Greetings friends and alumni of the UWM Department of Sociology!

As I write this I am amazed that another year has passed since our initial Sociology newsletter went out in 2013. Change was the major theme of my last “letter from the chair” and changes have continued in the department in 2014. We have moved back to Bolton Hall, we have plans to hire a new assistant professor this academic year, and our growing PhD program continues to change the actual number of graduate students in the department, as well as the course offerings and the instructors of many of our classes.

The Sociology department moved back to its old home on the 7th floor of Bolton Hall over the break between the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters. For most of us, being back in Bolton is a good thing, placing us again in the middle of campus and closer to main activity centers such as the Golda Meir Library and the Student Union, as well as the common area between them. The walls are freshly painted, there is carpeting throughout the 7th floor, and our offices have new furniture. And, although it took a while to complete the task, the two Bolton Hall elevators have been completely refurbished, and they even talk to us!

We are especially excited that the College of Letters and Science has given us permission to recruit for a new assistant professor who we hope will be here with us beginning in the fall of 2015. As I mentioned in my last letter, our department has been fortunate to have hired five new faculty members over the past several years, and we have benefited greatly from the energy and enthusiasm that new faces and ideas bring to our programs. We anticipate that our new hire also will enliven our faculty and engage our students in the coming years.

With the addition of our new PhD students, the department now has over 30 active graduate students! Many of these students have TA appointments with the department and are grading student papers, teaching discussion sections, and for our PhD dissertators (those that have completed all of their coursework), teaching their own courses in our undergraduate program.

In spite of these changes, our commitment to learning and research excellence continues unabated. Student evaluations of our faculty and instructors consistently rate the quality of instruction in the department very highly and our faculty are engaged in exciting scholarly projects that range from the public perception of science and scientific knowledge to the sociology of food and consumption, and from research on how the use of new technologies effect our lives and families to the sociology of water and our access to it. Rounding out the list, crime, inequality, health care, and gender also are the focus of sociology department faculty research efforts.

Over the past year we have enjoyed hearing from our friends and alumni about your experiences in Sociology at UWM, especially stories about how you use the knowledge and skills gained at UWM today. Tell us about your career so that we can share your success with current students as well as fellow alumni. You can always contact us at sociology@uwm.edu.

Donald E. Green, Chair
Department of Sociology

Join your fellow MA graduates on our LinkedIn group: http://tinyurl.com/ljaub4l
Tough Times
As many of you already know, UWM is facing unprecedented budget cuts in the coming years if Governor Walker’s proposals are enacted in full. Sociology will no doubt feel these cuts very deeply if implemented as is. In fact, the impact is already being felt. As we note elsewhere in this newsletter, we are thrilled to be able to hire a new faculty member for the fall of 2015, but this one hire cannot begin to make up for the loss of 7 valued full-time staff members. We encourage you to consider the words of our new chancellor, reprinted below:

Today, our university is facing a great challenge. The state budget that has been proposed by Governor Scott Walker would result in a $300 million reduction in state aid to the University of Wisconsin System. UWM’s share of that cut is expected to be $40 million over the next two years, the biggest budget cut in our history. The proposed budget cut is of a magnitude that will present unprecedented challenges to UWM. We already are one of the leanest research universities in the country. If the budget reductions are approved, it will impact our ability to serve students and support the important research work that benefits communities and businesses throughout the region….the proposed cuts are so overwhelming, that I am asking for your help.

I encourage you to contact your local state legislators to tell them about the positive impact UWM has had on you, your family and our community. And ask them to reduce the proposed cut to the UW System budget, while granting more flexibility so that we can do our jobs more efficiently. Faculty and staff should not use university resources to contact legislators; please take care to use your personal e-mail.

You can find information about how to connect with your legislator on our Panther Advocates website: http://www4.uwm.edu/alumni/Advocacy/

You can also learn more about the work we are doing to address the budget challenges on our State Budget Information website: http://uwm.edu/budget/

Graduate Student News
Our first cohort of doctoral students are now finishing their 4th year and we can safely say that our new PhD program is firmly established and making important contributions to the department’s research and teaching missions.

D.J. Wolover is our first published doctoral student! His article “An issue of attribution: The Tunisian revolution, media interaction, and agency” appeared in the peer-reviewed journal New Media & Society in 2014. Matt McCarthy has a forthcoming article, “Toward a Free Information Movement,” appearing in Sociological Forum in 2015. Ken Jackson’s “The Meaning of the Hijab” will appear in The Journal of International Women’s Studies this year as well. Mark Caldwell has also published three pieces in Contexts, the magazine of the American Sociological Association. We hope these will be the first of many! Our doctoral students are also now teaching a variety of courses, from Introduction to Sociology to Social Psychology and Crime and Deviance, to good reviews from our undergraduate students.

