions. In my current vision of social science, myopic as it and all visions must be, I can live without Truth and even without certainty – indeed I have no choice but to do so. But I can insist on our obligation to work and judge and act anyway. To take seriously our responsibilities to problems and communities which are no less real for their social construction. To constantly worry about how I’m doing it - by the principles enumerated above – but to study, judge and act anyway.

The necessary corollary of this sense or vision is that we take students with us and they take us with them, as we explore. Our job is not just to study and act or rather it is not only our job to do so. It is the job of all citizens in all communities and education into our approaches, especially education through practice, is the most important thing we do. Whatever our currently preferred understandings for our currently defined problems, what really counts is the socialization of students into practitioners of the trade. Critical, aware, widely read, publicly minded, morally centered, always willing, technically sophisticated but ultimately humble participants in academic and public discourse – that is our product. We cannot even secretly wish to produce clones of ourselves because the only thing we know about the science of today and about the people who produced it is that it and they are wrong. Other results will be required for what will, to some extent, be other problems. We hope to have students who go beyond us not just in time as they inevitably do, but in their methods, ideas and contributions.

So that’s research and teaching. What of service? In this vision service is not distinguishable from the other two responsibilities of the faculty individually and collectively. Our research and teaching are in service to important problems – intellectual and practical, immediate and more fundamental, local and global – and that service must spill over into paths not easily understood as research and teaching. A handy though incomplete sense of service is use of one’s knowledge and talents to assist important work in and beyond the university. In that sense service comes first and only some of it is also classifiable as teaching or research. Let me be clear, particularly to those still in the probationary stages of the tenure process – most visions of faculty responsibility are more heavily weighted to teaching and research than to service. My point is that the demarcation is often specious.

So what is my vision for this department? It is, I suppose, coincident with my vision for any community. That it – which means we – takes seriously our responsibility to seek out important problems in the social world (and all the world is social in important ways), to address them honestly, reflexively and critically with a competence based in wide familiarity with the evolving tools of our craft, to seek out and listen to those who think differently, to see these others not first as enemies to be bested but as a source of wisdom, to resist the inclination to decide too much too soon but ultimately to choose – to choose to act and to hope that our actions matter. If they do after all matter, we are responsible for those effects, intended and unintended. But if we do not act we are also
responsible. Just as there is no intellectual perspective above the fray (the a-perspectival ideal of some visions of science) there is no defensible moral position apart from the call to action.

Part II

So this is all general or even generic. Beyond these minimums, what kind of things should we do more? What should we do less? There is again a foundational answer which holds together the more particular guidelines and guesses to follow. The foundation is the malleable capacity of our faculty. Our vision is constrained only by the imagination and talent of our faculty, staff and students. It is constrained I think only in relatively minor ways by budget – in real but rare circumstances we are prevented from doing something by a literal inability to pay for it – offering more graduate fellowships is the most obvious example. But we are not prevented from pursuing such things and in making substantial progress if we have the capacity (imagination and talent) to do so. We must pursue resources but that pursuit cannot be limited to approaches which ask relatively little of us, of our imagination and talent.

The good news is twofold – 1) our capacity is already manifest in really important work and 2) that capacity is capable of imagining and doing many other things including a different mix of what we already do. We currently teach three high quality majors (each of which is also available as a minor), we instruct hundreds of students in general education, we have a high quality graduate program with a good placement record, we do important research as individuals but we also have multiperson research concentrations that roughly parallel our doctoral areas, and we have policy outreach significance tied to our affiliation with the Walker Institute.

This is where it gets tricky because, as an individual faculty member, I have some preferences about the mix just described. But, true to the collaborative principles outlined already, my view is only one of many. If we are to collectively shift or change apart from the individual growth we demand of ourselves, we must discuss it. For example, global dimensions are sensible for almost all of our work: in some areas these are already central, in others they could be enhanced while in still others that enhancement may not be a top priority.

