A Message from the Chair

Villanova offers our students many opportunities to engage in "experiential learning." This issue features articles by two of our seniors who are making the most of these possibilities. I want to thank Jennifer Clarke and Brianne Orner for their contributions. Jennifer became interested in the State Correctional Institute when she met and talked with inmates during a class visit; she contacted the PA Prison Society after learning about internship opportunities in another class. Brianne is participating in an internship program made available by the Villanova Law School, which taps into her bilingual talents to help people in need. As their insightful editorials reveal, a little extra effort goes a long way in enriching one's college experience.

The Department of Sociology works hard to develop internship opportunities, and we approve over 90% of the proposal applications received from students. I encourage you to speak to Dr. Waegel or me regarding internship opportunities.

On April 20th, students presented research from their Theory or Methods class at the Mid-Atlantic Undergraduate Social Research Conference. Not only is this a great item to include on applications, but it also gives the professors writing your recommendations something extra to address.

More importantly, it is a wonderful experience—every year, the 15-30 students who participate are glad they did. We will keep our majors posted about the deadlines and details of this spring’s conference.

If you ever wondered how sociologists and criminologists actually conduct their field research—on the street, in jails, etc.—be sure to take note of Dr. McCorkel’s article on urban ethnography. Being a professor, after all, isn’t simply about teaching and holding office hours. Good luck with the remainder of your semester and feel free to contact me with your internship questions.

—Dr. Tom Arvanites

Sociology in Action—Research in Prisons and on the “Street”

by Dr. Jill McCorkel

Since arriving at Villanova, the question that I’m asked most frequently by both students and colleagues is how I do my research. I should say, by way of introduction, that I am a sociologist who studies how criminal justice policy, particularly how the recent War on Drugs impacts urban poverty and exacerbates various forms of race and gender inequality. To investigate these topics, I spend a considerable amount of time in prisons, on "the street", and, on occasion, in areas where people are buying, selling, and using crack cocaine and other illegal drugs.

This is a type of research known as “urban ethnography.” The purpose of ethnography is to investigate how larger social structures such as culture, law, and the economy impact people’s daily lives, and also to analyze how they make

—Cont. on page 4
Did you know?

2,186,230 prisoners were held in Federal, State, and local jails in 2005—an increase of 2.6% from 2004.

There were an estimated 488 prison inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents -- up from 411 in 1995.

The number of women under the jurisdiction of State or Federal prison authorities has increased 3.4% to 106,174 from 2004.

--U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005

It is estimated that some 75% of incarcerated women are mothers, primarily of children under the age of 18. This affects over 300,000 children.

--The Institute on Women & Criminal Justice, 2004

6% of women are pregnant when they enter prison, yet most states make no special arrangements for the care of newborns.

--National Women’s Law Center, 2006

Working for the Incarcerated—The Experience and Rewards

By Jennifer J. Clark
Jennifer Clark is a Criminal Justice major in the Class of 2006.

During my first semester at Villanova, I visited SCI-Graterford, a maximum-security prison, with my criminal justice class. After speaking with several inmates with life sentences, I learned of their life stories and experiences with the legal system (most of which were negative and involved claims of inadequate legal representation). Moreover, I became interested in discovering the realities of incarceration and many of the gross injustices in our criminal justice system. Thus, when I learned of a project that involved a more humane treatment of inmates, I immediately wanted to become involved.

Through the Pennsylvania Prison Society, which is a social justice organization that advocates on behalf of prisoners, formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, I became a volunteer in the Family Resource Center (FRC) in SCI-Graterford. Some of the goals of the program include: facilitating positive visits between inmates and their families; teaching appropriate interactions between parents and children while improving parenting skills; and increasing the self-esteem of both inmates and their family members.

During visitation periods, inmates and their families participate in many different activities and programs the FRC staff organizes, such as Family Fun Day, holiday events, and various learning activities/crafts (many of which teach about different cultures and promote an understanding of all types of people). We believe these activities not only promote fun and positive visits, but also provide moments of normalcy in an unpleasant and distressing environment. The families are extremely grateful not only for the work and effort of the staff, but also for our genuine support, humane treatment and compassion for their families and relatives incarcerated.

