Greetings! I hope your new academic year has started off well.

We have had the good fortune of welcoming two new members to our department. One is Kate Meloney, who is the new Director of the University’s Graterford Program. The Graterford Program, started by sociology professor Jim McKenna forty-two years ago, allows men at Graterford prison to take courses from Villanova professors, and ultimately earn a Villanova degree. Since its inception, the Program has had sixty-two graduates. Previously, Professor Tom Arvanites served as Director, on top of his other departmental and teaching responsibilities. He has done a terrific job both overseeing the efficient administration of the Program and significantly expanding its scope. He has left the Program in great shape and well positioned for the future. The hiring of Kate as a full-time Director is a clear statement of the University’s ongoing support for the Program and will allow for its continued advancement. Many thanks to Professor Arvanites for his hard work and welcome Kate!

Students mainly tend to see faculty members in the classroom and so perhaps think of them primarily as teachers. And while we do have excellent teachers, we also have great researchers. Indeed, the two activities are closely related. Our department continues to be quite active, writing and publishing on a variety of sociological and criminological topics. These topics cover racial housing segregation, the impacts of mass incarceration, school discipline, race and higher education, the role of sports in society, and racial identity, among others. Moreover, department members have published their work in top academic journals and university presses.

We highlight the work of two of our colleagues in the newsletter. One is Professor Rick Eckstein, who is writing a book on college sports. The other is Professor Jill McCorkel who together with three other Villanova professors has written a major grant application for a study on human trafficking. Each has contributed a short piece explaining the work and its significance.

Our students have been busy as well in numerous activities. In this issue, senior sociology major Emily Walthouse describes her summer internship at Zappos in Las Vegas, Nevada. Emily mentioned that a key reason that she was selected was knowledge she gained in her methods class. So, study hard!

Finally, I would like to remind students of the Vreeland-Gallagher research support grants available for student research with our faculty members. This is a valuable and unique opportunity, so please consider it. More details are found on the department website.

Good luck with the rest of the semester.

-Dr. Robert DeFina
What Happened in Vegas: My Summer Internship with Zappos.com
- by Emily Walthouse, SOC ’16

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to intern for Zappos.com as a User Experience Research Intern. I used qualitative and quantitative skills learned from my Sociology classes at Villanova to conduct interviews and analyze statistics relevant to users’ experiences with Zappos. The sixteen year-old e-commerce website, famous for its shoe sales and next-day delivery policies, is stationed in Downtown Las Vegas, about a block away from the bright lights of Fremont Street. Needless to say, after living on the east coast for most of my life, living in Las Vegas for 10 weeks provided quite a learning experience, in more ways than I ever could have expected.

Zappos prides itself on its outstanding company culture. One of the company’s core values tells employees to “create fun and a little weirdness,” an idea that is fully embraced by all who work there. During my first week, Zappos welcomed a llama, a hot dog eating contest, and Instagram’s most famous bull dog. I quickly learned that things would only get more fun and even weirder from there.

A lot of my fun for the summer came from living and working with the other interns who came from colleges across the United States. Although we worked in different departments, we were all a part of Zappos’ Summer College Internship Program, which is currently accepting applications for its fifth class of interns. The 28 of us lived together and formed incredible friendships.

Most of the “weirdness” I witnessed had to do with the company’s recent adoption of “holacracy,” an atypical way of distributing power within a company. While most companies operate on a system of bureaucratic hierarchies, with employees responding to bosses who report to their own bosses until the CEO is reached, Zappos recently restructured its inner workings to move toward a system of self-management. Trying to adjust to a nontraditional institution of control was difficult, but extremely exciting. After learning more about holacracy, I came to appreciate and enjoy certain aspects of the policy.

As I move through my senior year, I will carry my experience working at Zappos with me. Most importantly, I will draw upon my time at Zappos to write my Honors Senior Thesis about different organizational structures in the workplace. By looking at Zappos and other businesses through the lens of Sociology, I hope to explore workers’ feelings of alienation and empowerment.

