FROM THE SECTION CHAIR

Dear CLD Members:

Plans are well underway for the ASA meeting this August in lovely Anaheim. Okay, what really comes to mind is Joni Mitchell singing about paving paradise to put up a parking lot, but let's focus on the good stuff.

Mary Vogel, Gary LaFree, and Jeff Morenooff have set up paper panels, and Rodney Engen and Stacy DeCoster have organized the roundtables. The listings will be in the summer newsletter. We should all be thankful for their hard work.

Speaking of which, thanks also to Sara Goodrum for setting up the CLD web site. A test version can be viewed at www.la.utexas.edu/research/eldasa/index.html, which will include this newsletter and several past newsletters in PDF format. Look for more progress in the future and CLD's appearance on the ASA server.

Don't forget nominations for the Reiss award (to Simon Singer) and the graduate student paper award (to Bradley Wright). One of the highlights of our meeting is the awards, and I look forward to hearing about this year's winners.

In the meantime, be sure to make plans to attend Anaheim -- we will have a great meeting and reception.

----Rob Sampson, Chair, 2000-2001

Graduate Student Issues

Preparing for Comprehensive (or Qualifying) Exams

Sarah Goodrum,
Assistant Editor

This information should be helpful for graduate students preparing to take comprehensive (or qualifying) exams [hereafter, "comps"] and for faculty helping graduate students to prepare (i.e., just hand them a copy of this article!).

It's been two years since I took comps in the sociology of law at the University of Texas at Austin, but I remember it well. Finishing my exams was one of the most rewarding accomplishments of my graduate school experience (I have not yet defended my dissertation). Generally speaking, the goal of comps is to develop the student as a scholar. The means to that goal, however, vary greatly across graduate programs. Some programs require four written exams; others require one written exam followed by an oral exam, or one written exam in a specific area of sociology. To provide context for my suggestions, I'll provide some information about the way that my program organizes comps.

In the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, graduate
students take comps at the end of the coursework for the Ph.D., and we take them in a specific area of concentration, such as criminology, sociology of law, family, or race/ethnicity. Comps are not strongly emphasized, nor are they viewed as a time to weed out students. The comps committee consists of three faculty members who specialize in the area of concentration with one member serving as the chair. Students can obtain old reading lists and old exam questions from the graduate coordinator (although some faculty disagree about the appropriateness of this practice). The exam takes place in an office with a computer on campus, and the student has 8 hours to answer 4 of 6 or 6 of 8 questions. The exam is not open book. Students can fail, pass, or pass with honors.

In general, preparation for comps falls into three parts: gathering information, understanding information, and testing knowledge. These three parts transcend the different formats, but the techniques you use in your preparations will and should vary by format.

Gathering Information. First, it's a good idea to think of coursework as a foundation for comps. Then, in the year or so before you plan to take comps, gather information about faculty expectations, comps policies and procedures, and other students' experiences. A good place to start is by talking to the students who have gone before you. Take a fellow grad student, one who has successfully passed his or her comps, out for coffee or lunch, and pick his or her brain about how he or she prepared for comps. Then, find out from either the graduate coordinator or graduate advisor what the department considers to be the goal of comps. For some programs (and some faculty), comps are a cruel hazing ritual or a rite of passage. Others view it as a time for students to prepare a dissertation literature review or as a way to test students' sociological knowledge up to that point. The program's view of this process will be helpful in preparing for the exam.

Also find out how the program administers comps; are comps oral, written, open book, specific, general? And, are you expected to know the author(s), date, and source for the references provided in your answers?

Some programs provide students with old reading lists, yet others feel that the student's construction of the reading list is part of the process. One faculty person in my department explained, "Comps should teach students how to act like a sociologist. As a sociologist writing a journal article or funding proposal, no one is ever going to give you a reading list."

So, in my program, it is the student's responsibility to make sure the comps reading list is current and complete. Some faculty are willing to tell you if your list is comprehensive; others are not, because they feel that this is part of the test. Use your knowledge of the program's approach to the reading list issue to guide your management of it. If possible, ask a faculty person to give you feedback about the reading list. Are there any holes in it? Also, if your program allows students to have access to old exam questions, use these to give you an idea of what to expect.

