

# UAH • SOCIOLOGY • NEWS

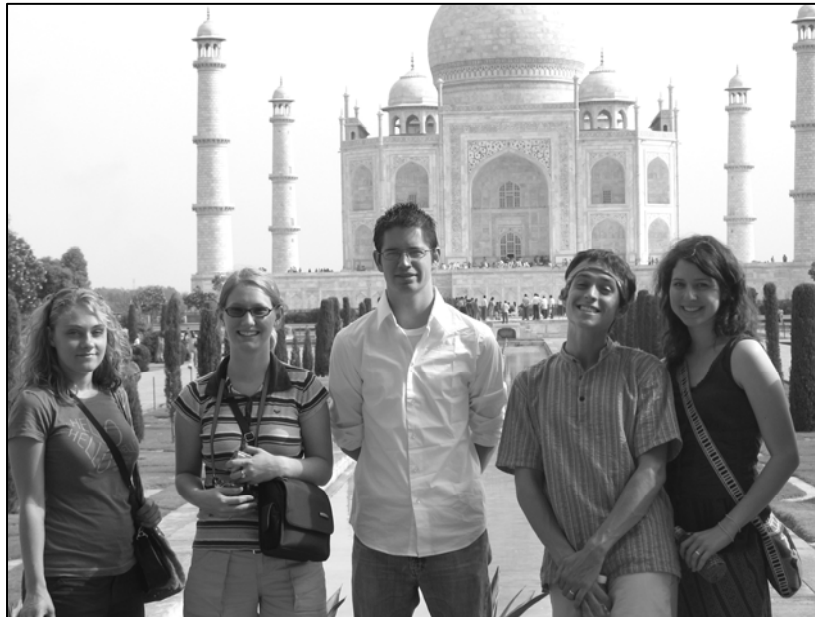
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE • VOL. 1, NO. 1 • FALL, 2007

## Students Travel and Study in India

For the first time ever, the UAH Department of Sociology offered a study abroad course in spring 2007. Five students spent three weeks traveling in the south Indian state of Karnataka. The course, *India: Idea and Experience*, was taught by Dr. Bhavani Sitaraman, a native of India and a UAH faculty member since 1993. During the spring semester, students learned about Indian history, culture, and society to prepare them for travel within India. Five of the 25 students enrolled in the course elected to travel to India: Carie Hilton, political science; Dana Stewart, history; Matthew Hodges, graduate student, public affairs; Stephanie Kaloi, sociology; and Sean Kaloi, sociology.

Students spent the first week at the Dhvanyaloka Center for Indian Studies in Mysore where they attended lectures on Indian philosophy, gender and the women's movement, development and social change, and Indian art and architecture. During their stay in Mysore, students visited numerous historical and modern sites including local markets, the famous Mysore Palace, Tipu Sultan's Fort, a local temple, a Women's Shelter, and INFOSYS, a leading Indian technology firm.

During the remaining two weeks, students traveled around the southern state of Karnataka visiting several ancient and medieval heritage sites belonging to Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures of India. They completed the trip with a visit to New Delhi, India's capital, and the Taj Mahal (see picture), a medieval monument most famously identified with India. Travel was organized to expose students to both modern and historical aspects of cultural diversity within India. In addition to the formal site visits, students immersed themselves in Indian culture,



*Student travelers—left to right, Carie Hilton, Dana Stewart, Matthew Hodges, Sean Kaloi, Stephanie Kaloi—stand in front of the Taj Mahal.*

tasting different foods, riding local transportation, shopping in local markets, learning a few words of Kanada (the local language), and interacting with local residents during the course of their site visits.

Learning by experiencing the culture was an intense and memorable journey for students despite and, perhaps, because of the difficulties encountered with travel in a developing country. A profound experience for most students was coping with being noticed as "different and exotic." As one student put it, "while I'm sight-seeing India, they're sight-seeing me."

