Spring 2018

The Socializer-Spring/Summer 2018

Department of Sociology

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The Socializer

Spring Academic Awards

Western Michigan University

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Technological Bargains: Self-driving cars and other lessons on the data-driven life

By Dr. David Hartmann

Aside from issues of life and death, there is no more urgent task for American intellectuals and writers than to think critically about the salience, even the tyranny, of technology in individual and collective life. … The burden of proof falls on the revolutionaries, and their success in the marketplace is not sufficient proof. (Wieseltierjjan, 2015)

When we hand over the wheel to data, we are making what seems a reasonable choice – and indeed the same general bargain our species has made for tens of thousands of years (and our lineage since the time of homo habilus). Indeed, the very idea of technology entails its use – and once real, once made, like Tolkein’s ring of power it calls out to be used. The payoffs are familiar; some combination of productivity, convenience, the thrill of novelty and the pride of creation. And over time, of course, such accommodations come to seem indispensable and then natural – not choices at all.

Letting data drive for a while seems both incremental and reasonable. The analogy of the self-driving car is a good example: We have, after all, been driving a long time, we are tired and need a break and the car is already trusted with so many parts of the operation – now all supposedly monitored and adjusted by the “computers” lurking somewhere (everywhere?) in the contraption. Furthermore, we are assured that the self-driving technology has been well trained for the task.
Two objections veritably leap out at us from this analogy. First, we recall our teenage son or daughter who was also anxious to take a turn at the wheel — our wheel mind you. Is Frankenstein’s monster to be accorded more trust than they? Second and by extension, the mind races to all the negative externalities that have come hidden in the packing of our bright new toys. “It seemed a good idea at the time” may come to be the defining epigram for man’s recent history with technology. This is not to deny that benefits occur and that they may even dramatically outweigh the attendant harms – no luddites we – but to point out that we are rarely in a position to know how it will all come out. We should by now have learned to be more cautious. I am not overly concerned that I will be run down in the street by a self-driving car but I am concerned that a data-driven university, for example, may run over a great deal of what we thought we cared about.

And I need to be clear - my critique of the enthusiasm for the data driven life has almost nothing to do with the particular persons espousing it, here or elsewhere, but rather with the tendency that we all have to see what we want in “data.” This confirmation bias encourages us to be less careful or critical of the limitations of measurement and analysis than we should be. Consider: When we see our department doing well in a chart or spreadsheet, we give that result more credibility. We assume the data speak for themselves and expect others to see it to. When the result makes our department or college look bad, we assume there is imprecision, limitation or even error involved, we look for it and we are pretty good at finding it.

These tendencies apply at the individual level as well. We have looked for the magic number that will attest to our place in the universe since Pythagorean times and our recent history of the IQ, the GPA, the SAT, the GRE, the number of publications or grant dollars, the Impact Factor, the Citation Index, and so on has become a secondary industry in academe that now threatens to change the nature of our basic work.

There is a common flaw in these data driven approaches quite apart from their particular gaps and failings. And it is a flaw we all know but for some reason choose to ignore. Models are not the world. They are partial and poor reflections of the world but they are also not reflections at all but creations – makings of the world through posited (and rarely explicit much less tested) similarities. A model and a term in a model are always to a purpose – they are not natural or true reflections of some mind-independent reality. We need them – science in particular would not be science without them. But we cannot believe them.

To further complicate the problem – there are models of phenomena but also data models that we use in conjunction. Both are in play in data driven systems. Data models are the accepted ways of collecting, analyzing, assessing and critiquing our phenomenal models and hypotheses and – most importantly - are intimately tied to those models. They do not typically stand apart and support theory-independent tests. As I’ve said, this is our professional world and we cannot run from it; but we should operate appropriately within it.

The trick, one which is very hard to perform, is to apply a consistent and very high level of suspicion to all data results – all data claims. We must avoid a reliance on the number as truth and recognize that data and statistics are artifacts and tools respectively and so produce imperfect evidence toward whatever picture is emerging and whatever decision is pending.