Understanding Information. Second, you should gain an understanding of the empirical research, theoretical perspectives, conceptual issues, and methodological techniques in the area(s). And, whether your comps are general or specific to an area of sociology, you should know the classics — Weber, Marx, and Durkheim — as well as how the classics remain useful for understanding issues in that area.

Decide on a strategy for reading the materials on your list; this strategy should be guided by your program's approach to and expectations for comps. A student in my program said that his strategy was to thoroughly read and understand the "biggies" in his area and in sociology; he read the other materials for what he called "nuggets" or the main points.

Consider organizing a study group with other grad students preparing for comps to talk about how to prepare, provide each other with support, and exchange ideas about the readings. Admittedly, this strategy is not feasible in all comps formats. If your program requires four exams, it's probably inefficient to meet with four study groups. Also, there is a limit to what this group can do for you.

My study group stopped meeting about 3 or 4 weeks prior to comps for two reasons. First, stress is contagious, and we were beginning to freak each other out (e.g., "Hey, Sarah, did you read that article by so-and-so?" Sarah responds nervously, "No. Why, did you?"). Second, the few weeks prior to comps is
a time when each student should be formulating his or her own ideas and arguments about the literature. This distance will be helpful for your sanity and your ideas.

It is also a good idea at this stage to draft an annotated bibliography of the references in the reading list. This bibliography can be organized by sub-topic area, chronologically, or both, whichever way you find most helpful for understanding and synthesizing the material. You may also want to consider meeting with a member of your committee in an independent study to discuss the theoretical perspectives, methodological techniques, and empirical research in the area. This can serve as an intensive learning experience and a time for professional development. In addition, approximately 3 weeks prior to the exam, it’s a good idea to meet with the members of your committee to tell them what you’ve been doing. They may have additional materials or perspectives that would be helpful to know. This can also help them in preparing exam questions for you.

Testing Knowledge. The third and final part of preparing for comps should involve testing your knowledge of the material. In the last few weeks prior to comps, begin outlining and drafting responses to those old comps questions (again, if permitted). The outline should delineate both your argument(s) and the empirical research and theoretical ideas that support your argument(s). One faculty person told me that she considered high quality comprehensive exam answers to be a student’s well-formed argument(s) supported by empirical research. I found this explanation to be helpful in organizing my answers.

As a final stage in your preparations, start putting yourself in situations similar to the testing situation 3 weeks before the exam. If your department administers comps in a two-day take home exam, give yourself two days to answer the practice questions. If your department administers comps in one 8-hour session, give yourself that amount of time to answer the practice questions. If a member of your comps committee is willing to look at your practice answers, ask for his or her feedback. If not, consider asking a fellow grad student to review your answers and give you feedback. The ideal reviewer is someone who has successfully passed this hurdle (not a member of your study group).

As with any type of writing, your answers should be presented in an organized and coherent manner. You should be constructing high quality answers not high volume answers.

Hope this is helpful and good luck!

---Sarah

Spotlight on Crime, Law, and Deviance Programs

University of Washington
Joseph G. Weiss
Professor of Sociology

Deviance in the Pacific Northwest

Walter Beach, the first and only member of the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington in 1917, published a monograph entitled Oriental Crime in California: A Study of Offenses Committed by Orientals in the State 1900-1927. That work, a statistical analysis of arrest record data that compared the rates and patterns of offending across racial and ethnic groups, concluded that the belief in a “yellow peril” fueled by crime among recent Chinese and Japanese immigrants was false. Their crime rates were low, compared to other groups, and their arrests were more likely for minor offenses against the public than for serious property or violent crimes. Of course, similar findings have been reported repeatedly in a variety of studies. Rigorous, sociological research had helped to correct, in some small way, another mistaken belief about the race-based characteristics of criminals.

