

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

Prepared for the American Sociological Association
Section on Sociological Practice
Winter 2008

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Editor's commentary

Communications

Leora Lawton
TechSociety Research

This issue of our newsletter brings a proposal to a new direction. The Section Officers have been discussing a proposal to transform the mission of Sociological Practice to include communicating about it to our publics. Contributions by Section Chair Kathryn Goldman Schuyler and by Phil Nyden, the co-chair of the ASA Task Force on Public Sociology should get you thinking. Please read these essays carefully and provide any feedback to the section officers (note the email addresses in the side-bar).

Another way to be proactive as a section member is to nominate candidates for the two section awards: the William F. Whyte award, for an accomplished sociologist whose work improves our society, and to the Student Award, whose work thus far shows exceptional promise.

Mary Gatta's piece on the role sociologists could and should play in shaping and evaluating public policy. is an example of the synergy of theoretical and practice-oriented facets of sociology combining with the outreach to public figures, political or organizational. In this issue she discusses examples of being 'policy entrepreneurs'. In the next issue, she'll discuss ways to make these partnerships happen.

Even though it's still the dead of winter, it's already time to think about this summer in Boston. Our section day is on Sunday, August 3, and our reception will be held in the evening at 6:30 PM. Note that this year the Annual Meeting begins in earnest on Friday, and ends on Monday

Another change to how things are done.

Practice = Having Impact in the World

I suspect that most practicing sociologists joined our field because we wanted to do something meaningful for people, organizations, government, or society. Many people have been attracted to our field because they are interested in how society works and how they can help it to work better. In our field, many of us move back and forth between theorizing, empirical research, and action, sometimes combining all three, seeking both to understand and change varied aspects of our social world.

The members of our section are employed using sociology in a great variety of ways: we teach in all levels of the academy, manage not-for-profits and corporations, own small businesses, are leaders of government agencies, have started new organizations when we see an unmet need, and have conducted and published applied research in medical, business school, and humanities journals, as well in journals that are explicitly “sociological”. If we catalogued the impact that we have had in our collective lifetimes, it would be huge.

I wonder, though, if we can do more...

There is so much that is not working well in our world, with its continuing legacy of conflict and violence within and across ethnicities, the wounds from abusively-used power and privilege, the challenges of raising and educating our children, and the sheer difficulty of managing large complex organizations and systems.

To this end, the officers of the Section for Sociological Practice and the leaders of the ASA Task Force on Encouraging Public Sociology began talking informally several months ago, exploring the idea of combining forces. After many conversations, we concluded that we see value in bringing our two groups together more formally within the ASA. Many sociologists who are committed to being public sociologists have already been presenting papers at our sessions, with their contributions adding to the richness of thought and action represented. We want the section to foster as

much vitality of action and thought as possible, so would like to explicitly include public sociology in our name. Both we and the leaders of the Task Force on Public Sociology feel that making our welcome explicit, rather than only implicit, will give public sociologists an ongoing organizational home base. This gives them a place where they can participate over the course of the year, rather than only at the annual meetings, and will give the section more active input from their thinking, writing, and action. This will be in addition to the existing Task Force, but that only allows active participation by those few who are appointed to it.

Therefore, if the Committee on Sections and the Council approve, the upcoming ASA election materials for the section will include a vote on this question. Unless we receive suggestions for improving or modifying our current plans from the previously mentioned administrative bodies, we will be asking you to consider the following modifications to the bylaws.

[1] A new name: “The Section on Sociological Practice and Public Sociology”.

[2] Strengthening the Purpose Statement:

The existing statement focuses on increasing understanding of the relationship between practice and knowledge:

The purpose of the Section on Sociological Practice is to increase understanding of the relationship between sociological practice and sociological knowledge by serving as an entity and forum within the American Sociological Association [ASA] to advance the interests and representation of sociologists working in academic, applied, and clinical settings.

We would like instead to make a clear assertion of our focus on fostering research, action, and public discussion:

The purpose of the Section on Sociological Practice and Public Sociology [hereafter

SSPPS, or the Section] is to advance sociologically-informed research and public action, and to further public discussion of sociological issues at local, national, and global levels. The Section serves as a forum within the American Sociological Association [ASA] to advance the interests and representation of sociologists working in applied, clinical and academic settings.

