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## **A Good Walk**

Mark Twain once referred to golf as a 'good walk spoiled'. Anyone who has golfed might share his sentiment. Over the years, first as a graduate student and now as a sociologist, I have always enjoyed attending the many different conferences associated with regional associations. They never felt like work, but instead were a time for dialogue and edification. But as the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association approached I was certain I would feel the way Mark Twain felt about golf. I thought it would be impossible to have a good time with all the responsibilities associated with organizing the conference. Fortunately, I was pleasantly surprised.

The 2009 A-MSA meeting went off without a hitch. The turn-out, though less than average, was still good enough to net us a profit for the year. I must say thanks to everyone who came, participated, and assisted in making this another successful year. Special thanks go to Steve Grice of Mississippi State University, not only for organizing the website, but also in helping provide all the needed files for a seamless transition from the year before. Of course the executive committee was invaluable in keeping me (somewhat) sane and (somewhat) balanced. It was great to see some dear friends such as Dennis Peck of the University of Alabama, and Nicole Carr from the University of South Alabama. Getting to spend a few minutes and get reconnected with Dennis was a treat. And seeing Nicole and her new son, Lorenzo was a lot of fun as well. Unfortunately Lorenzo, at less than a year old messed up his paper presentation as he claimed to not know how to speak. . . . Like we haven't heard that one before.

Congratulations to the students who did a wonderful job on their posters and papers. Part of the A-MSA tradition is great student papers and presentations, and this year was no exception. The winner of the Graduate Student Paper Competition was Mr. Andrew Whitaker from the University of Mississippi. The paper, "Pharmaceutical Advertisements and the (Bio)medicalization of Subjective Experience," analyzed advertisements in the Journal of Medical Education during the years 1952-1958. Andrew was able to demonstrate a link between pharmaceutical companies and the medical profession and suggested an influence on ideas within the medical field. A truly fascinating paper.

Joshua Walker, from Delta State University, won the Undergraduate Student Paper Competition. His paper "Cultural Bias and Environmentalism" was a huge hit in the 'Popular Culture' session. We had to twist his arm a bit to get him to Jacksonville, but once here he presented in a manner that suggested he was far beyond his undergraduate studies. Joshua impressively

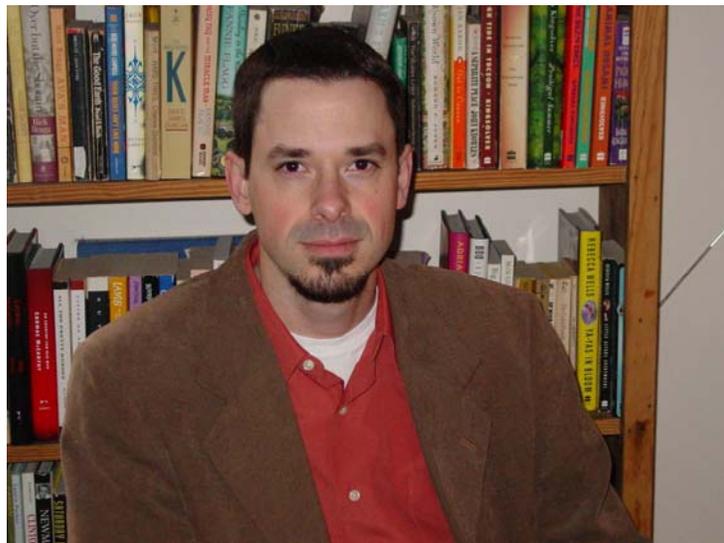
demonstrated the link between the philosophies of environmentalism and egalitarianism.

The winner of the Student Poster Session Competition was Kara Voorhest from Jacksonville State University. Her poster, "Tattooing Gender," was a collection of tattoo images exhibiting the differences between men and women in American society. Kara showed us that, while tattoos were traditionally a masculine characteristic, they have become part of American culture for both genders. All of us here are very proud of Kara and the strides she has made over her academic career. She will be a fine sociologist some day.

