

Teaching/Learning Matters

ASA's Newsletter for the



Section On Teaching &
Learning In Sociology

Volume 40, Number 3

Spring 2012

Editors' Introduction

We are delighted to share with you the contents of this spring issue of *Teaching/Learning Matters*. As part of our ongoing commitment to provide examples of how to connect the classroom to the community, we bring you Luis Nuno's "(Un)seen) Paterson, NJ as a Laboratory for Civic Engagement." In this piece, Nuno shows how he has created a course that "applies the concepts and theoretical orientations of a public sociology to develop a direct engagement with the community resources across the city of Paterson, New Jersey."

Next, you can read Erik Olin Wright's "Writing Wikipedia Articles as a Classroom Assignment." Wright's article is a wonderful resource for those interested in using Wikipedia in their courses and contributing to and improving the sociological content of Wikipedia. This issue also includes a review by Yvonne Combs of a new movie, *Concrete, Steel, and Paint*, that can be used in sociology courses. After reading Combs' review, I am sure many of us will want to see this film! ASA members (and their librarians) are eligible for a 20% discount when purchasing the film (with promo code FTXKK9).

As always, we provide you with STLS-related information, including conferences, grants, new books, and opportunities to connect with others interested in STLS issues. Please keep sending this information to us for future issues!

You can reach Jonathan White at jonathan.white@bridgew.edu, Corey Dolgon at cdologon@stonehill.edu, and Kathleen Korgen at korgenk@wpunj.edu. If you would like to send in a submission for the summer newsletter, please contact Jonathan White. We look forward to hearing from you.

We thank our section chair, Jeff Chin; Chair-elect, Liz Grauerholz; Publications Committee Chair, Kerry Strand; webmaster Lynn Ritchey; and layout expert, Jay Graham, for helping us create and disseminate this newsletter.

Happy Reading!

Kathleen, Jonathan, and Corey

SECTION CHAIR'S CORNER

Jeff Chin, Le Moyne College
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Greetings from your 2011-12 chair of your ASA Section on Teaching and Learning! I hope this finds you well rested from the holidays and your semester off to a good start. (We call it the "spring" semester but in Syracuse that's a bit of a misnomer. However, those of us who like winter sports are wondering if we are just going to have to write off 2012?!?!)

I am happy to report that the section had over 800 members for 2011 and so we will have 5 sessions at the 2012 annual meeting in Denver. Remember that section day is the first day of the conference, Friday, August 17. Please remind colleagues you know who support the section to renew their memberships for 2012 because they will not receive these reminders (newsletter or listserv announcements) until they do. Only about half of our normal membership will be reading these words when the newsletter comes out.

The pre-conference will be on "Day 0", this year, Thursday, August 16. Melinda Messineo (Ball State) is organizing the pre-conference and information on the conference and the resources supporting it are on the section's webpage: <http://www2.asanet.org/sectionteach/>

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Remember that there are resources to support the pre-conference. Since its inception, the pre-conference has been supported by Pine Forge Press and its sociology authors. (Check them out if you're looking for a book for your courses.) Pine Forge Press provides up to \$500 of support for travel. The deadline is March 1, 2012. See more on our section webpage.

Also new for 2012 is the grants program sponsored by Alpha Kappa Delta, the international honor society for sociology. It provides support up to \$1000 for travel. The deadline is February 1, 2012. (I realize by the time you read this it will be too late but keep it in mind for 2013.) Go to: <https://sites.google.com/site/alphakappadeltainternational/Home/asa-pre-conference-workshop>

While I'm on the topic, remember that another hat that I wear is the secretary-treasurer of AKD. My fabulous staff helps me run the executive office and if you have a chapter, we want to help you honor your students. Visit our webpage at www.alphakappadelta.org for more information on all of AKD's programs. If you do not have a chapter, we want to talk to you! Contact us and/or visit our webpage. Let us help you open a chapter so your students can be recognized for their excellent work.

The section's committees are formed and hard at work. Thank you to all council members and all the other volunteers who are contributing their time and expertise. If you have questions about the section and its work, please let me know and if I don't have an answer for it, it may be something that one of our committees can tackle.