A policy orientation is similarly a strong contender for attention and practice though again there will always be a place for the what the natural sciences can somehow still call “pure” research and what James Coleman in our field called “disciplinary.” Of course, he used that term in the years before the expectations around interdisciplinarity were so prevalent. That is a third theme around which we have built and could build more. Our success in attracting scholars with diverse training in several different fields enhances our capacity here. Interdisciplinary thinking is but one form of diversity which is the fourth thematic strength and capacity for growth in our department. Diversity for us is multidimensional. As a practical strength it clearly contributes to the experience, perspective and imagination I equated with capacity as a whole. In the process and value terms referred to earlier, diversity links to opportunity, equality and inclusion but also to openness of mind, the most basic of all scientific values.

A fifth theme around which we could build was also mentioned earlier in the same context of values – that is sustainability. A sixth theme is learning by doing. We already have internships and we have long valued the apprenticeship model of research training. We can do more of this for undergraduates in particular with some attention and effort.

A seventh theme is a reenergizing of our historically important concentration on race and ethnicity particularly in cities. We have relevant expertise here in inequality, in criminal justice systems, in education, in family and childhood issues and in basic demographic trends. Western was known for this urban and “small cities” emphasis decades ago and, particularly with the outstanding current leadership of the Walker Institute, we could be even more of a local and state resource and a national academic center in these areas.

I could go on at this level and I could be more specific. But that would betray the most essential
aspect of our capacity – that it is based first on the dedicated interests of our faculty. In terms of the directions we choose, the chair’s responsibility is no more and probably less than that of each of you. The chair’s job is to tease out these interests and support them, particularly as they form opportunities for collaboration inside and outside the department. But even that is only a chair’s responsibility to a slightly greater degree than it is that of each faculty member. We are all responsible for all we do or don’t do. We can take turns leading and following and with variable effort and enthusiasm. But we cannot consistently sit it out.

When a colleague has an idea we are obligated to listen to it and try to help to clarify and improve it. When a student needs help it is not just the responsibility of the advisor or major faculty member – they are all our students. When a brown bag or guest speaker is taking place – it is for our intellectual benefit and we have an obligation to attend to it. There will be exceptions but they should be exceptions, not a default position of isolation. One must still have, and others must respect, the right to abstain in particular circumstances. Our shared responsibility is to have such important and interesting collective work that no one wants to miss it.

This is an exciting department – an exciting time and place. I am incredibly optimistic about what we are and about what we will decide to be. In practice of the principles outlined here, this essay benefitted from a conversation with members of the Fall 2015 SOC 6200 class: Chris Strayer, Zack Oaster, Olivia McLaughlin and Kristin Witzel. As usual in such circumstances, they are in no way responsible for remaining nonsense.

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**Faculty Presentations:**


**Smith, Jesse.** 2015. Invited Critic. “Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America” by Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith. Author-meets-Critics session of The Association for the Sociology of Religion annual meeting. Chicago, IL.
I received both my MA and PhD from the Pennsylvania State University. My MA was in crime, law, and justice and my thesis focused on the influence of birth order on delinquency during adolescence using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. My dissertation topic explored the impact of adolescent expectations of the future on behavior during the transition to adulthood; specifically examining whether there are adverse consequences for failing to meet expectations. My comprehensive exams areas were: criminological theory, criminal justice systems, quantitative methods, and the life course perspective.

My research interests have been very broad to date with publications and projects on a variety of topics include: birth order, sexual assaults (both in the general population and in correctional populations), expectations of the future, and changes in punitiveness over time. Currently, I’ve been working more with: criminal justice education practices, police personality, and prisoner reentry. I have tended to pursue projects that pique my interest and I continue to search for new and interesting projects to work on individually and collaboratively.