By the time that study was published, Beach had left the Department, but he set in motion what turned out to be a long and illustrious tradition of scholarship on crime. Criminology became an institutionalized feature of the Department with the hiring in 1926 of two young sociologists, Norman Hayner, a criminologist who was trained at the University of Chicago and served as the chair of the Washington state parole board, and Calvin Schmid, a demographer who did important research on the ecological distribution of crime. They joined a four-member
Since its inception, the Department has conferred more than 300 Ph.D.s, among them a number of noteworthy graduates who have made substantial contributions to research and theory on deviance, law, and crime, including: Clarence Schrag, Donald Gibbons, Peter Garabedian, Stan Wheeler, Donald Garrity, Del Elliott, James Hackler, Leroy Gould, Walter Gove, Richard Hawkins, Roy Austin, Gary Jensen, Larry Cohen, Eric Linden, Rand Conger, and Richard Johnson.

The Department consistently ranks among the top 10 sociology departments in overall quality and scholarly achievement, and in the top 5 in its training of graduate students. Historically, the faculty has emphasized rigorous, empirical research training for graduate students. Students are admitted to a two-year M.A. program, which includes relatively structured, required coursework in substantive areas and theory, methods and social statistics, and the completion of a thesis. Students then apply for admission to the Ph.D. program, which allows more flexibility in selection of courses and is usually completed, depending on the dissertation topic, in 3 to 4 years. Doctoral students are required to complete coursework, approved by their Supervisory Committee, in substantive areas, theory, and research methods. They must earn certification in three areas: Research methodology (course sequence), Major Subject Area (written examination), and Minor Subject Area (written examination). Within the area of Deviance and Social Control are specialized courses on theory (Deviance and Social Control) and methods (Methods of Criminological Research), as well as a yearlong research seminar (Special Topics in Deviance and Social Control) and independent readings. The final requirement is a dissertation. A somewhat unique aspect of the graduate program is required training in teaching, in order to prepare students for TA positions and, ultimately, for teaching their own courses. The number of graduate students in deviance usually hovers around 10, making for a comfortable student-to-faculty ratio of about 2-to-1. This ensures the opportunity for graduate students to work closely with one or more deviance faculty. There is substantial collaboration between faculty and students on a variety of projects, which is actively encouraged.

Undergraduates can be admitted to the sociology major in one of four areas, including “Law, Society, and Policy,” which is simply a fancy title for deviance. In addition to the standard requirements, they must take 20 credits (4 classes) in the area, from a number of courses: Social Problems, Introduction to the Sociology of Deviance, Murder, Criminology, Introduction to Criminal Justice, Social Factors in White Collar Crime, Law and Society, Juvenile Delinquency, and Corrections. The area is one of the most popular among our undergraduates, with a couple of the courses (Murder, and Introduction to Deviance and Social Control) each enrolling between 500-700 students per quarter. The deviance courses enroll the majority of students.
who are in sociology classes each quarter.

The early imprint of the quantitative, empirical research of Beach, Hayner, and Schmid, and those that followed them, survives in the criminology of today in the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington. The analysis of the spatial distribution of crime, using stickpins, is now known as crime mapping, using the latest mapping software.

The research on the relationship between crime and race/ethnicity is typically done under the rubric of inequality and crime. Statistical analyses done manually are now more complex and accomplished in the blink of an eye. Human ecology and social disorganization theory have been rediscovered and refined. Differential association theory survives as learned attributions within the labeling process. And so on.

What the pioneers and contemporaries in the Department share is a commitment to the critical importance of systematic, empirical research in testing theories and producing new knowledge about crime in society.

Reiss, Jr., the award is presented every other year to the author(s) of a book or a series of articles published in the last five years and constituting a major contribution to the study of crime, law, and deviance. If suitable awardees of either type cannot be found, the Committee, at its discretion, may give the award to an individual for a "lifetime of outstanding scholarship."

Nominations must be specific, indicating clearly both the nominee and the book or body of work. It must be accompanied by a specific list of the work(s) to be reviewed and a brief statement of why it merits recognition. Nominators also must send or arrange to have sent to the Committee chairperson six copies of the listed work(s). The committee will review only the work that is nominated and submitted. Send nominations to the chair of the committee: Simon Singer, Department of Sociology, 430 Park Hall, SUNY-Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14260-4140.