Our master’s program continues its long tradition of turning out scholars and applied researchers. John Roberts has now taken over as Director of Graduate Studies. While the doctoral and MA cohorts for the fall of 2015 are mostly set, we are always looking for new additions to our scholarly community, and funding in the form of teaching assistantships is available. If you or someone you know is interested in either the doctoral or the master’s program, be sure to contact us at sociology@uwm.edu.

Jordan publishes Edible Memory
Associate Professor Jennifer A. Jordan has a new book! – “Edible Memory: The Lure of Heirloom Tomatoes and Other Forgotten Food.”

In Edible Memory, Jordan examines the ways that people around the world have sought to identify and preserve old-fashioned varieties of produce. In doing so, Jordan shows that these fruits and vegetables offer a powerful emotional and physical connection to a shared genetic, cultural, and culinary past.
Sad To See You Go!

The year 2015 will mark a substantial change for UWM Sociology as we lose 7 valued staff members of the department. Longtime Senior Lecturers Dr. Mary Ann Czarnezki, Dr. Mark Mantyh, and Dr. Tom Moore (more than 70 of years at UWM among them!) are all retiring from the department after contributing many excellent years of service and dedicated teaching for the department and its students. Professor Frank Wilson is also retiring after 27 years at UWM, leaving a trail of enlightened students from seminars that ranged from race relations to sports to funk; we’re hoping he’ll still come back for the annual holiday party and bring his delicious pecan sweet potato pies with him. Professor Stacey Oliker, after serving the department for 27 years and holding the office of chair and director of undergraduate studies, is also retiring this year. Professor Nancy Mathiowetz is also riding off into the sunset; though she has been with the department a mere 12 years, many will remember her excellent training in statistics and survey methods as well as her stint as department chair. Professor Heeju Shin is also leaving UWM after 7 years to pursue opportunities in her home country of South Korea.

The UWM Sociology show must go on — and it will — but we will greatly miss our esteemed colleagues.

What about you? We want to hear from you.

Did you have a great internship experience or have you been working in your dream job? We would love to hear from you. Please share your story with us for possible inclusion in future newsletters. Your success is something we are proud of and can serve as an inspiration to others.

Even if you aren’t ready to share your story quite yet, please keep in touch. We would like to make sure we have your email address on file. We promise not to fill your in-box but would like to be able to reach you with important information like job openings that we hear about.

You should have recently received an email from our Alumni Association with your Alumni ID number so that you may review your own profile and update your contact information at alumnidirectory.uwm.edu. Or, you can send your contact information to let-sci@uwm.edu.

We look forward to hearing from you!
When did you graduate from UWM with your MA? How did you end up at UWM?

I graduated in 2006, and multiple factors led me to UWM. My family had moved to Milwaukee. After I completed four years in the U.S. Air Force, I decided to join my family. I had been contemplating several universities to pursue a graduate degree, but I was referred to a faculty member in the Department of Sociology at UWM (Dr. William Velez). After several conversations with Dr. Velez, I knew I would get the support and mentorship I needed to successfully complete my Master’s degree at UWM. The rest is history.

How would you describe your experience as a sociology MA student and teaching assistant at UWM?

My academic experience at UWM was outstanding. At the Department level, I received an excellent education; I worked very closely with several faculty members; my faculty mentoring experience was also excellent. We had relative small cohorts of graduate students, thus we had an opportunity to work very closely and interact on a regular basis with the program faculty. Faculty members were very supportive, accessible, and provided an outstanding education, which prepared me incredibly well to pursue a PhD in Sociology at UW-Madison, which had and continues to have one of the best sociology and demography programs in the country. Can I say that here? 😊

How has your sociology background and education at UWM influenced or affected your work and career?

My excellent education, training, and mentoring at UWM really set the foundation of what has been an exciting and fulfilling academic and administrative career in higher education. My research work and publications regarding Latinos/as in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, including an edited book titled “Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of America,” had its origins with my academic work at UWM, including my Master’s thesis, which focused on income inequality among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Almost 30 years later, I still collaborate with Dr. Velez (my faculty member at UWM, mentor, and friend) as we have similar research interests. He also collaborates with one of my former students who is now a faculty member in Florida. Thus, we now have three generations of very successful Latino faculty…and it all began at UWM.

Has the pursuit of your scholarly interests been crowded out by your increasing administrative responsibilities in recent years?

As mentioned previously, one of my major scholarly/research areas focuses on demographic patterns, migration, and income inequality among Latinos/as in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Another major area I have focused on, for nearly 30 years, has been the socio-economic impacts of disasters (e.g., tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, etc.), particularly focusing on disaster mitigation, response, and recovery. Actually, this work is intrinsically tied to my interests regarding income inequality and poverty, and how they impact population vulnerability to disasters.