College Athletics and Girls Youth Sports
- by Rick Eckstein

Data from the Aspen Institute and other sources show that kids, especially girls, are dropping out of organized sports at an earlier age, mostly because they are not having fun. Meanwhile, higher education costs are skyrocketing, and colleges are spending an inordinate amount of time and money on marketing campaigns to “brand” their schools with catchy slogans and non-academic amenities. While trends in girls’ youth sports may not seem linked with this so-called “corporatization” of higher education, a little sociological imagination can uncover connections.

I am finishing a book titled Childhood Betrayed: How Intercollegiate Athletics (and Title IX) are Ruining Girls’ Youth Sports. I argue that the increased commercialization, commodification, corporatization, and masculinization of higher education have been mirrored in girls’ youth sports. The primary mechanism is the post-Title IX explosion of women’s varsity athletics programs that is riding the wave of higher education’s obsession with expensive football and men’s basketball teams that are central to its “brand.” Universities systematically grant both financial aid (far less than you think) and admissions advantages (far more than you think) to athletes in order to win, even in sports that generate neither revenue nor community solidarity. This corporatization of higher education and its manifestation in varsity athletics has created “youth sports to college pipelines” in those sports with a significant or expanding women’s intercollegiate footprint. Girls are increasingly playing youth sports not to have fun or build social relationships, but as part of a ten-year college admissions strategy. (College Athletics continues on p. 3)
Million Dollar Grant Proposal on Human Trafficking
- by Dr. Jill McCorkel

This summer, a woman from Texas answered a Craigslist ad for a modeling gig. She was delighted when the ad’s poster, Michael Watts of New Jersey, contacted her with the good news that she had been selected for the job. On the surface, it all seemed legit. Watts even paid for her flight and picked her up at the airport.

She quickly learned that the reality of her newfound circumstances departed dramatically from her expectations. Watts confiscated her cellphone and money, and drove her to a strip club in Port Richmond demanding that she dance. When she refused to strip, other women at the club forcibly removed her clothes and reiterated Watts’ demand.

After three days of forced participation in Philadelphia’s commercial sex trade, she managed to escape from the apartment Watts was holding her in and called the police. Watts was arrested in New Jersey and charged with first-degree human trafficking.

The case against Watts is, from a legal perspective, fairly straightforward. Trafficking has been a felony in New Jersey since 2000 and is broadly defined as holding, recruiting, luring, enticing, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining, by any means, another person to engage in sexual activity or to provide labor or services (NJ C.2C:13-8). This includes doing things like deceiving a person with the promise of a modeling job, taking away her belongings, forcing her to dance in a club, and imprisoning her in an apartment. Where this case takes a turn, however, is in evaluating the behavior of the other women in the club, the ones who forcibly removed the Texas woman’s clothing and later chased after her when she ran away from the apartment. Police and prosecutors in the case acknowledge that the others who forcibly removed the woman’s clothing and later chased after her were part of the prostitution ring and that their participation was likely coerced. So what does this make them... victims or offenders?

On this issue, the laws around trafficking, prostitution, and the commercial sex trade are decidedly murky. When police, prosecutors, and judges encounter people engaged in the commercial sex trade, how do they determine if their participation is coerced or voluntary? Is there a moment when someone goes from being a trafficking victim to a participant as prosecutors are suggesting the other young women are?

In May of 2014, I collaborated on a million dollar grant proposal to the National Institute of Justice that aims to study just that. Along with Michelle Dempsey, Associate Dean of Villanova’s School of Law, Shea Rhodes, Director of the Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation, and Katina Sawyer, Assistant Professor of Psychology, we are planning to conduct an extensive study of the commercial sex industry in Philadelphia. Our goal is to understand how people enter into the sex trade and whether and to what extent coercion shapes their participation. We also want to understand how legal actors, particularly police and judges, interpret laws around trafficking and prostitution, and how these interpretations influence street encounters, arrest decisions, and courtroom outcomes.

