



## Mid-South Sociological Association Conference in Huntsville

The 34<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association will be held in Huntsville, from October 22-25, at the Holiday Inn at 401 Williams Avenue. This year's theme is "Sociology in an Increasingly Virtual World."

Several faculty members from UAHuntsville's Sociology Department will be presenting papers including Dr. Jason Smith, Dr. Nancy Finley, and Dr. Glenna Colclough.

More than 40 sessions will be included in the conference. The plenary address, "The Dumbest

Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future," will be given by Mark Bauerlein from Emory University at 4:15 p.m. on Friday evening. It promises to evoke a lively discussion.

Topics of other sessions include environmental sociology, disaster research, health care, globalization, gender, race, religion, education, deviance, crime, and criminal justice.

The conference largely draws its participants from the Southern region: Alabama, Mississippi,

Louisiana, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Arkansas. In addition, sociologists from as far as California, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, Texas, and Oklahoma will be presenting their research.

Student papers, both graduate and undergraduate, will be presented as well. Anyone who is interested in sociological issues is welcome to attend; registration is on site.

For more information, contact Dr. Nancy Finley, Chair of Local Arrangements, at [finleyn@uah.edu](mailto:finleyn@uah.edu).



The conference will be located at the Holiday Inn near downtown Huntsville, Big Spring Park, and the Von Braun Center.

## Message from the Department Chair

Greetings and welcome to the second issue of our newsletter *UAHuntsville Sociology News*.

Last year was a great success. During the past year we taught a record 1,061 students in our classes; we inducted seven outstanding majors and minors into Alpha Kappa Delta, the Sociology Undergraduate Honor Society, and eight students graduated with degrees in Sociology.

In the first year of our fund drive, we made great progress toward our goal of \$25,000 to fund our **Sociology Scholarship**. This happened mainly as a result of one large anonymous donation in excess of \$10,000! On behalf of the entire department, I thank you, dear anonymous friend!

So we now have over \$16,000 in our fund. Even though we have not yet reached our goal, the scholarship is now "endowed" – meaning we were able to provide scholarships this year for the first time. As discussed elsewhere in this newsletter, the first two **UAHuntsville**

**Sociology Scholars** are **Delilah Pettitt** (Minor in Business) and **Shermete Brown** (Minor in Spanish).

We also had several students win other scholarships. **Shauna Floyd** (Minor in Psychology), received a Felix L. Newman Scholarship (in college-wide competition), and three sociology majors won Kathryn L. Harris Women's Studies Scholarships: **Veronica Ferreira** (Double Major with History and Minor in Women's Studies), **Heather Harwell** (Minor in Women's Studies) and **Sarah Ragan** (Minor in Women's Studies). If you are keeping score with me, you know now that six of our sociology majors earned scholarship this year.

Our full-time faculty remain in place from last year – that includes Drs. Berbrier, Colclough, Finley, Sitaraman, and Smith. In addition, **Dr. Isaac Sakyi-Addo** joined us this semester in a part-time capacity. Isaac received his Ph.D. from the University of North Texas

in 2001, specializing in public health, medical sociology, and racial stratification. **Dr. Teresa Terrell**, who joined us last fall as Adjunct Associate Professor of Sociology, will be on leave for 2008-09 – she received a prestigious post-doctoral fellowship from the Hubert H. Humphrey Public Policy Center at the University in Minnesota. We look forward to Dr. Terrell rejoining the department next fall.

The sad news is that **Dr. Glenna Colclough** has announced her retirement as of the end of this academic year, after 25 years with the Department, including 9 years as Department Chair. Glenna guided us carefully, and successfully, through some very difficult times. She will spend her retirement riding horses and pursuing an advanced degree in Software Engineering, and she will be missed.

Best wishes,  
Mitch Berbrier, Ph.D.