My administrative responsibilities make it increasingly difficult, though not impossible, to continue to be engaged in my academic and scholarly/research endeavors. Nevertheless, I try to publish on a regular basis, present at conferences, and write grant proposals. For example, I am currently the Principal Investigator of an NSF $3.1 million grant titled “Attracting and Nurturing Women Faculty at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI).” Also, given my work and leadership in higher education, I will be awarded the 2015 Alfredo G. de los Santos, Jr. Distinguished Leadership Award by the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), which recognizes an “outstanding administrator in the field of higher education who has demonstrated excellence in the profession.”

How did you move into administrative work and on to the top spot of a university?

My first faculty appointment (1991) was at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez (UPRM). In 1992, as an untenured Assistant Professor, I was asked to serve as Associate Chair/Director of the Department of Social Sciences...still untenured, I became the Interim Chair/Director (not a good idea for junior faculty!). I guess I did a very good job as I was then (after being tenured) asked to serve as Associate Dean for the College of Arts and Sciences, and then the Interim Dean for Academic Affairs at UPRM. We then moved to the University of Delaware (UD) to direct the Disaster Research Center.
(DRC), the oldest and one of the leading disaster research centers in the world. That led to the position of Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and International Programs and then to the Deputy Provost at UD. I was then recruited to serve as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Texas – Pan American. I now have the unprecedented privilege of serving as the last President (Ad Interim) for this excellent institution of higher education. In 2015, we will establish the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), which is the result of the consolidation between UT Pan American and UT Brownsville, with the addition of a School of Medicine. I have the distinct honor of serving as the founding Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs for UTRGV, which in the next few years will probably become the largest Hispanic Serving Institution in the country.

My “secret” to this administrative success is that I have never been particularly active or eagerly seeking a “promotion” to the “next administrative level.” I have truly focused on doing the very best work that I am capable of in that particular position. My focus has always been to promote excellence in everything that we do. These positions come with a tremendous amount of responsibility and accountability, and I take them very seriously.

There is much concern about the future of higher education. From your perch at the top of your institution, what challenges do you see for higher education in the U.S. beyond the usual concerns about budgets and funding and what makes you optimistic about the future?

One of my major concerns is the increasing focus on accountability and the bureaucratization of higher education in the midst of declining budgets. Our focus should be to provide an excellent education to our students; to promote diversity; to ensure that our faculty, staff, and students are successful; and that we become increasingly global in our perspectives and approach to higher education. We, as institutions of higher education, need to increase the global reach, visibility, and impact of what we do.

What makes me optimistic about the future? Our students and their eagerness and desire to learn, to have an impact, to become global contributing citizens. We as faculty members and administrators have an enormous responsibility, which we must not take lightly; we should embrace the challenges and focus on the opportunities; we can and should continue to transform our communities and society at the local, national, and global level.

How does the discipline of sociology figure into those concerns as well as that optimism?

As a sociologist, I have a good understanding of organizational structures, and how individual behavior is impacted by organizational and societal norms, values, and structures. Our discipline provides us a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of both the challenges and opportunities we confront as institutions of higher education. Sociology has also become an incredibly handy “tool” as we work collaboratively to establish a new institution in South Texas – UTRGV.

You had the opportunity to work within the American Sociological Association in the 1990s in the Minority Affairs Program. How have things changed for minority students and scholars in the discipline since that time? How do you see things going forward?

We have made significant progress as it relates to students and faculty of color in the discipline. The ASA, through its Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) and its different iterations of MOST (more recently the Minority Opportunities through School Transformation Program – funded by the Ford Foundation), has had a tremendous positive impact in diversifying the field of Sociology. Actually, I am a product of the MFP, and I owe many of my achievements and successes to this important program and its contributions to promote and enhance diversity in the discipline. That said, there is much more progress to be made in diversifying our curriculum, our academic and administrative structures, and the composition of faculty in institutions of higher education, even in Sociology!

What advice would you offer our current graduate students or alums thinking about returning to graduate school in sociology?

If I had the opportunity to do it all over again, I would pursue a career in sociology. Not only has the discipline allowed me to flourish as a researcher and scholar, but it provided the basic foundation and building blocks, which has allowed me to become very successful in my academic and administrative career. C. Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination still provides the insights, wisdom, and foundation to become a successful scholar and administrator in a university setting or elsewhere. Whatever career you pursue, sociology provides the critical thinking skills, the quantitative and qualitative reasoning skills, and the writing skills to help you succeed in whatever career you pursue...just remember to promote and expect excellence in everything that you do.
When did you graduate with your sociology degree from UWM?
I graduated from UWM in 2014 with majors in Sociology and Psychology.