I just finished reading 18 papers for a session on social psychology (phew) and it reminds me that the session organizers for our section's sessions have also been hard at work looking at the papers many of you have submitted. I look forward to sitting in on these sessions next August. Thanks to all of you who submitted papers, to the session organizers who read them and to Liz Grauerholz (Central Florida) who put together the terrific slate of sessions for 2012 last September as chair-elect. The timetable for this task of the chair-elect gives a whole new meaning to "hitting the ground running".

The past chair is in charge of nominations. Thanks to Darlaine Gardetto (St. Louis Community College) who put together an outstanding slate of candidates with the help of the nominations committee this past fall for the upcoming election. I also asked Darlaine to constitute the Awards Committee for 2011-12 (thanks, Darlaine!).

The awards committee is chaired by Dana Greene (UNC-Chapel Hill) and is getting down to this very important work.

The membership committee is chaired by David Purcell (Kent State). The committee is sending out a survey to lapsed members to find out why they haven't renewed and what we can do so the section can serve all of us better. If you have already renewed, you won't get this survey but we would still like to hear from you. Please send your comments to me or to David.

We have an active committee on graduate student concerns chaired by Alison Moss (UI-Chicago) with the assistance of Anne Eisenberg (SUNY-Geneseo). They have a very ambitious agenda and I look forward to bringing you their report at the end of the year.

It's not too late to get involved with the section; just let me know. Besides the committees I have mentioned above, we have a publications committee, a contingent faculty committee and a cooperative initiatives committee. I hope by the time you read this, I will have gotten the webpage listings up to date so you can direct your questions either to me or the appropriate committee chair.

If you know colleagues who are normally involved with the section but haven't yet renewed for 2012 get them to renew now. If you know colleagues who are interested in the work of our section but have never joined, encourage them to sign up. This is especially true if you have graduate students.

See you in Denver and possibly earlier at the regionals as well.

(Unseen) Paterson, NJ as a Laboratory for Civic Engagement

Luis Nuño



William Paterson University, where I teach, is a suburban campus, which rests on a hill neighboring the city of Paterson, a poor, largely Black and Latino city, located a mere nineteen miles from New York City. While the William Paterson University Campus is only about two-and-a-half miles away from the downtown, historic district of Paterson, we might as well be a world away. While some of our students come from Paterson, the city remains a mystery to many of our other students who commute in from the Northern suburbs of New Jersey. I designed the course Unseen Paterson as a vessel for demystifying, and increasing our engagement with, the city of Paterson.

A sociology of the city engages publics and institutions in the modern metropolis. There is now great emphasis on learning sociology by applying the problem-solving skills that the sociological imagination provides to real, living, breathing social space¹. Political-economic views of the city analyze city centers as places where the effects of state and market forces appear most visibly. I believe the contemporary metropolis offers students a laboratory for witnessing democracy in action and the effects of unequal capitalist development. One of my most memorable experiences as an undergraduate was taking a course that my university offered titled Unseen America. A central component of the Unseen America course was to encourage students to explore the social consequences of power inequities. Unseen America consisted mainly of

field trips to local community organizations that directly engaged marginalized populations. The course took students to jails, battered women's shelters, and a medical marijuana dispensary before medicinal marijuana became legal in California. Students also took part in meals-on-wheels delivery to patients who were diagnosed H.I.V.-positive. Through civic engagement with community resources in the cities of San Francisco and Oakland, California, students learned that it was possible to make a positive change in people's lives through direct action.

The American imagination possesses a strong anti-urban bias. The modern metropolis is filled with social life. At times, the city center can come across as wildly confusing, and sometimes even a threatening zone. The city is viewed as a place characterized by social disorganization, consumed by all the ills that are the product of that disorganization, such as crime, segregation, homelessness, and drugs. The city is a place to be feared and controlled. I designed Unseen Paterson to help our students confront the common sense and nonsense about the American metropolis and to witness and participate in sociology in action.

Unseen Paterson is a course that requires students to engage the world as it exists. Segregation by social class and racial identity remains a vivid reality of the New York Metropolitan area, including Paterson. Northern New Jersey lives this discomforting social fact. Through field trips to local institutions, the course aims to sociologically analyze issues of power and foster participation in community and civic life. The scheduled field trips aim to question inherited assumptions about urban spaces. For example, students visit a boxing gym to witness a space of hope in the inner city. Boxing gyms are places where the urban underclass train their bodies and discipline their minds to hone a soul craft, which requires intense spirit and desire to succeed. The course also includes visits to the local YMCA, shelters for battered women, a drug rehabilitation center, the courthouse, city hall, and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Interspersed throughout the course are topical readings about the strained relations between the university and its community, violence, victimization, and the justice system, as well as theoretical materials on civic moral and public life.