My wife’s name is Blair and we have been married since 2013. We moved here from Greenville, North Carolina (where I was an Assistant Professor at East Carolina University) in early July in to our first house and have been enjoying the mild Michigan summer (with the knowledge of the not so mild winter soon to be coming). Blair works as a veterinary clinical research associate for Zoetis and has been loving her new job. This is our first time in Michigan, but we both have Midwestern roots. I’m an avid sports enthusiast who is a college football and basketball junkie. Blair is a big Penn State fan and an even bigger fan of equestrian sports. We have fallen in love with Kalamazoo and southwest Michigan, and enjoy the burgeoning local food scene and plethora of local breweries.
Over the summer, I had the unique opportunity to travel to Amman, Jordan and Istanbul, Turkey as part of an International Faculty Development Seminar. The seminar was organized by the Council on International Educational Exchange, an organization that coordinates study abroad programs for undergraduates throughout the U.S. My travels, sponsored entirely by the Haenicke Institute on Global Education at WMU, occurred just prior to what has now (finally) become an internationally recognized problem of mass proportions – the Syrian refugee crisis.

I was joined by eight other American academics from a variety of institutions, all of whom were strangers to me at the outset. By the end of our 12 day journey, we had bonded over the concern for the millions of civilians who have been killed, injured, or displaced due to the Syrian civil war, now in its fifth year.

The program centered on placing the refugee crisis within a historical-political context in which there are far more questions than straight-forward answers. At this point, approximately half of Syria’s pre-war population have died or fled (within or across its borders). Over four million have left the country, often through land and water migration routes predominantly destined for Europe. However it has been non-European, “developing” countries that have housed the majority (i.e., Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon), all with inadequate (and dwindling) international aid (which may explain part of the recent E.U. migrant influx). Through the process, they have been subject to constant danger, unscrupulous smuggling, police and military brutality, harassment, hunger, illness, familial separation, arbitrary or outdated immigration policies, employment discrimination, religious Stigma, media stereotyping, and general Indifference within many a “host” community.

I personally looked at this opportunity as a means of bearing witness to the less visible victims in this crisis, namely women and children. It was difficult, though not surprising, to hear very little about their specific plights. We certainly know, from other settings of conflict, that women can be subject to various forms of war crime, including sexual assault, forced marriage, and trafficking. Girls and boys are also vulnerable targets of myriad physical, sexual, and psychological assaults. The cumulative trauma of this current conflict will inevitably impact an entire generation or more of Syria’s citizens.

Below are a few pictures that tell small pieces of the much larger story.
In this same small village, less than a mile from the southern Syria border, we met with refugee families. Here I am trying to engage, to little avail, a 2 year old girl while her father recounts the family’s journey over the border. Notable, this man has lung cancer which is going untreated due to cuts in health care to refugees in Jordan. He has five daughters, one of whom was born while they were fleeing.

A young boy, probably 4 or 5, playing the dumbek (Arabic drum) for change on a commercial street in Istanbul, Turkey. Such efforts were commonplace within the city’s tourist centers, but took the form of loitering or panhandling in other areas. The majority were children (from infant to young adolescent) and women. It was not always possible to determine whether these individuals were Syrian (there are also many refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan), but they were likely not Turkish nationals from what I gleaned about changes in the urban landscape of Istanbul and current public sentiment toward migrants.

Patrick Cundiff was recently accepted into this academic year’s Collaborative Inquiry Community on Social Science and Humanities at WMU. The goal of the group is to develop techniques and best practices to help students remain engaged while overcoming typical barriers often encountered in introductory and advanced courses.

Whitney DeCamp:
(Principal Investigator, 2015-2016), Kalamazoo Public Library Website and Catalog User Experience Study, Kalamazoo Public Library

Gu, Chien-Juh: Dr. Gu began a new project about Burmese refugees in Battle Creek and Springfield, MI, last summer. She uses mix-methods (in-depth interviews, ethnographic observations, and photo voice) to investigate the adaptation experiences of Burmese refugees in this non-traditional immigration destination.

Jesse Smith:


As the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Sociology at Western Michigan University, I want to talk to you about graduate studies. We are currently accepting applications for the Fall 2016 cohort for both M.A. and Ph.D. programs. We accept online applications through February 1, 2016 and all accepted candidates will be considered for our various sources of funding.