The intent of the change is to clarify what we stand for and why we exist. I believe this has always been our purpose, and that by making this modification, we'll make our role clearer.

[3] Minor changes in committees and re-appointment of the newsletter editor.

The existing bylaws made us more bureaucratic by requiring more people on committees that seems to have been feasible and by limiting the time that a newsletter editor could serve. This has been impractical, even impossible. We want to have bylaws that help us function effectively.

The president of my university issued a challenge recently to us as faculty. He asked us, "Do you want to work on things that are interesting – as you already do – or do you want to make sure

that you are working on things that are important, things that make a difference to society?" He came on board at the school in order to make our university into what he describes as a "professional practice university."

As the portion of the ASA that explicitly stands for practice, I know for certain that we want to be doing things that are important. By explicitly welcoming public sociologists to the section, we bring in colleagues with similar underlying commitments to using sociology actively in the world, who may have different ideas about how to do so. All us will benefit from rubbing shoulders with people with similar underlying values yet different ways of living them out, whether we think of ourselves primarily as public sociologists or as practitioners. We can unite in our common purpose of using sociology to make a difference in all of the varied publics in our tumultuous world.

One of the co-chairs of the ASA Task Force on Encouraging Public Sociology, Phil Nyden, has contributed an article to this issue of the newsletter describing its mission and activities over the past few years. Read it, think about what you want to see our section be and stand for, both within the ASA and in the world – and vote when you receive the ballot!

Elections

Ballots for our section officers and council members will be sent to all members no later than May 15. Please be sure to vote. We have an excellent slate of candidates and the Council thanks all of those who have agreed to run for office.

Chair-elect

Jeff Will; University of North Florida

Marvin Finklestein; Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville

Council:

Phil Nyden; Loyola University Chicago

Linda R. Weber, PhD.; SUNYIT

Tina Fitzgerald; First 5 California

Josh Meisel; Sonoma State University

Paul D. Steele, Director; Morehead State University

Kathy Stolley; Virginia Wesleyan College

Lisa Frehill, Ph.D.; Executive Director. Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology

Awards – Call for Nominations

All of us have met, or are at least aware of, another sociologist who has accomplished in a way that perhaps you could only dream. They've brought sociology into the world to make at least their corner of it a better place. And for those who teach, if you have a student – graduate or undergraduate – whose work exemplifies the promise of increasing understanding of the relationship between sociological practice and sociological knowledge, then please submit this student's name for the student award. For both awards, send a letter detailing the nominees contributions and supporting materials such as a curriculum vitae or resume, and/or additional letters of support to the section chair, Kathryn Goldman Schuyler (kgschuyler@alliant.edu) by March 15, 2008.

William Foote Whyte Distinguished Career Award:

The William Foote Whyte Award is for individuals who have made notable contributions to sociological practice, which can include several of the following elements: outstanding clinical or applied work, exceptional service to the section, publications that advance both the theory and methods of sociological practice, or mentoring and training of students for careers in sociological practice. Nominations should consist of a letter detailing the nominees contributions and supporting materials such as a curriculum vitae or resume, and/or additional letters of support. Please send nominations by March 15, 2008 to the section chair, Kathryn Goldman Schuyler.

Student Practitioner Award

The Student Practitioner Award is for a promising effort, contribution, project, or paper by a graduate student in the area of sociological practice. Work done within the three years prior to the conferral of the award will be considered. Products of graduate-level classes, internships, or independent projects are eligible. An award recipient who attends the 2008 ASA Annual Meeting will receive a cash award of \$200 to offset travel expenses. Nominations should consist of a letter detailing the nominees contributions, a copy of the paper or other project, and supporting materials such as a curriculum vitae or resume, and/or other additional letters of support. Please send nominations by March 15, 2008 to the section chair, Kathryn Goldman Schuyler.