The purpose of the Unseen Paterson course is twofold: on the one hand, students learn about life in the city and analyze how social forces impact settlement patterns across the modern metropolis; on the other hand, students learn about community resources that exist across the American landscape. The field trips that are a central component of the course are not exclusively about the city of Paterson. The emphasis on trekking into the city center is to demystify and confront common myths about urban life. The goal, however, is to nurture in students a sociological imagination which they can take back to their home communities. The functional purpose of the sociological imagination is to recognize our active role in a par-

ticipatory democracy, to learn to navigate through social structure and mitigate processes reproducing social suffering. Unseen Paterson applies the concepts and theoretical orientations of a public sociology to develop a direct engagement with the community resources across the city of Paterson, New Jersey.

Endnote

¹ Kathleen Odell Korgen, Jonathan M. White and Shelley K. White, *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice* (Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2011); Amy L. Howard, "Engaging the City: Civic Participation and Teaching Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 36:1 (January 2010): 42-55.

Writing Wikipedia Articles as a Classroom Assignment

Erik Olin Wright



In the fall of 2011, I taught a graduate seminar on theories of the state in which one of the core assignments was writing a Wikipedia article or contributing significant new material to an existing article. I saw this assignment as serving several

interconnected purposes: First, the assignment provides students with the opportunity to actually publish something in the course of a semester's work. Second, it forces students to worry about the clarity, accessibility and conciseness of writing. Third, it fosters an important norm: Wikipedia is a global public good, part of the intellectual commons, and getting students to contribute to it reinforces the more general idea that users of a public good have a responsibility of contributing to it when they can. The ASA has recently launched a Wikipedia initiative for precisely this reason: Since people around the world (including most sociologists!) use Wikipedia, it is important that the entries relevant to sociology be as good as possible, and the only way this will happen is if sociologists write and edit Wikipedia articles.

The specific assignment was structured as follows: I assembled a list of about 25 dissertations on the state that had subsequently been published as books. Each student had to pick one of these books and do three things: 1. Pretend that they had written the book and prepare a 20 minute oral presentation as if this was a presentation on an ASA panel the year that they were on the job market; 2. Write a term paper which assesses the arguments of the book in light of publications since the book appeared. 3. Write a contribution to Wikipedia based on factual information assembled for the term paper. Wikipedia articles are not the same as term papers since they are supposed to adopt a "neutral point of view" (NPOV) rather than advance an argument, but in the course of doing the research for term papers

there is generally enough descriptive material to make a contribution to Wikipedia.

The Wikimedia Foundation (the nonprofit organization that owns the servers and manages the behind-the-scenes logistics of Wikipedia) has a global education project to facilitate classroom writing assignments in Wikipedia. As part of their support services, they have recruited "campus ambassadors" who come to classes, conduct workshops on Wikipedia editing, and act as mentors for students in the course of the semester. What this means is that it is possible for a professor to organize a Wikipedia writing assignment without actually knowing anything about writing for Wikipedia.

The assignment was a great success. Here are a few comments students wrote afterwards:

It was exciting to finally contribute to Wikipedia after being merely a consumer for so long.

I really like the idea of the assignment, and it seems like a great way for graduate students who are spending so much time grappling with these texts to spend a little time giving back to the general public by adding to our collective knowledge and summarizing the basic contributions of these books.

The arduousness of the assignment made it quite rewarding and worth it. Besides the process itself being informative, it felt good to have written a (hopefully) helpful summary of an important book that was immediately available for reading and use by anyone with an internet connection. I also found myself considering edits to other pages, taking part in discussions on articles unrelated to my assignment, and in general being more enthusiastic about the Wikipedia project.

(From a student who rewrote and added to existing article) This article is one example of how Wikipedia can work well. A group of relative beginners initiates an article. Someone with more knowledge finds the page and builds on it, discarding some sections, adjusting others, and adding new material. Now a more developed article exists for perusal and editing by the general public.