How would you describe your undergraduate experience at UWM?
I was born and raised on the east side of Milwaukee. I truly love everything the city has to offer and it only seemed natural to continue my education at UWM. I had initially intended on exploring a major in Psychology. As I was determining courses to enroll in, I was drawn to many of the important topics through the Sociology Department. The Sociology Department at UWM really opened my perspective on the importance of understanding ourselves in relation to others. The sociology courses also complimented my psychology courses, providing me with a well-rounded education and experience for navigating my future career paths.

How did you end up working for Running Rebels?
I gained employment with Running Rebels Community Organization through my internship with the Sociology Department at UWM. Running Rebels came highly regarded from Professor Mark Mantyh as an organization that puts its influential work with youth and within the community at the forefront. I was intrigued to see how an organization of this caliber was able to perform and provide such necessary opportunities for our city’s youth. This would be my first experience working with youth and my internship included tutoring students after school. I came home from each day at Running Rebels invigorated and excited from being a part of the youths’ lives, knowing I was helping to be a positive role model and also learning in abundance from the kids. Once my internship came to an end, I still felt compelled to finish the work I started. I continued to volunteer my time tutoring after school. This extra effort was noticed by the Executive Director, and led to a position within the organization.

Tell us a bit more about Running Rebels. What do you do for the organization?
Running Rebels has been in operation since 1980. Victor Barnett, Founder and Executive Director, describes it as an “alternative outlet for the youth and helping them out of trouble.” Running Rebels is an afterschool program, which provides support and opportunities for neighborhood youth.

As the Educational & Volunteer Coordinator, I have the unique opportunity to work closely with the youth and provide academic support, as well as work within our neighborhoods to coordinate volunteers for a plethora of community events. My job allows me to connect and build relationships with the youth and citizens of our city in a positive, collaborative way.

How has your sociology background and education influenced or affected your work and career?
I have always wanted a career in which I would be able to work for the betterment of people’s lives. My sociology background has opened my eyes to the multiple careers available in this area and prepared me with the tools to be successful in my given career. Without the opportunities granted to me through the Sociology Department, I would not have gotten my foot in the door with Running Rebels. The Sociology Department has provided me with not only an exceptional education, but invaluable experience in an urban setting doing something I truly love. No matter where my life takes me, I will always have the skills and knowledge gained from the professors and Sociology Department at UWM.

What are your plans for the future?
For a long time I have been trying to figure out what my future plans are, and I finally feel like I am in a place that allows me to focus on the present. I am passionate about the city of Milwaukee, and I strive to do my best to help open doors to youth who need extra guidance. I continue to learn on a daily basis on how to best handle a variety of situations to better our community. As of now, my hope is that my future will hold some consistency, and allow me to see my efforts of progressing and bettering our youth come to fruition.

Any advice for our current sociology majors?
My advice for the current sociology majors would be to start networking within the sociology department right away. There is a wealth of knowledge within the department and an overwhelming willingness to spread that knowledge so it is important to tap into that. Whether it comes from letters of recommendation, or general guidance through the program, the wisdom and intelligence available to students from the department is rare and should be sought after.
Can You Study an Army in the Laboratory?

In the book chapter, “Can You Study an Army in the Laboratory,” sociologist Morris Zelditch Jr. describes an interesting paradox in our field: the apex of rigorous scientific methodology is the laboratory experiment, yet sociologist rarely make use of it. As a field, sociology is primarily concerned with broad structural and cultural patterns, such as those that make up an army. Formal roles (e.g., sergeant, private) that carry rights and responsibilities (e.g., the private should follow the sergeant’s orders) constitute the army’s structure and culture. These “macro-level” phenomena persist long after the specific individuals who occupy the roles leave and are replaced by other individuals. How can something so big be studied in a small laboratory room?

Our newest faculty member, Professor Celeste Campos-Castillo, is researching big phenomena like these in our new sociology lab, located in Bolton 735. As a sociologist, she is interested in how big phenomena and individuals mutually influence one another. Individuals come face-to-face with broader structural and cultural patterns when they interact with others in groups. When we make a hospital visit, for example, the prestige and respect that our society places onto doctors materializes before our eyes: we rarely interrupt the doctor and may feel guilty if we go off on a tangent when it is our turn to speak. In other words, forming groups in a sociology laboratory is a way to shrink down big phenomena.

Everyday life – such as going to the doctor or joining the army – is far richer than what a laboratory experiment can capture. However, this ability to simplify things is actually an advantage of using the experimental method. We can untangle a number of factors that commonly appear together in everyday life. Sociology laboratory is a way to shrink down big phenomena.

Celeste Campos-Castillo


Cary Costello

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YES, I WANT TO BECOME A FRIEND OF SOCIOLOGY!

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