Our plenary speaker, Ms. Fran Curry from First Priority of Alabama, gave a rousing articulation on the complementary relationship between the goals of Christianity and that of Sociology. She chose to highlight one of the most famous Sociology majors, Martin Luther King Jr., to remind us that when we put our ideas into practice we literally change the world. It was great to have Fran come and speak, and I am grateful to her for participating.

### **Announcement: the 2010 Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association**

The theme for the 2010 annual meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association is "Sense of Place and the Sociological Imagination." Incoming AMSA President, Dr. John J. Green (Associate Professor of Sociology and Community Development at Delta State University), says that the conference will include a variety of events and activities exploring the ways in which sociologists and other scholars conceptualize and utilize "place" in their theories and analyses. The meeting is scheduled for February 18-19 on the DSU campus in Cleveland, Mississippi. The Program Chair for the 2010 meeting is Deborah Moore, Director of DSU's Center for Community and Economic Development. Submissions are invited on all sociological topics, with formats including paper presentations, posters, panels and workshops. A formal call for abstracts is forthcoming. For more information, contact John at [jgreen@deltastate.edu](mailto:jgreen@deltastate.edu).



### **Some Parting Thoughts**

This year's conference addressed many of the problems and solutions that we face as Sociologists here in the Deep South. At times we could see the stress on each other's faces. Here are some things we discovered in the process:

## Sociology Programs

Two key areas were identified that assisted programs in getting some positive attention from administrators: (1) research grant money; and (2) more majors. The sociology program at Mississippi State University has done a great job gaining research grants that help in funding both faculty, graduate students, and working professionals alike. When administrators see the money the program is generating they tend to look more favorably on the program and department as a whole. Unfortunately, most of the colleges and universities in the two states have not had the opportunity to generate these large grants. At my own university we are encouraged to only write very small grants to provide enough money for our personal research endeavors, and not look beyond that. Given that we do not have graduate students here as well as other colleges and universities, that leaves research grants rarely going over a few thousand dollars. In light of that, the second alternative is to generate more majors.

As I have been proud of stating to anyone who will listen (or at least pretend to), in 2002 we had 49 majors here at Jacksonville State University in Sociology but at the end of last year, 2008, we had 125. This does not include the 200+ Social Work majors in our department either. The two different programs have their own faculty, and neither classes nor faculty overlap. In all practicality, we operate as two separate departments. Some have asked what we do or did to see the increase in majors. Here is what we did: (1) One of the first things was to get involved in the summer orientation program. Since so few students ever come to college planning on majoring in sociology, we saw this as an ample opportunity to get in contact with incoming Freshman and to make an impact. Since trust is a huge issue for students, some quality time with faculty goes a long way in helping students feel comfortable. It was typical for students to eventually become sociology majors because they felt they could relate to us more than many of the other faculty.

(2) We made a concentrated effort to teach courses or to highlight topics in our classrooms that reflected life in the Southeast, so issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and stratification have become a mainstay, with a focus on social justice in general as the theme. With 23% of the student body at JSU African American, we were able to increase the percentage of our majors who are African American to 47%. The subject material resonates with students who have lived and experienced these phenomena. Since the students are interested in the material, we have had the simultaneous benefit of MFAT scores increasing by over 100%. So, the increase in numbers has not had a negative effect on quality of students.

(3) We began to encourage undergraduates to assist in research and presentations. Since 2002 we have had ten student publications with the faculty, with approximately 20 presentations at conferences. Students have presented at the A-MSA meeting, as well as the Mid-South Sociological Association, the Southern Sociological Society, and the Atlantic Coast Pragmatism Association meetings. To some meetings we have brought as many as 12 students with us.

(4) All the faculty have been heavily involved in the Sociology Club and various student organizations on campus. More importantly, faculty typically have attended club meetings. Students wanted to have club meetings off campus, and over the past few years we have met at local pubs where age is not an issue. Given that we are sociologists, we have done our best to be 'social'. Faculty assisted in 'Deviant Night' exercises, participating with students in

breaking norms in public. Also, Dr. Tina Hebert Deshotels has been instrumental in producing The Vagina Monologues the past two years. Our students this past year were the 'stars' of the show over a three night period. These events have kept students from feeling marginalized or isolated from the faculty.