Here are some links relevant to using Wikipedia writing assignments:

The ASA Wikipedia initiative:
http://www.asanet.org/about/wiki_Initiative.cfm

The Wikimedia U.S. Education Project:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:USEDU>

My course:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:United_States_Education_Program/Courses/Theories_of_the_State_%28Erik_Olin_Wright%29

August 2011 to August 2012 STLS Officers/Council Members

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Film Review

Concrete, Steel & Paint

Reviewed by Yvonne Combs



Concrete, Steel & Paint begs the viewer to examine the details of institutions, interaction, identity and inequality. For a sociologist, it doesn't get much better than this. The film's focus on prison experiences underscores the imposed isolation and impact of "total institutions." Its examination

of the transition from captivity to freedom suggests an important concern with social justice

In *Concrete, Steel & Paint* community members who were victims of crime come together with prison inmates to create a mural that tells the story of prisoners and their victims. As a result of their different experiences and, therefore, perspectives, they agree that a single mural cannot tell both stories accurately. Both groups ultimately agree to create separate murals representing their opposing realities. Throughout these negotiations, offenders and victims begin to create a dialogue that, in part, transcends their respective positions. As one prisoner notes, "We are all human beings."

As the group comprised of "victims" begin the search for a wall to display their separate mural, they create a new identity being referred to as "wall hunters." Again identity becomes a key focus of this experience. Both groups seek to define themselves independent of one another. Their universal purpose is to create the mural for the community and transcend the boundaries of everyday life in prison. For some, there is a hope that they might make some degree of restitution for their crime, usually murder. For them, the mural "is a way to give back." From the standpoint of the victims, there is the expectation that the mural project will help them "heal" from the chaos and pain created as a result of the prisoners' crimes. The filmmakers' detailed account of the murals' construction process portrays them as a bridge between offender and victim; between the lived sociology of incarceration and freedom of movement experienced by the victims.

While every sociologist interested in redemption, social justice and prison reform will be glad to add *Concrete, Steel & Paint* to their film library all sociologists no matter their perspective will find the film useful. The film can be used as an excellent tool to teach the recurrent themes of institutions, interaction, identity and inequality. In this respect, the film has a universal and sociological appeal to even the most skeptical social science scholar.

You can learn more about *Concrete, Steel & Paint* at <http://concretefilm.org/>

News & Announcements

ASA Pre-Conference Seminar

The 2012 ASA Section on Teaching and Learning Pre-Conference Workshop, "**The Art at the Heart of Learner-Centered Teaching**", will be held from 8:00am to 5:00pm on Thursday August 16, 2012 in Denver, Colorado.

Through engagement with experienced colleagues and with each other, keynotes, panels, discussions, roundtables and networking are designed to provide an integrated learning experience grounded in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

We invite colleagues at the earlier stages of their teaching careers who are particularly dedicated to the science and art of teaching sociology to become part of this community of scholarly teachers.

Acceptances are made on a rolling basis but we would appreciate applications and registration fees no later than June 15, 2012; space is limited to 40 participants but a waiting list will be maintained. A non-refundable

\$60 registration fee covers conference materials, programming, and meals. Participants are expected to be Section members of the ASA Section on Teaching and Learning which sponsors this workshop.

Early application is appreciated and ensures that there is space for you. The application form is available here.

A separate process for travel grants sponsored by Sage/Pine Forge Press is also available, and information is posted on the Section website and at www.sage.com. The deadline for travel applications is March 1st, 2012.

For information on the travel grants, you may also contact Keith Roberts <robertsk@hanover.edu>

AKD, The International Sociology Honor society also provides travel grants to members. The award covers up to \$1,000 in travel expenses; a maximum of five awards will be made. This award is intended to advance the quality of teaching in the discipline of sociology. It is available to AKD members only and the selection committee will give the highest priority to AKD chapter representatives, especially those who are early in their careers (i.e., untenured assistant professors).

Graduate students who are ABD and within a year of entering the job market are encouraged to apply as well. For more information go to:

<http://sites.google.com/site/alphakappadeltainternational/Home/asa-pre-conference-workshop>

Please contact the workshop organizer, Melinda Messineo, mmessine@bsu.edu for any additional information.