As an experienced professional, I may (or may not, I suppose) do this pretty well but parts of my various audiences may do it less well. My point is that as more and more actors and offices of the university begin to play the data driven game, there will be more variation in the quality of the effort.

One last example: as an expert witness in school desegregation litigation, my job was to point out the flaws in the opposition’s data presentations and analyses and to offer alternatives congenial to our side. While this explicitly adversarial context can lead to disingenuous work, it is supposed to have the advantage of requiring explicit debate on data quality. At the university where we should generally be able to recognize that we are on the same side, it is all the more important to have-as impartial a critique of evidence as possible.

1 A vague self-preservation instinct at least resisted these teenaged entreaties—though as with technology more generally, over time “resistance is futile.”

Congratulations!
Dr. Doug Davidson has retired and was honored with a reception on Thursday, April 19, 2018.
Dr. Chien-Juh Gu

**Publication:**

**Recent research awards:**
Dr. Gu received the 2018 Faculty Research and Creative Activities Award ($10,000) from WMU and the 2018 College Discovery and Dissemination Award from the College of Arts and Sciences.

**Other news:**
Dr. Gu has been invited to teach a summer course at the Graduate School in History and Sociology at Bielefeld University in Germany. 13 doctoral researchers have enrolled in her graduate seminar, “Immigration and Gender: Theory, Methods, and Analysis,” in June. She also has been invited to give a research talk at Bielefeld’s Global Migration as the New Social Question Colloquium Series, held by the Sociology of Transnationalization, Development and Migration research group. Dr. Gu’s new book, *The Resilient Self*, recently received praise from Chronicle of Higher Education.

Dr. Ron Kramer

**Publication:**

**Presentation:**
Dr. Kramer delivered the 2018 *Dean’s Lecture*, “Carbon Criminals, Climate Crimes and the Current Political Crisis” at the College of Justice and Safety, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky on March 22, 2018.


At the American Society of Criminology Meetings in Philadelphia in November of 2017, Ron Kramer: Served as a Critic in an “Author Meets Critic” session on Gregg Barack’s *Unchecked Corporate Power* (Routledge Press).

Dr. Vincent Lyon-Callo will be starting a four year term as co-editor of the interdisciplinary journal "Rethinking Marxism" July, 2018.

Dr. Elena Gapova

Elena Gapova gave a talk at Barnard College, Columbia University. The talk, titled "The Russian Revolution and Women’s Liberation: the Making of the Soviet Gender Contract", was part of the lecture series “Women in Revolution,” which marked the centenary of the Russian Revolution through a critical examination of the role of women, gender, and sexuality in the Soviet revolutionary project. Importantly, the event took place on March 8, which is International Women’s Day.
Dr. Whitney DeCamp

Publications:

Op-Eds:

Grants:
Development and Validation of Observational and Self-Report Instruments to Describe Teaching Practices in Online Undergraduate STEM Courses.
Researchers: Brian Horvitz (Principal Investigator), Whitney DeCamp (Co-PI), Regina Garza-Mitchell (Co-PI), Megan Kowalske (Co-PI), Charles Henderson (Co-PI).
Fund Source: National Science Foundation.

Kalamazoo Community Foundation Community Survey Researcher: Whitney DeCamp (PI)
Fund Source: Kalamazoo Community Foundation.

Awards:
DeCamp, Whitney. Excellence in Discovery Award, Western Michigan University, 2018.

Presentations:
Foster, Jennifer M., Kenneth Schmidt, and Whitney DeCamp. (2018). The Impact of a Group Intervention on Adult Survivors of Childhood Trauma Using a Psychoeducational Model. Presented at the 36th annual Kalamazoo Community Medical and Health Sciences Research Day, Kalamazoo, MI.


Media Coverage:
Following President Trump and other politicians focusing on violent video games after recent gun violence, DeCamp was called on by many news organizations for his expertise on the topic of violence and video games. In February and March, 2018, Dr. DeCamp’s research and interviews were included in news articles by CNN, Encore, NBC News, Teen Vogue, and other publications. He also participated in radio interviews for Michigan Radio (NPR) and WMUK (NPR), as well as televised interviews for MSNBC Live, WWMT (CBS), and NBC News.