(5) We also have an end of the year celebration. We include AKD awards as well as any other awards during this event. We have it outside, potluck style, informal: students and their families are invited to come. We definitely let our hair down and talk about anything that the wine inspires. In Vinos Veritus. It is a great time: a wonderful way to end the school year, and say 'good-bye' to our Seniors.

(6) A tip from Nicole Carr and the University of South Alabama: talk with faculty from other departments to try and get their majors to enroll in Introduction to Sociology courses as a means of exposure. If we can get students early enough, they typically either major or minor in sociology. I am sure many of you have encountered over the years the Seniors who take our courses and voice sadness that they did not take a sociology course earlier.

Unfortunately, while we have had success with increasing the number of majors, and being recognized by administrators here for that accomplishment, we still lack the kind of support we want. As the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences told me, "sociology has no glitter." He went on to tell me that since sociology does not have an accreditation agency, we end up competing with English and History for limited resources. Therefore, even though our classes average traditionally between 35-40 students, other programs with classes half the size of ours have added faculty. Other programs have agencies that fight for them on their behalf, and these agencies have tremendous influence. So, while there have been many good opportunities for our program, as well as for many other sociology programs in the two states, we continue to struggle. This is terribly frustrating when trying to build and/or maintain a program in the field you love.

Some of the "Deep South" sociology faculty talked about having more 'joint' ventures, where faculty and students from different universities participate in various research or activities. This is still in the infant stage of development, but certainly the advent of new technologies might help us in creating a 'Virtual Sociology Club' that would be available to anyone. We could look into long distance presentations via video conferencing, and other possibilities that could bridge the gap between our schools.

The bottom line is that we do have some great Sociologists here in Alabama and Mississippi. We also have some great students. And there is no shortage of things to study. We should be able to combine our resources to overcome many of the obstacles we face within our programs, departments, and universities.

### **Changes to the Constitution and By-Laws**

For those of you who were at the General Business Meeting, you might be aware that several changes to the Constitution and By-Laws were voted on. Those changes will be outlined in the Fall 2009 Newsletter.



## News from the AMSA

### **Albert Nylander Named Dean of Graduate Studies at Delta State University**

Dr. Albert Nylander III, Professor of Sociology and Community Development at Delta State University, was recently named Dean of Graduate Studies. A longtime member and past President of AMSA, Albert will be leaving his position as a highly successful Chair for the DSU Division of Social Sciences to fill his new role at the university-wide level.

### **Delta State University's John Green Lectures to Students in the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program**

From February 14-18, 2009, Dr. John J. Green and his wife Eleanor visited Cambridge, Massachusetts. John was invited to lecture to students in the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program at the Harvard Law School on the evening of February 17. The title of his presentation was, "Windows to the World: A Primer for Thinking About and Doing Social Research." A mix of traditional lecture and open discussion, John introduced students to frameworks and strategies for using research to inform conflict negotiation and mediation processes. The course he visited was led by Robert Bordone, Stephan Sonnenberg, and Matthew Smith.

The Greens' visit was organized through a partnership between the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program, the Delta Directions Consortium, and the Delta State University Institute for Community-Based Research. Emily Broad, a graduate of Harvard Law School and current Fellow with the Delta Directions Consortium and Mississippi State University's Social Science Research Center, is working to facilitate initiatives focused on the intersections between health and community economic development. Among other activities, her efforts include connecting students from Harvard and DSU to work on real-world projects to improve quality of life in the region. For more information on John's presentation, visit the following website:

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/academics/clinical/hnmcp/ResearchResources.php>.

# Professional Opportunity

## Call for Papers

The A-MSA journal, the A-MSA Online Sociological Review, housed at the University of Mississippi is accepting submissions for publications. Edited by Dr. Gary L. Long, with assistance from Drs. Elise S. Lake, Minjoo Oh, and Ming Tsui, the journal publishes reviewed papers, essays, and comments authored by both faculty and students. One of the purposes of the journal is to encourage faculty-student collaboration at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. By policy, the journal will provide space for undergraduate submissions.

Send manuscripts to:

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## **A-MSA Officers**

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**Open position**

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