Another student noted, "At times being the minority put me very much outside of my comfort-zone, but it was a good experience that has helped me understand better what being a minority means." Still others realized the difference between an intellectual understanding of cultures as opposed to direct experience of cultural difference through travel. As one student commented, "I had built a number of preconceived notions about this land on the other side of the world. I had 'understood' the value of religion, 'realized' that there was an amount of poverty, and 'comprehended' that there were a

multitude of religions, languages and cultures within this single country. The truth of the matter, I neither understood, realized, nor comprehended any of the above very fully... I remember one of my first mornings in Mysore. I opened my window, looked outside, and saw what I had expected to see in India—a cow walking down the roadway, birds chirping, a nice breeze blowing. And then suddenly, as if awaking from a dream, I heard horns blowing, train whistles howling, and people speaking. It was amazing to see cows walking alongside a Honda car that was following behind a bicycle driven by a woman with a Sari. It was India at one intersection. It was the

traditional and the modern. It was amazing."

For the students, returning home to the U.S. was an equally enlightening experience. One member of the group conveyed her experience of "reverse culture shock" in this way: "Overall, my experience in India was overwhelming, exciting, educational, tiring and unforgettable. After arriving back home, I began to go through a second culture shock. The road seemed so bare and quiet without the honking and the variety of transportation we had seen in India. I was thankful for the hot showers, the air conditioning, and the steady, constant supply of electricity. It took me a week to recover from jet-lag, and I felt restless and bored. I popped in an Indian CD in my car one day, and I suddenly began to miss India..."

"Mostly, study-abroad makes you want to study-abroad again. It makes you realize how much you can learn in such a short amount of time, but ultimately how little you really know... [S]tudying abroad provides an educational experience which doesn't end when you return home. The learning continues as you encounter opportunities for comparison and reflection, long after you have returned to your home country."

## Meet the New Faculty

**NAME:** Jason M. Smith – a.k.a. "Dr. J"

**EDUCATION:** Ph.D. (2006), Sociology and Demography, Penn

State University; M.S. (2001), Sociology of Sport, Miami University; B.S. (1995), Secondary Social Studies Education, Miami University

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Education, Demography, Quantitative Methods, Sport

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

Smith, Jason M. (2007). "Between the Lines, On the Stage, and In the Club: Additional Ways Students Find to Overcome Disadvantage through School." In *Child Poverty in America Today*, Vol. 4, *The Promise of Education*, edited by Barbara A. Arrighi and David J. Maume. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Smith, Jason M., & Alan G. Ingham. (2003). "On the Waterfront:

Retrospectives on the Relationship Between Sport and Communities." *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 20, 252-274.

**COURSES TAUGHT AT UAH:** SOC 100 Introduction to Sociology; SOC 333 Statistics for the Social Sciences. In Spring 2008, I will resurrect our upper level course in Sociology of Education (SOC 325). In the future, I plan to offer courses in Demography, Sociology of Sport, and Criminology.

**CURRENT RESEARCH:** I am continuing my work on extracurriculars and how they affect educational outcomes, especially for kids in high poverty schools. I also have a research project with Dr. Philip Kovacs (Education) investigating the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act on curricular and extracurricular offerings, and teachers' sense of professionalism and job satisfaction, in the Huntsville City Schools.

**HOBBIES:** I play in a men's baseball league, as well as traveling to tournaments around the country. I also like to play golf and basketball. When I'm not doing one of those things (or when I'm going to and from one of those) I like to ride my motorcycle, hike with my wife Patti at Lake Guntersville State Park (she's the Park Naturalist there), and play with our 2 dogs and 2 cats.



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## Message from the Department Chair

### Why a Sociology Newsletter?

Greetings and welcome to the first issue of *UAH Sociology News*.

Why a newsletter? There were a number of reasons for this. Overall, the university and this small department within it have reached a stage and an age (over 50) such that we now have a large group of alumni and friends, most of whom have heard nothing from us for years.

Second of all, the students in our small department tend to get to know each other and their professors better than most students in most departments at most universities even UAH. We figure that there is at least some curiosity about "where they are now" and that is something we'd like to work on in the coming years, with your help.