NEW PUBLICATIONS AND GRANTS

Member Steven Picou of the University of South Alabama shares his recent accomplishments:

NEW BOOK: David Brunnsma , David Overfelt and J.Steven Picou [eds.] *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe*. Lanham , MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007

NEW GRANT: J.Steven Picou, Principal Investigator, "Hurricane Katrina:Community Recovery in Louisiana and Mississippi"

\$125,750 Grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

NEW ARTICLE: J. Steven Picou and Brent K. Marshall, "Impacts of Hurricane Katrina on K-12 Displaced Students and Educational Institutions in Coastal Alabama Counties: Some Preliminary Observations" *Sociological Spectrum* 27[6] : 767-780, 2007.

Notes from the U.S. Field

Association of Applied and Clinical Sociology News

The Third Annual Meeting of The Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology will be held in Jacksonville, FL, October 16-18, 2008, at the Crown Plaza Riverfront Hotel. For more information, please visit <http://www.aacsnet.org>.

**Special Issue of Equal Opportunities International (EOI):
The ‘New’ Policy Partnership: Academic Researchers and Government Officials Partnering Toward
Social Equity**

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This special issue of Equal Opportunities International seeks contributions that address innovative ways that researchers and policymakers can collaborate to move policy agendas forward that address pressing social issues of our time (i.e. poverty reduction, economic development, health care disparities, foreign policy). Some important questions papers can explore include:

- What are examples of successful policy-research linkages?
- What needs to be in place for a partnership to occur and be sustained?
- How do the bureaucracies of both the state governments and the universities impact these partnerships?
- What type of training is necessary to prepare academics and policy officials to engage in successful partnerships?
- Indeed a gaping hole in this work is that there is no systematic understanding of how, when, and why policy researchers and policymakers collaborate. And, beyond that, when they do collaborate, what are the policy results?

Update on Task Force on Encouraging Public Sociology

-Phil Nyden, Task Force Co-Chair and
Director, Center for Urban Research and Learning, Loyola University Chicago

Created three years ago, the ASA Task Force on Encouraging Public Sociology, was given the charge to: increase the recognition and validation of public sociology; improve incentives and rewards for doing public sociology; and develop ways of evaluating public sociology. We use the broad definition of public sociology presented by ASA President Michael Burawoy: it is “a sociology that seeks to bring sociology to publics beyond the academy, promoting dialogue about issues that affect the fate of society...”¹. We also use the more comprehensive view of public sociology as including both the “traditional” and “organic” public sociologies. As framed by Burawoy, traditional public sociologists do not necessarily interact with their “publics.” Writing op-ed pieces, making research reports available to broader groups of users, and just documenting, questioning, and analyzing the social world are forms of public sociology. “Organic public sociology” includes the larger portion of public sociology where sociologists “work in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counter-public.”²

¹ Burawoy, Michael et al. 2004. “Public Sociologies: A Symposium from Boston College.” Vol. 51, no. 1. *Social Problems*, 104 (103-130.)

² Burawoy, Michael. 2005. “2004 Presidential Address: For Public Sociology.” *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 70 (February), 7 (4-28).

A series of recommendations made by Task Force in 2006 and published in its interim report have been accepted by ASA Council. The Task Force has also continued to work on a number of fronts. We have developed a web site that is expected to be integrated into the ASA web site: <http://pubsoc.wisc.edu/news.php>. The Task Force crafted tenure and promotion guidelines aimed at rewarding public sociology in academic settings (in both research and teaching). The interim report and tenure and promotion guidelines are both available on our web site.

We are currently writing a career guide in public sociology—providing guidance to graduate students and young sociologists considering work inside and/or outside of academia. An edited book including public sociology case studies and description of the impact of the work on public policy and on specific communities and organizations is also in the works.

Last year, ASA Council also agreed to a number of Executive Office activities based on recommendations coming from the Task Force. These included:

- Expanding the use of *Contexts* magazine by those in the media, government, and relevant non-profit organizations;
- Expanding the capacity of the ASA to disseminate sociological research to broader public audiences;
- Working with the recipients of the Spivack Program Community Action Research Initiative grants to develop, where applicable, disseminating plans for the products of their projects; and
- Ensuring the Department Resources Group (DRG) has sufficient academic members with experience engaging wider publics and producing professional work for these audiences through research, teaching and service.