We hope you can join us!

Exciting Program at ASA!

The Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology has a great program in store for the 2012 annual meetings in Denver, CO. Our Section day is the first day of the meetings—Friday, August 17. Please plan to attend to support our members and learn about important teaching developments.

Here's a quick overview of what will be taking place:

- Corey Dolgon, Kathleen Korgen and Kathy Stolley have organized a panel on "Teaching Public Sociology or 'What do Sociologists Do?'" The presenters will investigate pedagogies that incorporate applied and public elements; present various techniques and approaches; raise theoretical issues or concerns, or offer a historical or analytical context for public sociology pedagogy.
- Jeanne Ballantine has invited experts to share their knowledge and lead discussion on the core of sociology and introductory students. The session is entitled "The Core of Sociology: What Introductory Students Need to Know." It promises to provide important insight into the structuring and teaching of Introductory Sociology courses.
- I (Liz Grauerholz) have organized a session on "Teaching the Unspeakable." This session will explore the ways we teach about topics that are highly sensitive or outside the constructed sociological boundaries. We will be exploring issues of death, animal-human studies, and other "unspeakable" topics.
- Michelle Newton-Francis is organizer of a session entitled "Innovative Approaches to Teaching Sociology" and Amy Traver is organizing roundtables.
- At the Section business meeting, we will be making the Hans O. Mauksch Award announcement and last year's winner, Nancy Greenwood, will be giving the address.
- In addition to Section sessions, there are other teaching-related workshops and sessions being offered. For one, Lydia Rose has organized a workshop, in keeping with the meeting theme (Real Utopias), on Emancipatory Pedagogies: From Social Structure and Straight Jackets to Social Action and Praxis. Martha Thompson has also organized a general session on Teaching Sociology.

All these great sessions and workshops are excellent ways to promote networking among teacher scholars, raise the conversation about teaching and learning to higher levels, and share important knowledge about teaching in order to enhance our students' learning.

See you in Denver!

Liz Grauerholz, Program Committee chair

NYSSA 60th Annual Conference

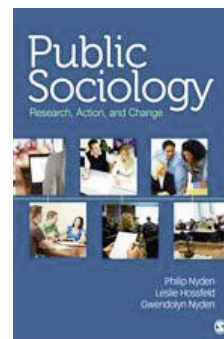
Heather Sullivan-Catlin (SUNY Potsdam), President of the New York State Sociological Association, is pleased to announce the NYSSA's 60th annual conference to be held at SUNY Potsdam on Oct. 19-20, 2012. The theme is Thinking Globally, Seeing Sociologically.

The keynote speakers are Peter Menzel and Faith D'Auluisio, the creators of an incredible series of books that bring global stratification, cultural diversity, and environmental concerns vividly to life.

The titles include *Material World*, *Women in the Material World*, *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats*, and *What I Eat: Around the World in 80 Diets*.

See: <http://www.menzelphoto.com> for more info about Menzel and D'Auluisio. A CFP will be forthcoming later this semester. For more information contact Heather at sullivha@potsdam.edu.

New Books



Public Sociology

Research, Action, and Change

By Philip Nyden, Leslie Hossfeld, and Gwendolyn Nyden

SAGE 2012

This timely resource, written by a team of authors who are working at the forefront of the public sociology movement, provides a contemporary analysis of public sociology. The book highlights a variety of ways in which sociology brings about social change in community settings, assists nonprofit and social service organizations in their work, and influences policy at the local, regional, and national levels. The book also spotlights sociology that informs the general public on key policy issues through media and creates research centers that develop and carry out collaborative research.

You can learn more about the book and order a complimentary review copy at <http://www.sagepub.com/books/Book234763/samples#tabview=title>

The Teaching Sociology E-mail List

The Teaching Sociology E-mail List – teachsoc@googlegroups.com provides a place to discuss and distribute news on teaching sociology. It is open to all individuals interested in pedagogy, curriculum, and other issues related to the teaching of sociology. The listserv was founded in 1995 by Jeff Chin and Kathleen McKinney. The list has about 800 members, averages about 100 messages a month, and is currently managed by Carolyn Pevey, Paige Miller and Sheetal Ranjan.

Nathan Palmer has created a video about the listserv and instructions for joining available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldTZexoJvj4>