Third, and related to both one and two above, the department and this university have been growing by leaps and bounds in the past decade. Even if you just graduated six or seven years ago, you would be amazed at the changes—a full service gym, two new residence halls, five new fraternity and

sorority houses, a new baseball field, and multiple renovations to our buildings—even Morton Hall has seen some improvement! Yet, the Department of Sociology has retained its intimate feel—we still have five full-time faculty members, while the number of sociology majors has doubled since 1997.

So we felt it was time.

Since this is our first issue, we have spent a lot of time over the past year just trying to locate as many of you as we can. But just finding your addresses is inadequate for us. We want to know where you are *in your lives*—what you are doing, what your plans are, and how you remember your time here with us. Please get in touch. Contact us at [sociology@uah.edu](mailto:sociology@uah.edu) or contact me at [mitch.berbrier@uah.edu](mailto:mitch.berbrier@uah.edu) or (256) 824-2301.

Best wishes,  
Mitch Berbrier, Ph.D



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### Upcoming Events

## Social Issue Symposium to Tackle Steroid Use in Professional Sports

The Department of Sociology's Social Issues Symposium will feature Dr. Robert Beamish on Wednesday, February 20, 2008, at 7 p.m. in Roberts Recital Hall at UAH. In his talk, Dr. Beamish will explore the process by which steroid use has come to have its connotations of deviance and why. He will also discuss the historical roots of our current understanding of "steroid use as deviance" in the development of the modern Olympic Games and the possible implications of such a view for the future.

Steroid use has become a major issue in America, receiving much attention from both the press and government. The televised Capitol Hill hearings regarding steroid use by professional baseball players garnered surprising ratings for congressional inquiries, and images of such stars as Mark McGwire and Rafael Palmeiro testifying have become familiar to many. Understanding how steroids have come to be so vilified can help us to understand how a behavior comes to be defined as "wrong" and how rules prohibiting certain behaviors can have unintended

consequences and may not address the root problem at all. Such considerations of the process of defining behavior as "deviant" have applications to a broad range of activities, from cigarette smoking to premarital sex to alcohol consumption and beyond.

Beamish is currently Associate Professor and Chair of Sociology at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He holds Bachelor's degrees in Physical Education, Psychology, and Education from Queen's University in Canada, and graduate degrees (M.A. and Ph.D.) in Sociology from Queen's University and the University of Toronto, respectively. Since joining Queen's University, he has directed their Continuing and Distance Education program and served as Associate Dean of Studies for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Beamish is an internationally renowned scholar, speaking in Canada, the U.S., Germany, Japan, and Denmark. His work has been published in multiple languages across the world.

For further information, contact the Department of Sociology at (256) 824-6190.

## Updates from Alumni

### Heather Kilgore ('02)

Upon the completion of my undergraduate degree (communication arts and sociology), I found myself working at a coffee shop. Without discouragement, I used any opportunity to flesh out my resume by doing volunteer work. The Volunteer Center of Madison County ([www.volunteerhsv.org](http://www.volunteerhsv.org)) is a great place to find organizations that need volunteers. Often job opportunities will arise from doing volunteer work and such was my experience. Doing outreach for the homeless led to a \$15 an hour part-time job. I was able to keep my coffee shop position and work for Interfaith Mission Service's First Stop for the homeless.



After about a year, a funding crisis led to the downsizing of my position at First Stop, but I continued to offer my services as a volunteer. By doing so I was able to keep abreast of occupational opportunities, many unannounced, in my community. That is how I learned of a position open at the Huntsville Rehabilitation Foundation. The requirements for the position were a degree in sociology, psychology, or related field. Due to my less than stellar GPA from UAH, I was a bit hesitant to pursue the job opening, but with my "beefy" resume I found the confidence to apply for the job.

