



Spring 2015 Newsletter

The Sociology of Resident Advisors

By Jeff Funk '16

A well-trained sociology major possesses a critical and important lens through which she views her experiences in life, and this sociological 'imagination' can be quite a useful skill in many professional and paraprofessional settings. Nobody understands this better than the students majoring in sociology at Muhlenberg, where seven of twenty-five (28%) majors are employed as Resident Advisors ("RAs") and Resident Liaisons ("RLs") on campus.

Being an RA involves overseeing a floor of students in traditional and suite-style housing, designing and implementing engaging and enriching programs, and enforcing college policies. The RL job is very similar, the main difference being that RLs are responsible for students living in college-owned houses and apartments. The sociology majors who work as RAs/RLs are aware of the symbiotic relationship between their choice of study and their role as student leaders.

Emeley Rodriguez '15 is currently the Head RL of the MILE (Muhlenberg Independent Living Experience) houses. Her experiences have taught her that *"sociology is about seeing the bigger picture and understanding not only an individual, but an individual's position in society as well as the various institutions that make up society. It is about seeing the world through more than one lens. Being an RA/RL relates a lot to sociology because you have to be able to see any situation through more than one lens. When interacting with my residents and dealing with conflicts, being able to step back, evaluate, and handle whatever situation I come across requires being able to understand the different perspectives involved."*

Stephanie Pasternak '15 is the Head RL of the Village and 2201 Apartments. As an RL, she is *"required to create bonds between students who often come from very different backgrounds. Not only are RAs and RLs expected to host programs that will bring people together and*

cross various social divides, when roommate issues arise, we are expected to step in to mediate them. The ways people communicate with and react to one another is influenced by race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, and ability. These social, physical, and cultural categories are just as prevalent in dorms as they are in the "real" world, and part of our job is to draw students together despite their differences."

Olivier Jean-Pierre '15 is the Head RA of Benfer, Robertson, and South Halls. He feels that *"the college has entrusted RAs to deal with really hard situations that take discernment. My sociological brain helps me understand how student behavior is often affected by the groups they surround themselves with. As RAs we have to figure out how to deal with an entire floor as a unit. Sociology zooms out from the individual and looks at how people interact at a larger level. RAs must understand how to bring their floor together as unit to ensure everyone has the best residential life experience possible in Muhlenberg's dorms."*



Jeff Funk '16 is currently an RA in, and next year will be the Head RA of, Prosser Hall. He says that *"working as an RA, especially with freshman residents, allows me to apply my sociological training to a job that I care about very much. Not only has sociology made me more aware and respectful of my residents' positions in society, but it has also enabled me to shape my programming and role-modeling efforts in a way that will help improve my residents' college experiences and promote community on our floor. I also feel that being able to apply my sociological lens to college residence life has refined and enhanced my skills and abilities as a sociology major."*

Paul Corgan '16 is an RL in the Village apartments and will be an RL in the MILE houses next year. Paul realizes that he has *“always found it interesting how many RAs I would see in all my sociology classes at Muhlenberg but never recognized the underlying reasons for this until now. Sociology is all about understanding how people/groups of people interact and how a variety of social, economic, and political factors inform these relationships. As RAs, we are tasked with managing a safe and healthy living environment for our residents; we must understand who our residents are and where they are coming from, which informs our understanding of how well they will cooperate with each other. Both this job and this major have worked to inform each other and helped me grow a deep respect for people and where they’ve come from. Because of this understanding, I am able to work towards bridging the gap between people and try to create a sense of community.”*



Lydia Condoluci '16 is currently an RA in Robertson Hall and will be the Head RA of Benfer, Robertson, and South Halls in the upcoming school year. Lydia points out that *“my background in Sociology gives me a glimpse into the lives and experiences of the people around me. Resident Advisors are expected to build community given a group of people that may, at first glance, see to have very little in common. With an understanding of where these people come from and of the structures that shape their everyday lives, an RA who studies Sociology has a huge amount of insight and confidence when interacting with residents that other RAs may be lacking.”*