In its continuing work, the Task Force invites input from sociologists working outside academia in its work on any of these initiatives. It recognizes that the work of many members of the Sociological Practice Section is central to the health of the field and the further promotion of public sociology.

The possible expansion of the mission of the Section to include public sociology in its mission is seen as a positive step toward strengthening the role of sociology in our broader society. Although the Task Force has been emphatic in its view that public sociology is something that should be integrated in all sectors of the field, having a section that can be an ongoing advocate for public sociology and a place for focused scholarly exchanges on public scholarship and sociological practice would be a very positive development.

Feature Article

Symbiotic Partnering of Sociologists and Policy Officials Mary Gatta, Center for Women and Work, Rutgers University

Public policy is an arena that is truly shaped by sociological concepts and frameworks. Government and legislative officials develop programs and policies that among other things attempt to: redress structural discrimination and disadvantage; provide social supports and safety nets; increase access of marginalized groups to sets of resources; and understand global and local phenomena and the connections between them. Yet despite being a “sociological rich” field, sociologists are not the major “players” in public

policy. Think back, when was the last time a sociologist was consulted on a major public policy initiative? Or how often do news organization interview sociologists for their input on policy? And how much of graduate training is directed toward policy work?

There are numerous reasons as to why sociologists do not play as major of a role in public policy as we have the potential for—a lack of value within and outside the discipline on applied work;

inadequate graduate training for policy work; a rigid academic system; a lack of a public understanding of sociology—the list goes on and on. In addition, the traditional portrayal of the relationship between policy researchers and policy officials paints a linear and stagnant picture: policy research happens at universities, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, governments and private firms, and then gets disseminated. Some of the research gets “picked up” by policymakers, some does not. This portrayal is not only inaccurate in some cases, but more importantly, does not represent the most effective ways that researchers and policymakers can collaborate. Supplying knowledge is not enough. Building on Canadian and European models of policy entrepreneurs—persons who have sufficient research backgrounds and credentials to understand the culture and methods of university research organizations but who also understand the policy process and can communicate effectively with state policymakers—we need to invest resources and training into these arenas. Sociologists are in the prime position to take on this role in public policy.

What is encouraging is that there are several examples where sociologists (and other social scientists) are taking on the role of policy entrepreneur. For example, the Institute for Health Policy of the Muskie School of Public Policy in Maine has had a cooperation agreement with the state Medicaid agency for over a decade. Through this collaboration the Institute engages in applied research, education, policy analysis, and technical assistance for the state. Also, the University of Washington’s Health Policy Analysis Program, for

Member News

instance, was created to bridge the gap between the Department of Health Services research capacity and expertise, and the state’s need for technical assistance and policy analysis. In addition, in my role at Rutgers University I direct the Sloan Center on Innovative Training and Workforce Development which provides process evaluation research and to assisting State, County, and City Government Departments and Workforce Investment Boards institutionalize technologically-based flexible education and training alternatives, especially online learning opportunities for non-college educated workers throughout the nation.

Indeed there are many of us in the section that are working as policy entrepreneurs. In fact, as our world continues to experience greater challenges, the public sector cannot be expected to respond to these changes alone. Instead, with the evolving economy and an increasingly complex public policy-making process, sociologists can serve as a vital partner to state and national governments by providing sophisticated research and economic modeling, gleaned best practices, serving as technical assistance centers, and convening forums and conferences. This type of partnering between government and research brings the collaboration into a new arena. Indeed researchers and policymakers can influence and shape these agendas together. This assumes that we must move beyond just considering that research can be used by policy officials, but must ask instead what are the different levels at which research influences the policy process. In doing so, we will no doubt impact social change.

Life on the Outside: MA Alumni Enthusiastic About Practicing Sociology

By Mary Virnoche, Humboldt State University

Graduate level research and theoretical training, tightly linked with applied field experiences, are a “winning model,” said Tiffany Wilson (MA 2005). Wilson has been a planner with Planwest Partners Inc. in Arcata, California, since graduating from Humboldt State University (HSU).