Mitch Berbrier

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## Scholarships for Sociology Students



Top: Delilah Pettitt  
Bottom: Shermete Brown

This fall the Department of Sociology was able to award its first two scholarships from its newly endowed scholarship fund. The recipients are Delilah Pettitt and Shermete Brown. Each of them offers their reasons for choosing a major in sociology.

### Delilah Pettitt

"Choosing sociology as my major was not something I had planned on. Ever since I was young, I wanted to be an elementary school teacher. Once I had graduated from high school, however, I decided teaching was not for me. I began college and earned my associate's in pre-law at Calhoun. After taking a year off from school, I enrolled at UAH and declared English as my major. However, after my first semester back I had a change of heart. Although I did well in English, reading literature written hundreds of years ago was not very interesting to me.

I changed my major to Sociology on a whim. I had taken an introduction to sociology class three years earlier, so I didn't know exactly what I was getting myself

into. After taking a few more courses, I realized I had made the right decision. Sociology has opened up my mind to the social and cultural diversity of people around the world. It has provided me with a whole new way of thinking and viewing others. Sociology is a fascinating discipline, and I am excited to continue learning everything it has to offer."

### Shermete Brown

"As a child I was very quiet, well, except for when I was really comfortable. Because of that I was always observing people, listening to adults talk, and taking in everything. As I got older and began to speak up more, I realized that I was frustrated with people who had a one-track mind. I couldn't understand why people couldn't look at things from different points of view. I wanted to argue but I didn't quite understand how to.

When I was in the ninth grade I decided that I wanted to be a school psychologist. In the 12<sup>th</sup> grade I even shadowed one. People kept telling me that I should major in either psychology or edu-

cation. But for some reason, neither of these felt right to me. I knew that psychology would be important, but I still felt that there was another side of things. I came into UAH as an education major. Second semester I decided to take sociology. When I took my first sociology class, by Professor Glenna Colclough, I knew that this is what I wanted to do. I was so interested and intrigued, and Professor Colclough was an awesome and passionate teacher.

I finally felt like someday I could argue back. I learned things like, 'the reason people often have a one track mind is because they are not allowing themselves to think objectively.' I loved knowing that there was an entire science devoted to my way of thinking. The child who isn't behaving properly might be acting up for other reasons besides ADD. I loved it. I called the National Association of School Psychologists and asked was Sociology an okay major for what I wanted to do and they said, 'YES.' Once I heard that I changed my major and I have been content ever since."

## Sociology Major Awarded Liberal Arts Scholarship



Shauna Floyd

**Shauna Floyd**, another sociology major, was awarded the Felix L. Newman Scholarship by the UAHuntsville College of Liberal Arts. She also describes her path into this discipline:

"Arguably, a degree in Sociology is the most flexible background one can have, with the possibility of entering careers in human resources, research, the legal system, government, teaching, or social work, to name a few.

However, I did not begin my college career endeavoring to major in this diverse field, but started out focused on biology. From there, I wound up as a psychology major before finding my-

self 'at home' in the Sociology Department.

Although Sociology was always my minor, I'd have to admit that at first I had no idea what it was, and entered the introductory class as a blank slate. It wasn't until taking anthropology that I was hooked. I would have to say that studying the cultural aspect of sociology is what fascinates me the most.

After being exposed, and developing my 'sociological lenses,' I saw the world in a different light, made up of different norms, rituals and belief systems, ways of life for different people, something a course in biology, or math wouldn't necessarily achieve.

Now, I find myself as a self-proclaimed anthropologist, discovering, and inquiring about the 'mini subcultures' around me, such as the 'culture of Bingo halls' and the players' superstitions about winning, and the 'culture of the highway' and how it's the norm to merge right for faster cars.

There are many other aspects of sociology explored in UAHuntsville courses such as childhood, religion, sport, and race and ethnicity. Whichever fascinates you, I would encourage everyone to take at least one sociology course, and if just for that semester, trade their 'old specks' in for a 'sociological lens.'"