Malcolm McClain '17 is an RA in Walz Hall and will be there next year as well. His take on the RA job is that it *“seems like the perfect fieldwork for a Soc major. Seeing the structure and social interactions that take place in housing are very interesting, and I think being inside this structure has taught me a lot about some of the sociology behind living spaces, a topic that I’ve become more interested in studying. When you hear conversations at Muhlenberg about who lives where, especially in relation to Walz Hall and the more expensive living spaces, it doesn’t take much work to*

understand the power and privilege that influences housing selections.”

New Faculty in Anthropology

By Heather Lash '18

Dr. Maura Finkelstein is a cultural anthropologist who will bring great energy as the newest addition to the faculty of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Muhlenberg College.

After completing her undergraduate degree, Dr. Finkelstein decided to take a few years to travel and experience the culture of India. During this time she also worked



for a non-profit organization and in the Peace Corps. Then she went to New York and earned her Master's Degree in Anthropology from Columbia University. From there, she earned her PhD from Stanford University. Dr. Finkelstein did her fieldwork in Bombay and spent two years living in India doing extensive research on deindustrialization.

At Mills College, she taught courses on the theory and methods of anthropology as well as medical anthropology, and her specialty, urban anthropology. At Muhlenberg, Dr. Finkelstein wants to have a working relationship with her students. She is willing to work with the strengths of each of her students to ensure each one succeeds. She is excited to teach such classes as Queer Anthropology, Indian History and Culture through Film, and Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion.

While teaching at Muhlenberg, she plans to connect students to the community through learning about the cityscape and economy and she hopes to take students with her to India. Overall, Dr. Finkelstein will be an excellent addition to the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Muhlenberg College.

Recent Faculty Research

Dr. Krista Bywater has published an article, “Investigating the Benefits of Participatory Action Research for Environmental Education” in the journal *Policy Futures in Education*. In addition, Dr. Bywater received both a faculty summer research grant as well as the Crossette Fellowship for international research to continue her work on environmental movements and water governance in India this summer.

Dr. Benjamin Carter presented his research on active learning in the archaeology classroom at two conferences and published a short piece entitled, “Real-World Problem Solving in Archaeology: In and Out of the Classroom.” Dr. Carter will be working with his students in Maine this summer during his biannual field school. He was recently accepted to the NEH-funded Digital Institute for Archaeology: Method and Theory.

Dr. Anne Esacove who was on sabbatical for the academic year 2014-15 began a new research project examining how, if at all, the burgeoning “natural death” movement reconfigures or challenges the practices and ideologies of the mainstream health/death care industries. This research engages a number of key areas within sociology, including (de)medicalization, modernization, emotional labor, and the disciplining of bodies.

Dr. Janine Chi published an article, “Consuming Rice, Branding the Nation” in the journal *Context*. She developed and coordinated two faculty reading groups; one reading group on developing a co-taught interdisciplinary course on BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), and another reading group on “The Legacy of Stuart Hall,” to reinvigorate faculty interested in approaching issues of culture and identity from a global and multicultural perspective.

Dr. Amy Cooper had articles accepted for publication in *American Ethnologist*; *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*; and *Annals of Anthropological Practice*. She is currently co-authoring an article on the illicit use of ADHD medications with two students. This fall, Dr. Cooper will begin a new position as Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Saint Louis University. She will miss the friendly students and colleagues she got to know at Muhlenberg.

Dr. Sabar Sadeghi has been invited to contribute book chapters based on her dissertation research in two different books on the Iranian Diaspora. The first chapter examines the limits of cultural competence and cultural integration for securing belonging and membership among Iranians in the US and Germany. In addition, Dr. Sadeghi is contributing a second book chapter that focuses on perceptions and experiences of belonging among second-generation Iranians in the United States and Germany. Lastly, Dr. Sadeghi and Professor Aggie Bazaz (Media and Communication) hosted a screening and discussion of a documentary titled *Us in Pieces* on the Iranian Diaspora.