I was hired as a Program Manager and Life Skills Coordinator for the Adjustment Services Department of the Huntsville Rehabilitation Center. My job entails counseling and teaching people with disabilities who want to enter the world of work. I was able to create my own teaching curriculum. I teach life and work skill classes such as money management, interviewing skills, time management, and hobby development to name a few. While working for the Huntsville Rehabilitation Center I saw the need for my clients to have an easier access to the GED programs in our area, so I teamed up with Calhoun College Adult Education Program and now GED classes are taught at the Center, free of charge.

A year and a half into my career at the Huntsville Rehabilitation Center, I was awarded the state's most prestigious honor for my field, the Professional of the Year Award presented by the Alabama Association of Rehabilitation Facilities. I have been with the Center for two and a half years now and I love my job.

### Quinn Ottaway ('06)

After completing my B.A. in sociology at UAH, I headed north to Minnesota State University, Mankato, to pursue a Master's degree in sociology. In taking complex organizations with Glenna Colclough a few years ago we had to do an organizational analysis of something. I was fortunate enough to study the women's prison in Alabama. Focusing on inmate organization among themselves in relationship to staff, this project sparked a deeper interest in me about the biographies of female inmates.



Many of MNSU's sociology faculty do research on inmates, prisons, and the correctional system as a whole so it was a natural fit for me. MNSU is also very strong in the qualitative methods which I have grown to love. The greatest thing about graduate school is having the chance to work with faculty and experts in a particular topic or area along with the research opportunities that are available. Also, students can expand and grow by meeting and sharing ideas with sociologists from all over the country and world.

I have begun the treacherous path that is my thesis, and I am excited about it yet know it will be quite exhausting. I am doing a phenomenological study of incarcerated mothers in Tennessee (how these mothers are creating/recreating identities and meanings in their lives and how they experience social life and social structures—a "what and how" of their lived experience from their own perspective and value systems).

I have also volunteered at the women's prison here in Minnesota teaching a sociology class in hopes that inmates will be able to see how the social world around them influences the choices they make.

After I finish here at MNSU I hope to pursue my Ph.D. and continue my research with female inmates, corrections, and qualitative methodology. Feel free to say hi: [quinn.ottaway@mnsu.edu](mailto:quinn.ottaway@mnsu.edu).

#### CALLING ALL ALUMNI!!

Please send us your own news and contact information. Email the department at [sociology@uah.edu](mailto:sociology@uah.edu) or contact the Department Chair at [mitch.berbrier@uah.edu](mailto:mitch.berbrier@uah.edu).

## Student Focus



### SSA off to a Big Start!

The Student Sociological Association (SSA) is a democratic, student-run organization whose purpose is to promote the study of sociology, to sponsor social and intellectual activities that will serve to enrich its members' study of sociology, to aid students in their preparation for careers after graduation, and to contribute toward the improvement of the community as well as the human condition.

The club has already been very active this year. Over the summer, members held a successful root beer and soda float fundraiser. Dr. Berbrier was a big supporter whose contributions allowed for the purchase of a banner with the new SSA logo. During the UAH Connections Fair the club received "runner up" for the best booth. The first meeting this fall was a potluck which attracted many new students interested in becoming members. The first bake sale in Morton Hall made enough profit to provide an honorarium for guest speaker, Dr.

Ellin Jimmerson. On September 13, Dr. Jimmerson came to a private luncheon with SSA members and then later gave a public presentation titled "Messages from the Border" about her field research along the border between the U.S. and Mexico where she collected pictures and data from individuals working and living there. Her talk provided a platform for their voices to be heard about illegal immigration. Watch for upcoming events and fundraisers. For more information contact [ssa@uah.edu](mailto:ssa@uah.edu).



SSA officers—back row (left to right) Amanda Bisset, treasurer; Ellen Parker, president; Dr. Jason Smith, faculty advisor; front row, Rebecca Purcell, secretary; Tiffany Schlosser, vice president.

# ***Contribute to the Sociology Scholarship Fund!***

**Help make a Department of Sociology Scholarship available to students who need it.**

**The scholarship will be awarded to students based on academic merit  
with consideration also given to financial need.**

**Annual Contribution (October 1 – September 30)**

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