## Calling All UAH Sociology Alumni—We want to know about you!

We want to know where you are *in your lives* – what you are doing, what your plans are – and also how you remember your time here with us. Please get in touch – contact me at [mitch.berbrier@uah.edu](mailto:mitch.berbrier@uah.edu) or (256) 824-2301. Also, if you wish to check up on friends from years gone by, please join our new Facebook page (UAH SOCIOLOGY).

## What the Faculty are Working on

**Mitch Berbrier** has continued his research in the general area of "the social construction of ethnicity and race." Right now he is focused primarily on completing a book manuscript on the Cleveland Cultural Gardens, a series of landscaped gardens in the heart of Cleveland, Ohio, which commemorate the various ethnic and racial groups of Cleveland through sculpture and foliage. The Gardens have existed since 1926, and new ones are still being added from time to time. He is also working on several scholarly articles related to the Gardens story in which he subjects certain segments of the tale to more theoretically rigorous and focused analyses.

**Glenna Colclough** conducted in-depth interviews of local women who own and manage their own high-tech companies. These women work in male-dominated occupations such as engineering and computer science. They have started companies in male-dominated industries that are frequently engaged in government contracting. She finds that demographically, these women share many characteristics with their male counterparts, but are confronted with unique challenges in their careers and businesses due to their status as women. And, while their companies mirror the structures and processes of many small high-tech businesses (flatter hierarchy and less bureaucracy), their culture (norms and values) may differ from the larger companies in these sectors in which many of these women have previously worked. While performance is obviously important, these women report a strong emphasis on social relations with employees and customers, and the values of fairness, honesty, and integrity as shaping their company milieu. They typically view their own gender as an asset for their companies in developing these characteristics of company culture.

**Nancy Finley's** research interests focus around issues of gender, so when she first saw Women's Flat Roller Derby, she

saw a social phenomena rich with insight about women and femininity. For over a year and a half, she has been traveling around the south looking at the formation of new leagues of derby, attending bouts and practices, and interviewing participants and fans for an ethnographic study of this subculture.

Since its resurgence in 2002, the popularity of women's flat track roller derby has soared in the U.S. In this short period of time, over 180 teams have formed and a national organization, Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), materialized to oversee the sport. This incarnation of roller derby is unique from previous ones, and from other more traditional sports, in that the teams are woman-owned businesses operated by do-it-yourself teams, which are unaffiliated with traditional sports institutions like schools, etc. Their emergence from alternative subcultures, especially punk countercultures, created a social environment surrounding the sport characterized by parody, daring personas and clever theatrics. Nonetheless the skaters view themselves as seriously pursuing a very violent, complicated athletic event, in fact, arguably the most violent sport that women organize and own.

Dr. Finley's work on derby is focusing on issues of "alternative femininities," ones that differ from conventional versions emphasized and rewarded in our society. The complexities of derby are helping her develop more robust concepts in the analysis of femininity, and to offer some empirical insights into ways power relations in society are constructed, reified, or challenged in social contexts.

**Bhavani Sitaraman** is currently in India interviewing call center employees for her research on the cultural dimensions of work in call centers. Her research explores international call centers in which workers call or respond to calls from customers in the UK, Europe, and the United States. Some of the cultural dimensions she is looking into include the impact of shift work

on family/personal life; cultural training of workers for interactions with foreign clients, and gender differences in experiences of call center work.

**Jason Smith** is continuing to work on his project—"NCLB in Huntsville"—with Dr. Kovacs from the Department of Education. This project is centered on their survey of all K-8 teachers in Huntsville City Schools. They have nearly completed their first manuscript covering the overall results of their survey and will be presenting some of their findings at the Mid-South Sociological Association Annual Meeting here in Huntsville in October. Some of the most interesting results they have found include the decline in teachers' professional development opportunities in areas like Social Studies, Art, and English, and a growing feeling among teachers that they are neither viewed nor treated as professionals. They will be submitting this manuscript for publication in the coming weeks, as well as starting work on a second paper from this project, which focuses on recruitment and retention problems for the teaching field based on the results of their survey.