Dr. Jesse Smith

Publications:


New position:
Smith has been selected as the new Joint Editor-in-chief for the journal, *Secularism and Nonreligion*. Here is the website: https://www.secularismandnonreligion.org/

*Secularism and Nonreligion* is the world’s first journal dedicated to the investigation of secularism and nonreligion in all forms. Articles are published on a continuous basis, ensuring publication as soon as submissions are accepted and formatted.
Highlighting our undergraduate students

Undergraduate Students’ Honors Reception

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

Dr. Charles Crawford (left), Faculty Advisor

2017-2018 Inductees
Jose Luis Cruz Jr. (pictured center)
Hanna Jane Harter (pictured 2nd from right)
Maritza Cuellar Hernandez (pictured on right)
Michael Joseph Kemme (pictured left)

Left: Dr. David Hartmann, Chair of the Dept. of Sociology and Shelby Esman, Criminal Justice Scholar, 2017-2018.

Above: Dr. David Hartmann, Chair of the Dept. of Sociology and Tyler Willison, the Presidential Scholar for the Department of Sociology, 2017-2018.

Alpha Kappa Delta

Alex Webb and Steve Elliot were inducted into Alpha Kappa Delta, The International Honor Society of Sociology, by Dr. Chien-Juh Gu, WMU Chapter Advisor.

Above: Dr. David Hartmann, Chair of the Dept. of Sociology and Nathan Browning, recipient of the Robin Scholar Award.
Dr. Susan Carlson, presenting pens to new MA graduates Katherine Brown, and Randy LaPrairie.

Sociology graduate students who have presented or published research during 2017-2018.

GSA Board members (Brian Lunn, Olivia McLaughlin, Keiondra Grace) present Dr. Zoann Snyder (left) with the Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award.

All-University Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award and Department Teaching Effectiveness Award presented to Brian Lunn.

Dr. Susan Carlson, presenting PhD desk wedge to Dr. Codie Stone.

GSA Board presenting Ryan Castillo (PhD Level) (on left) with Outstanding Instructor Award and Ashley Chlebek (MA Level) (2nd on left) with Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award.

Acknowledging all PhD students who have successfully completed at least one area exam during 2017-2018. (Left to right: Rebecca Sevin, Keiondra Grace, Olivia McLaughlin, Kristen Witzel, Matt Reid, Christine Strayer.)

Sunny Days: Therapy Dog’s Visit

Sometimes what a child needs most is unconditional acceptance, and at Northeastern Elementary School there is someone who can provide that. Sunny.

The 18-month-old Golden Retriever has been visiting with classrooms at Northeastern Elementary School for the past few months as comfort dog. Along with his owner, Dr. Angela Moe, Sunny is in the school as a calming and encouraging influence on children.

“Thank you Sunny for coming,” fifth grader Jasmine Cole wrote in a thank you note to Moe and Sunny. “Sunny is the best ever.”

To earn those accolades, he had to do nothing more than lay in the hallway, while his hordes of fans wave and hope that he’ll look their way. Everyone wants to be near him. And, he’s fine with that.

Actually, that calm is the hallmark of a good therapy dog, said Moe, who is a professor of sociology at Western Michigan University. Working with Sunny, she said, is a culmination of her work in holistic health, child welfare, and trauma.

Sunny became a certified therapy dog in August through Pet Partners. He’s worked at Northeastern as well as Mattawan Consolidated Schools and the Children’s Advocacy Center.

Therapy dogs like Sunny are exposed to as many people and situations as possible as puppies to help them acclimate to their roles. They begin official obedience training at four months. Ultimately, what programs and trainers are looking for are dogs that are unlikely to startle easily.

“They want a dog that goes with the flow,” Moe said. At Northeastern, Sunny does just that. He waits patiently through all the pats and sitting quietly as children walk by and occasionally reach out to give him a pat with Moe’s permission. He can sit respectfully while Moe reads a storybook, and he’ll take to the leash for a stroll around a classroom.