College Athletics (continued from p. 2)

The book draws on sports participation data, census data, ethnographic observations, and over 100 interviews to examine four sports with very different pipelines: soccer, field hockey, figure skating/ice hockey, and ultimate frisbee. Interviews provide the bulk of the data and they include players, parents, league officials, coaches, university athletic directors, sporting goods retailers, and many others.

On the supply side of these pipelines, individuals and companies have a significant financial stake in businesses and services that will supposedly translate into a coveted college admissions advantage (or athletic scholarship). On the demand side, girls and their families are institutionally misled and misinformed about the likelihood of obtaining these advantages. Since non-wealthy families are unable to access these pipelines, they are unable to enjoy any of their payoffs, regardless of their exaggeration. Sports prowess has become an affirmative action program for the relatively rich and decidedly not (as conventional wisdom maintains) a mechanism for poorer families to knock down higher education’s financial obstacles. If we want to make youth sports more fun and accessible we need to address the current state of higher education. It may also reduce the cost of a college degree.

ASA Conference Presentations

Drs. Rory Kramer and Brianna Remster presented a paper titled “Surveillance that Avoids or Engages? Understanding the Relationship Between Criminal Justice Contact and Institutional Involvement.”

Dr. Melissa Hodges presented a paper titled "All in the Family: A Couple's Approach to Understanding Parental Wage Gaps Within and Across Households."

Check out our departmental website to view a video of the keynote speech from the 2015 Mid-Atlantic Undergraduate Social Research Conference given by recent Villanova graduate, Kenny Tsang ’13
Congratulations to Dr. Brianna Remster who won the Junior Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching for 2015! This award is given to faculty who have been in a full time position for less than seven years and have developed extraordinarily effective teaching approaches.

Welcome Denise Wilson!
I am thrilled to join the Department of Sociology and Criminology as Director of the Graterford Program. This position fulfills my desire to help break down barriers that have made obtaining a quality education nearly impossible for incarcerated individuals.

My passion for social justice and working with inmates began at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. I helped develop a creative writing program for incarcerated females in a rural Oregon jail. These women were languishing in a men’s institution and were not provided programing or access to the library because moving them securely would have been difficult. This inspired me to research rights and laws regarding incarcerated females and became my Senior Thesis Project.

This led to a Master of Law and Social Policy and a Master of Social Service from Bryn Mawr College School of Social Work and Social Research. While in graduate school I interned at the Pennsylvania Prison Society where I worked with a committee to successfully overturn Pennsylvania’s law requiring the shackling of female inmates during labor and birth.

In a pursuit towards understanding the many facets and perspectives of mass incarceration I became the Director of Families of Murder Victims with the Anti-Violence Partnership located within the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office. We helped families navigate homicide trial proceedings and acted as liaisons between the Assistant District Attorneys and the families of victims. This helped me to understand that most of the families I worked with had already been deeply involved with the criminal justice system and had also sat on the defendants’ side of the courtroom.

Following this I taught incarcerated individuals residing in the Philadelphia Prison System, Chester County, and George W. Hill County, and George W. Hill Prison System, Chester County. I managed the Sexually Transmitted Infection Treatment and Counseling Program within George W. Hill Correctional Facility where I was a strong advocate for women’s reproductive healthcare. I used data to demonstrate the importance of testing men and women for sexually transmitted infections. I successfully changed prison policy to go beyond pregnancy tests and to test and treat women for sexually transmitted infections.

My commitment to creating a safe learning space for those inside prison walls has been developed over a fifteen year career dedicated to social justice. I am honored to be part of the Villanova community which has created a program that strongly demonstrates its Augustinian mission to provide service for others. I am thrilled to grow the Graterford Program with the help of the Villanova community and those who are served on the inside.

When not in prison I can be found exploring the outdoors on foot, boat, or bicycling. I am also an avid cook, baker, and canner. I have an open door policy and encourage you to come by my office and say hello!

Welcome Kate Meloney!
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