**Teresa Terrell** will be on leave during the 2008-2009 academic year while she participates in a postdoctoral fellowship in Race, Gender and Public Policy at the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The fellowship is a joint program of the Wilkins Center for Social Justice and the Center on Women and Public Policy and is designed to advance the field of intersectionality studies, promote interdisciplinary research, and facilitate critical dialog on Race, Gender, and Public Policy. Teresa has been chosen as one of two fellows for the 2008-2009 fellowship year. She will extend her dissertation research on civic participation in urban poor neighborhoods by investigating citizen participation in neighborhoods in North Minneapolis. She will also teach a graduate seminar based upon her research.



The Student Sociological Association is off to a good start this year, participating with the Minority Graduate Student Association and a few other student groups to host a **voter registration drive** throughout campus the first week of October. They also have planned a week-long **food drive** in November, and are hoping to bring back movie and discussion nights.

There has been discussion on supplementing a student survey that was initiated by Dr. Sitaraman's Research Methods class by taking those results and attempting to replicate them regarding student opinions of the UAHuntsville campus and its policies. If completed, they hope to be able to bring their results to President Williams, who might be able to take action on student-oriented issues. They are also discussing plans for a major fundraising party this semester. Some of the members will volunteer at the **Mid-South Sociological Conference** this October, and we hope to see many of you there!

The president of SSA is Rebecca Purcell, Vice President Mossy Mauer, Treasurer Sarah Ragan, Secretary Heather Harwell, and the faculty advisor is Nancy Finley. We welcome all of our new members, officers, and faculty advisor to a great new year.

For more information about the Student Sociological Association, contact Rebecca Purcell at [ssa@uah.edu](mailto:ssa@uah.edu).

## Notes from Alumni



Top: Amanda Bisset with children in Zambia  
Bottom: Latasha McCrary

### Amanda Bisset

"In February I had the opportunity to travel to Zambia for three weeks with my friend Michelle Davis. Michelle and I stayed with Linda Wilkinson, a family friend who currently lives in Zambia and dedicates her time to relief work in the country's capital, Lusaka. Linda started a grassroots organization called *Chikumbuso* which provides resources and opportunities to widows and single moms by teaching them necessary skills used to fuel micro-businesses in their local community, *N'Gombe*. Soon this movement expanded throughout the region and now includes a fully-facilitated school for 300 children as well as several ways for women, men, and children to make a living and provide for their families.

I was proud to be a part of this amazing charity. In so many ways I

feel as though I gained more than I contributed. For example, when teaching in a fifth grade classroom at Chikumbuso School, my friend Michelle and I decided to give a lesson on culture by comparing the United States to Zambia. At the end of the lesson we were all excited to learn that there were more similarities than differences between the two cultures. I remind myself of this lesson all the time and rejoice in the commonalities of humanity while also celebrating our differences. I left Zambia with a great love for its people and culture, and find that I am constantly discovering how it has impacted my life."

### Latasha McCrary

"I graduated from UAH with a degree in sociology and political science in May 2005. Since that time, I entered law school at The

University of Alabama School of Law, where I recently received a Juris Doctor degree and certificate in Public Interest Law.

While in law school, I had the opportunity to work on a number of issues involving social justice. I was involved in research that prompted The Supreme Court of Alabama to restore voting rights to certain ex-felons and I conducted research for Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb on the social and moral imperatives for using drug courts as an alternative to incarceration. Currently, I am working to initiate a public interest project that facilitates successful reintegration for previously incarcerated persons and I am pursuing the publication of my second journal article. I am also awaiting the results of my bar exam as I look forward to a life-long career pursuing social and legal justice."

# UAHuntsville

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