His calm, and the calm of any therapy dog, is contagious. Children who work with therapy dogs show slowed heart rates and experience feelings of wellbeing, Moe said. “Dogs just provide unconditional support for children who may not always get the support they deserve,” Moe said. “Children just want to interact with someone. This makes them feel like they have a connection.

(Reprinted from The Excelsior, Vol. 21, Issue 5, a newsletter of the Kalamazoo Public Schools. Found at: https://kalamazoopublicschools.com/Portals/0/KPS%20Site%20Docs/Excelsior/2018.05%20Excelsior_web.pdf)
Kevin David Nester of Camp Hill, PA, passed away suddenly on Thursday, March 1, 2018, at his home. He was 36. Born in Doylestown, PA, he was the son of David M. and Kathleen S. (Swartz) Nester of Hilltown Twp., PA. He was a 2000 graduate of Pennridge High School, Perkasie, PA, where he belonged to the National Honor Society.

Kevin attained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Astronomy and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Sciences concurrently from Lycoming College, Lycoming, PA, in 2004. While a student at Lycoming, he was active with the Creative Arts Society. He went on to attain a Master’s Degree in Comparative Religion from Western Michigan University. His studies there included a year of studying abroad in Japan. He was then a student in the Master’s program in the Department of Sociology from fall of 2013 until spring 2017.

Kevin was employed for 15 years with Walmart, working in the Pharmacy and Electronics Departments at its Quakertown, Williamsport and Camp Hill locations in Pennsylvania as well as its Kalamazoo location in Michigan.

He is dearly missed by his friends here at the Department of Sociology. Among other things we miss his Tuesday night bowling gatherings, and his phenomenal gourmet cooking skills that he tantalized us with.

Dr. David Chaplin

Chaplin, David 11/30/1930 - 7/27/2017 Brunswick, Maine Dr. David Chaplin, Lifelong educator, story teller, sailor, husband, father and uncle, passed away peacefully on July 27th 2017 at the age of 86 at a nursing home in Freeport, Maine. David is survived by his wife, Joyce Whittier Chaplin; his children, Duncan, Scott, and Alexandra Chaplin.

David obtained his undergraduate degree at Amherst College and his PhD in sociology from Princeton University. He worked in the Sociology Department at the University of Wisconsin from 1964 to 1972 and served as Chair of the Sociology Department at Western Michigan University from 1972 till 1989. He retired to Maine in 1992. David's ashes will be interred during a family event in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in his name to Harpswell Community Television, or the Maine Historical society. Letters to Joyce can be mailed care of Scott Chaplin, PO Box 374, Freeland, WA 98249. Emails can be sent to Joyce.Chaplin@icloud.com.

Memorial Service for David Chaplin

Host: Duncan Chaplin, (202) 258-6247. **Sunday, August 19, 2018 from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM,** Merriconeag Grange No 425 529 Harpswell Neck Road Harpswell, ME 04079
This year brought a new adventure for me and 11 of our undergraduate Criminal Justice Program majors. I offered a course with a spring break study abroad component in Utrecht, Netherlands. My course offered a comparative study of the U.S. and the Dutch criminal justice systems to include policing, courts, and corrections. We also addressed the globalization of crime and justice. We discussed how criminal activities, such as terrorism and war crimes are addressed through the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court (ICC) housed in the Hague, Netherlands.

I taught the class in a traditional, on-campus classroom format in preparation for the spring break study abroad component. This enabled me to engage the students in a formal study of what we would later see and experience. I used a comparative criminology text, scholarly articles, videos, and news websites to help the students learn about the social, cultural, and political contexts in which the Dutch criminal justice system and process function. In collaboration with Heidi van Houten, lecturer, in the Institute for Applied Safety and Security Studies, Hogeschool Utrecht, I developed a program which incorporated formal guest lectures and professional presentations with field trips to a former prison, the International Criminal Court, and Europol. Each of the lectures, presentations, and field trips was designed to examine a key component of the Dutch criminal justice system and/or illustrate criminal law and policy in action. The students also had time to explore Amsterdam and Utrecht on their own.