As many of you are successful alums, you are aware we have a diverse and reputable faculty who are engaged in various levels of scholarship. We are known for producing well-rounded graduates who are equipped for various lines of employment in the public and private sectors. Our curriculum is theoretically and methodologically rigorous, with an expectation for the development of individual lines of inquiry.

Please help us spread the word about graduate studies in sociology. I invite you to learn more about our graduate programs at www.wmich.edu/sociology and to contact me directly with any inquiries or questions (269/387-5278 or zoann.snyder@wmich.edu).

Two New Books by Recent Alumni

**SOCIeLOGY OF RELIGION**
A Critical Primer
Walter A. Jensen

Dr. Walter Jensen (PhD 2015)  
Published by Printmill-  
Kalamazoo, MI  
August 2015

**QUEER CRIMINOLOGY**
Carrie L. Buist and Emily Lenning

Dr. Carrie Buist (PhD 2011)  
Dr. Emily Lenning (PhD 2008)  
Published by Rutledge Press,  
2015.
It was a busy summer indeed. We traveled and presented papers at three conferences in three different countries. Here is what we did.

**Ukraine.** In the end of June, Elena Lisovskaya and Slava Karpov went to Kyiv (Ukraine) to participate in the international workshop “Lived religion in the Black Sea Region” sponsored by the Region, Nation and Beyond Research Group and the Swiss National Science Foundation. Our trip was also partly supported by the grants we received from the International Education Faculty Development Fund. The workshop brought together scholars from the United States, Britain, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Russia. Elena’s paper at the workshop, “Teaching religious cultures, teaching nationalism: the case of Russia’s secular schools” showed how nationalist, neo-imperialist ideology is promoted through religious instruction in Russian schools. Slava’s paper, “Holy Russia 3.0: A post-modern remake and its consequences for Russia and Ukraine” explained how Russia uses religious mythology to justify its aggression against Ukraine. Our papers were well received and we were invited to submit them to a refereed journal.

One of our strongest impressions of the workshop was that practically all of its Ukrainian participants had taken part in the Euromaidan protests that went from November, 2013 through February, 2014 and triggered revolutionary changes in Ukraine and Russia’s counter-revolutionary, military intervention. It was fascinating to sit at the roundtable with young Ukrainian scholars who impressed us greatly with their excellent, fully European professional preparation as well as with their profound and proven commitment to the cause of free, democratic and independent Ukraine. Exciting as the workshop was, it was even more fascinating to be in Kyiv amidst the monumental changes brought about by the Ukrainian revolution. We spent several days walking...
the streets, and meeting and talking to many people ranging from ordinary folks to activists and professional politicians. And we were deeply impressed and touched by the Ukrainians’ hospitality, kindness, and resilient optimism. The wounds that the nation has suffered have not healed – the memorials to the fallen heroes of Euromaidan and of the war in east Ukraine are stark reminders of the price the country pays for its freedom.

And yet there is hope, and a beautiful sense of humor, and optimism about Ukraine’s victory in its fateful struggle not only with Russian aggression, but also with entrenched corruption, the power of the oligarchs, dysfunctional bureaucracy, and other Soviet and post-Soviet legacies. And despite the horror stories told by the Russian propaganda, we saw no sign of hostility to Russian speakers. We felt absolutely at ease speaking Russian on the streets of Kyiv (and our friends are telling about their similar experiences in western Ukraine). Characteristically, our guide in the Kyiv Lavra (an ancient monastery and one of the holiest places of Eastern Christianity), a highly educated and very patriotic woman, readily switched to conducting the tour in Russian instead of Ukrainian, even though we were the only non-Ukrainians in the group of about fifteen people.