“Securing a position with Planwest was a direct result of my applied training and experiences. They needed someone with a variety of research skills and an ability to work with diverse communities,” said Wilson.

Wilson most enjoys the outreach components of client work. “In the outreach phase of a contract,” she said, “I meet with community groups to figure out their interests and concerns. We use that information to inform planning recommendations and decisions.” Wilson would eventually like to specialize in this aspect of community planning, perhaps building her own business.

According to Jennifer Eichstedt, Graduate Coordinator of the Department of Sociology at HSU, “Many students come to our sociology program with the desire to effect social change. This program is very explicit in making

sure students know how to connect the theory and research background from the classroom to needs in the community.”

Research suggests that Sociologists trained at the graduate level and working in applied settings most value and use their research and writing skills (Hawdon and Mobley 2004). This has also been the experience of alumni of the HSU Master’s in Practicing Sociology. Yet alumni are also conscious of the infusion of sociological theory in their everyday practices.

“I use a sociological lens to problem solve,” said Leah Thompson (MA 2006). While finishing her master’s thesis, Thompson accepted a position as the Adult Day Services Program Director with Easter Seals of Northern California. The program serves adults, mostly women, with developmental delays.

“I make connections between the individuals that I serve and the broader social context that they navigate,” said Thompson. “I was able to develop some creative new programs drawing on my training in gender, coupled with new knowledge about developmental disabilities.”

For example, Thompson developed an all-day workshop on self and body, which was enthusiastically received by her clients and state-level officials. Among the sessions were body image and media discussions, and assertiveness training. Thompson also trained a group of HSU Sociology students to lead evaluation focus groups at the end of the workshop. She recently accepted a new position as a Service Coordinator for the Redwood Coast Regional Center. This agency also serves residents with developmental disabilities and their families in a four-county area.

Each Sociology MA student at HSU completes at least 240 hours in field experience. For example, as a student Wilson had worked closely with a local community on an asset-based community development plan. She had also designed, implemented and reported on a needs assessment for a local child services agency. Thompson worked on a university-based evaluation of a program for girls in math and science. She also wrote successful grant proposals for related projects.

Another alumni, Adrian Chevraux-Fitzhugh (MA 2005) worked with Democracy Unlimited of Humboldt County (DUHC). He developed a large-scale community survey. The results are now used by the organization to assist with grassroots organizing and mobilization. Chevraux-Fitzhugh now works in the institutional research office at the College of the Redwoods in Eureka,

California, as a survey specialist. He also teaches Sociology.

“The field experiences are a win-win model for the students and the community,” said Judith Little, Chairperson of the Department of Sociology. “Our students offer the community a great resource for trained sociological expertise in action. They address real issues and meet real needs of the community.”

“Humboldt’s remote location on the Redwood Coast is a blessing,” she added. “This community understands self-sufficiency, sharing resources and expertise, and developing them when they do not already exist.” Little has long identified as an applied Sociologist and now serves on the board of the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology, the organization that in 2004 accredited the HSU program.

The HSU Sociology faculty agrees that accreditation has strengthened its program, as the practice of sociology was integrated across the curriculum. “In addition,” said Eichstedt, “the accreditation process forced us to formalize student placements in the community and in our own research. It’s a professional process with more checks to assure quality experiences.”

Since the HSU MA program was accredited in 2004, sixteen students have completed the program. Most alumni are working in a variety of consulting, planning, governmental or non-profit organizations. The HSU program in applied sociology, while active since 1991, was the first master’s program accredited by the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology. Since then Valdosta State University in Georgia has also become an accredited master’s program.

For more information about the HSU MA program contact Dr. Jennifer Eichstedt, Graduate Coordinator, at (707) 826-4949 or jle7001@humboldt.edu. Also see <http://www.humboldt.edu/~soc/>. For information about the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology and the accreditation program, contact Dr. Melodye Lehnerer, Chairperson, at melodye_lehnerer@ccsn.edu. Also see <http://www.sociologycommission.org/>.

References

Hawdon, James and Mobley, Catherine. 2004. “Applied Sociology: What Skills are Important?” *Social Insight: Knowledge at Work*. 9(1):6-16.