Deadline for receipt of nominations is April 1, 2001.

Submission
deadline for the ASA Section on Crime, Law, and Deviance annual Student Paper Competition is April 30th, 2001. The winner receives $500. Papers should not exceed 30 double-spaced pages, and they should use the manuscript preparation guidelines used in the American Sociological Review (see Aug. 2000 issue, p. iii). Coauthored papers are acceptable if all authors are students. Submit six printed copies to Brad Wright, Department of Sociology, University of Connecticut, U-2068, Storrs, CT 06268. (bradley.wright@uconn.edu).

Announcement: The National Academy of Sciences Panel on Juvenile Crime: Prevention, Treatment, and Control (co-chaired by Joan McCord and Cathy Widom) has completed its report. The document discusses patterns and trends in juvenile crime, conditions that seem to influence development of delinquency, juvenile crime prevention, the justice system itself, and the issue of racial disparity. Topics include descriptions and critiques of available evidence and recommendations for both policy and research. A searchable copy of the draft (uncorrected) report is available on the National Academy website, under publications.

Indian University's new Summer Intensive Training in Research Methodology is offering two programs this Summer:

"Categorical Data Analysis: Introduction to Regression Models for Discrete Outcomes" with J. Scott Long

"Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis" with Doug Maynard.

These 1-week courses are scheduled for July, 2001. If you would like additional information, please visit our www.indiana.edu/~isr/isrip/, or contact the Institute of Social Research Intensive Program, isr@indiana.edu.
University of Arizona. A tenure track Assistant Professor position is available in the School of Public Administration and Policy in the Eller College of Business and Public Administration, at. We are seeking applicants with a specialty in the politics of managing public and nonprofit organizations and the politics of implementation. Applicants with research and teaching interests related to criminal justice policies and organizations will receive hiring preference. Other possible areas of scholarly interest include health care, public/nonprofit information technologies, nonprofit organization and management, and local government. Faculty members teach two courses per semester at the undergraduate and graduate levels and are expected to pursue an active research and publication program. The individual selected for this position will contribute to the School’s core teaching and research mission and become a part of the effort to advance the study and practice of public administration. Qualifications: Doctorate in political science, public administration, public policy, or related social science field; record of research and publication (or demonstrated potential); and commitment to improving public service. Experience in local or state government or nonprofit organizations is desirable. Application deadline: position open until filled; review of materials will begin February 23, 2001. Expected starting date of August 6, 2001. Please send a resume that addresses publications and experience in teaching, a cover letter stating interest in the position, three letters of recommendation, and a writing sample to: Edella Schlager, Chair, Personnel Committee, School of Public Administration and Policy, Eller College of Business and Public Administration, The University of Arizona, P.O. Box 210108, Tucson, AZ 85721-0108. The School of Public Administration and Policy is strongly committed to achieving a diverse faculty. The University of Arizona is an EEO/AA Employer - M/W/D/V.

Note: Session listings for the Anaheim ASA Convention will be in the Summer Issue.

Please send news items, critical dialogues, humor, job announcements, and letters to the editor for the Summer issue by June 15, 2001.

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Job Announcements

Vanderbilt University. The Department of Sociology invites applications for an assistant professor of sociology, tenure-track faculty position, commencing August, 2002. Strong preference will be given to candidates with expertise in deviance and crime, and advanced statistics. The candidate will be expected to teach graduate statistics courses. Other areas of expertise will be considered. Applicants should submit a letter of interest in the position, curriculum vitae, and any supplemental material (e.g. reprints, pending manuscripts, teaching evaluations) indicating promise or evidence of outstanding scholarship and effective teaching. Application materials, including three letters of recommendation, should be received by October 1, 2001. Vanderbilt is an Equal Opportunity-Affirmative Action Employer and women and minority candidates are encouraged to apply. Send all materials to Search Committee Chair, Department of Sociology, 2301 Vanderbilt Place, VU Station B Box 351811, Nashville, TN 37235-1811.