Belgium. From Kyiv we went to Belgium in order to participate in the prestigious biennial meeting of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR) in Louvain-la-Neuve (near Brussels). At the meeting, Elena organized and convened a panel, The meaning of icons: towards a social-scientific understanding. The panel at which Elena presented a paper under the same title, was most likely the first ever to focus on the place of icons in religion and society across cultures from an interdisciplinary perspective. Elena’s talk was in part informed by her ongoing study of iconography in the United States, a growing phenomenon in which women play a key role. The well attended Panel’s participants came from backgrounds as diverse as Korea, Finland, Britain, Romania, and France, bringing together perspectives from sociology, cultural anthropology, and comparative religion. At the same conference, Slava presented a paper at a key panel on Religion and Social Theory. His paper, Theorizing multiple secularizations and counter-secularizations, criticized limited views of religion and social change that focus predominantly on Western experiences and proposed a more pluralistic perspective that integrates religious developments in other parts of the world. This included a case study of la Cristiada (the war against suppression of religious freedom in Mexico) a subject largely neglected by sociologists. It was fun to be in Belgium – we had a chance to see Brussels and Bruges. The downside was a heat wave, not very pleasant if you stay in a conference hotel and present in a university building without air conditioning. However, famous Belgian beers provided a much needed cooldown in the evenings.

Chicago. Finally, in August our group presented papers at the Association for the Sociology of Religion. Rachel Schroeder convened the panel Religion and State, with participants coming from France, Romania, Canada, and the US. Rachel’s talk at the panel, “The Enemies of the Church”: Religion, Artistic Expression, and the Culture Wars in Russia, presented an innovative and comparative perspective on the nature, meaning, and consequences of religio-political conflicts in Russia. Slava Karpov presented a paper “The role of religion in Russia’s war against Ukraine” which showed how two alternative models of desecularization, Russia’s top-down model and Ukraine’s grassroots- based one, impacted the conflict between the two countries. Thus, three countries, three conferences, two university grants plus external funding, six papers on six different topics, two panels convened, and multiple new research contacts established. A busy summer for our Group indeed!

Submitted by Slava Karpov
Congratulations to our Graduate Students who have achieved ABD Status:

Darrick Brake
Cleran Hollancid
Jenn Marsen
Simon Purdy

Graduate Students’ Awards/Grants/Presentations/Publications:

Matt Reid, PhD Student has been appointed to a 3-year term on the Midwest Sociological Society's (MSS) Student Committee (2016-2019).

Codie Stone, PhD Candidate won the “Emerging Leader Award”, Office of LBGT Student Services, Western Michigan University

Codie Stone, PhD Candidate also won the “Make a Difference Award”, Graduate Student Association, Western Michigan University

Strayer, Christine, PhD Student:

Strayer, Christine, PhD Student:
Alumni News

Please keep in touch with us and let us know what you are doing! We love to hear about how successful you have been and what WMU has meant to you!

Updates from Alumni!

I am a 1994 WMU Sociology grad. Since receiving a MLIS (Master of Library and Information Science) degree from Wayne State in 2001, I have worked as a children’s librarian. I am currently the Head of Youth Services at the Oxford Public Library in Oxford, MI.

I am married with two sons ages 13 and 11. I enjoy working to serve the youth of our community and helping to instill a love of reading into their lives. I have fond memories of my time at WMU and appreciate the foundation in the social sciences I received there from the Sociology department, which continues to serve me well in my current profession. I appreciate the updates from WMU and enjoy reading about the growth and change happening around campus. Thank you for keeping the alumni informed.

Fondly,
Kim (Ingersoll) Burean

I retired last September after more than 25 years as a Police Officer with the City of Sterling Heights, Michigan. My wife JoAnn (also WMU alumni) and I live in Armada Michigan and she is an Occupational Therapist. We have two daughters who both are in the nursing program at Oakland University. I can be reached at kevinernst@att.net.

Thank you.........Kevin Ernst

The American Sociological Association Conference, Chicago, IL

Dr. Gu took two Alpha Kappa Delta students, Scott Duxbury and Kelsey Dovico, to attend the American Sociological Association conference in Chicago in August. Both students were accepted to the ASA Honors Program and presented their research papers at the ASA. Scott is pursuing a Ph.D. in Sociology at Ohio State University, and Kelsey is applying to graduate school this year.

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