Dr. Ayako Takamori's article “Henna Nihongo (Strange Japanese): On the Linguistic Baggage of Racial Strangeness” was accepted for publication in the *Journal of Japanese Language and Literature*. Dr. Takamori is currently in contact with a number of academic presses to have her manuscript, *Traversing Borders: Japanese American Transpacific Positioning* published.

Students Enrolled in Dr. Bywater's classes at the People's Climate March, NYC (Sept 2014)



New Courses

Fall Semester 2015

Dr. Takamori is offering a new course ATH 384: Anthropology of Media Culture. This course introduces students to the history of visual anthropology and anthropological approaches to the study of media and visual cultures. Emphasizing questions and ethics around the politics of representation in depiction cultural difference in documentary and ethnographic film/video as well as other forms of media, students will gain an awareness of the significance of media production, circulation and consumption within the context of contemporary globalization.

Spring Semester 2016

Dr. Chi is offering a new course SOC 288: Political Economies of (Post)Modern Chinese Societies as part of the cluster “Ancient Ideals and Contemporary Realities in Chinese Societies.” This course is the second companion course to Philosophies of China, and provides an overview of current political economic realities faced by contemporary Chinese societies. Rather than focusing simply on China, we will draw heavily on other Chinese societies in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan. Beginning with an examination of the social foundations of Chinese societies, we investigate several key thematic issues in contemporary Chinese societies, including the organization of economy as well as the challenges of nation-building, modernization and citizenship.

Redesigned CUEs

Last summer, Dr. Bywater and Dr. Cooper received a Faculty Center for Teaching grant to redesign the department’s two Senior Seminars. The course redesigns had several goals: address student difficulties completing empirical research projects in a single semester; align the courses with the college-wide CUE (Culminating Undergraduate Experience) goals; and practice pedagogies of student-led collaborative research.

This fall, the anthropology program launched the redesigned Senior Seminar with a plan for students to collaboratively lead all stages of an ethnographic research project. Given the broad topic of “ADHD in college,” students selected a pressing research question (“How do college students understand and experience the illicit use of ADHD medications?”),

created a mixed-methods research design, wrote and received approval for an IRB proposal, conducted 340 surveys and 35 in-depth qualitative interviews on campus, and analyzed their findings. Four students are presenting these findings at the annual Research Symposium (see below), and two are working with Dr. Cooper to co-author an article based on the group’s work.

Department Events

RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM
April 29th, 2015, 4:30-6:00pm
SA 25, Department Lobby
Refreshments will be served.

Research Symposium Posters

Stacy Radmore ‘16, and Lisa McGee ‘15 (Anthropology). “ADHD Medication Use at 'Berg: Group Research.”

Nicole Skidmore ‘15 and Rocio Vidal Ronchas ‘15 (Anthropology). “An Anthropological Approach to Understanding the Illicit Use of ADHD Stimulant Medication: Perceptions of Morality and Cheating.”

Edward Bavaria ‘16, Anne Langan ‘15, Liuba Seaboyer ‘16, Nicole Skidmore ‘15 and Rocio Vidal Ronchas ‘15 (Anthropology). “Excavation of the Whitefield House, Nazareth, PA.”

Emily Fingerle ‘15, Humberto Garcia ‘15, Lisa McGee ‘15, Gina Modero ‘15 and Stacy Radmore ‘16 (Anthropology). “Everyday Wares: Ceramic Analysis and Moravian History.”

Marc Jablonski ‘15 (Anthropology). “Students as Patients: Students’ Perceptions of the Counseling Center at Muhlenberg College.”

Jeffrey Funk ‘16 (Sociology) “More Than Just A Body: Fat Student Experiences in College.”