The challenge for me was to guide students from being well-versed on the U.S. justice system to critically examining another country’s system without prejudice. I had no real metric by which to test this ahead of the trip. It may be a function of this group’s dynamics, but the students impressed me at every turn. They took in the newness of the country with genuine respect and were very curious. Their interactions with faculty, students, and criminal justice professionals were very positive.

The prison administrators who met with us on campus called Heidi van Houten and specifically invited next year’s class to come to their prison. They had not wanted to do this prior to meeting the students. Our hosts at Europol also asked me to return next year with my students.

The Netherlands is probably one of the easiest cultures to navigate as an outsider. English is readily spoken, and the Dutch have a long history of tolerance and are genuinely welcoming to others. Most of the students spoke openly of wanting to come back to visit or even to pursue international internships or study programs in the Netherlands. The short duration of our stay likely helped a great deal as there wasn’t time for homesickness or for novelty of travel to wear off. I am offering the course again in spring 2019, and I look forward to introducing another group of WMU students to the Netherlands.
Our Alumni Make Us Proud!

Michael Gillespie, PhD, 2010
I received the Eastern Illinois University Student Distinguished Faculty Award. It is an award presented to faculty on campus based on the nominations of students. Nominations are collected, a committee of 8 students screen the top candidates and administer the awards. Over 100 faculty nominations were collected, and six were awarded. The cool thing about the award is that it is completely student-focused and guided; it reflects the commitment we make to our teaching and our students. I am quite humbled. (Michael is on the right in the photo.)

Carrie Buist, PhD, 2011
Received a 2017-2018 Pride Award from Grand Valley State University for having positively impacted and contributed to the LGBTQIA+ community at Grand Valley.

Emily Lenning, PhD, 2008
Fayetteville State University Professor from the College of Arts and Sciences received the 2017-2018 UNC-Board of Governors’ Excellence in Teaching Award Recipient

Melinda McCormick, PhD, 2016
WMU would like to welcome Melinda McCormick back! She will be joining the faculty of the School of Social Work as a regular full time tenured track faculty member!

Please keep in touch with us! Let us know what you are doing! We love to share how successful you have been and what you have been up to since you left WMU! Email: ann.browning@wmich.edu.

Sam Jaeger, BA 2013
Two weeks after graduating from WMU with a BA in Criminal Justice/Sociology, Sam Jaeger went to Europe with dreams of becoming qualified as an International Lawyer.

A year later, Sam was accepted into law school at the University of Derby in England. Along with his studying, he traveled around Europe working as a freelancer; using knowledge gained at Western in creative ways which surprised himself and his peers. "The style of teaching at WMU, namely in the Sociology Department, gave me tools from a liberal arts perspective which I didn't expect to achieve through my studies. These tools have opened up so many doors for me and continue to do so. I will forever be grateful for becoming a Bronco."

In 2017 Sam completed his LL.B. (Honors) in Law and decided to move to Germany with his fiancé Svenja. He now has taken up work as a Legal Adviser for an Irish real estate developer based in Berlin and plans on becoming qualified as a lawyer in both the UK and Germany "It has been a long, bumpy and sometimes treacherous road ...but in spite of this, my liberal arts education enabled me to navigate the systems I was immigrating into. To just pick up and establish myself in another continent was hard, but thankfully in 2008 I Grabbed the Reigns which has taken me on this ride."

During Sam's 5 year tenure at Western, he was a member of the Football team; earning 2 varsity letters between 2008-2010 before suffering an injury putting his career on hold. In 2013 he resumed playing 'American Football' in Europe and still remains actively involved in the sport internationally. Missing home, Sam hopes to someday return to the Mid-West, where he plans to coach and become further qualified as an attorney in the State of Michigan. Could we see Sam Going for Gold at WMU's Cooley Law School? ...only time will tell!