The FRC program is much needed in a time when society easily forgets and/or stigmaizes the millions who are incarcerated. I am grateful to have had this rewarding experience and hope that others will realize that prisoners must be held accountable for their actions, but also, society must recognize the humanity in all individuals and advocate for restorative justice. Hopefully, similar programs will be developed to promote justice and compassion for all individuals, including those incarcerated.

Speaking of Internships... ¿Sabes hablar Español?

By Brianne Orner
Brianne is a Sociology major in the Class of 2007.

Four years ago, the Legal Clinic at Villanova Law School noticed a remarkable trend. The clinic, which provides free legal service to indigent individuals, was facing a surge in clients who spoke languages other than English. The clinic’s administrators reached out to the under-graduate Department of Classical and Modern Languages, which offered Spanish-language interpreters through an academic internship program.

In Pennsylvania, the court system is rarely required to provide interpreters for LEP (Limited English Pro- ficiency) clients. In the civil court system, an interpreter is almost never provided. As a result, clients without the means to hire personal interpreters are often forced to enlist family members, often children, to translate for them during the legal filing and interview process, and in court. The Villanova Legal Clinic’s interpreter program has grown to be able to provide undergraduate student interpreters to translate in the interview and filing process for Spanish-language clients, and is often able to secure the assistance of professional translators for court proceedings.

In addition to the work of the clinic and its interpreters in court and in the clinic’s office setting in Garey Hall, student lawyers and interpreters undertake "outreach" projects. They travel to farms in Pennsylvania that employ migrant workers, and offer a presentation program intended to make those workers aware of their rights as workers, including Workmen’s Compensation, fair wages, and safe working environments. Interpreters assist with the translation of worker questions, and act as cultural liaisons between workers and student lawyers.

Many Villanova students are unaware that a legal clinic of this type exists within the Villa- nova School of Law. The clinic is a fully-functioning law firm, and offers free services to clients experiencing issues related to taxation, asylum or immigration, civil justice, and work-related issues. With the help of the interpreter internship program, tireless student lawyers, and a highly dedicated faculty and staff, the Villanova Legal Clinic is able to legally aid some of those members of our local community who are most in need.

Congratulations to our Honored Students
Best of Luck With all of Your Future Endeavors!

The John C. Hughes Medallion of Excellence Award in Sociology
Diane L. Coffey

The Edwin Sutherland Medallion of Excellence Award in Criminal Justice
Dayna M. Zatina

The Lawrence J. McGarry Award for Academic Excellence with a Commitment to Social Justice
Diane L. Coffey
Caitlin A. Sheehy

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics are the fastest-growing ethnic group in this country. Between the years of 1990 and 2000 the Hispanic population grew by 58%, representing approximately 33 million persons nationwide.

--Janet Powell, CSW

(One) report — Lost Opportunities: The Reality of Latinos in the U.S. Criminal Justice System — found that Hispanics represented 13% of the U.S. population in 2000, but accounted for 31% of those incarcerated in the federal criminal justice system. Hispanics have one chance in six being confined in prison during their lifetimes, the authors found.

--Michigan State University Press Release, 2004
sense of their lives and the world at large. As an ethnographer, I spend as much time as I can “hanging out” with my research subjects in the social settings they occupy. This, of course, is not the sort of research that one enters into lightly. The rules of interaction on “the street” and in prison are nuanced and complex, perhaps more so than other social settings, because the stakes are so high in both an economic and legal sense. Many of the men and women I interview supplement their income through drug sales and related “hustles,” and I am always aware that a misstep on my part could cost them their income or their freedom. I observe what they say and what they do, supplementing this with more formal interviews. Since I am an “outsider,” I never enter a neighborhood or attempt to interview potential subjects cold. Instead, I rely on networks of informants. When I develop a good relationship with a research subject, I ask them to introduce me to other people who they think would be useful for my research project. In this way, I enjoy a sort of sponsorship on the street and in prison that accords me a greater degree of trust than I would enjoy if I tried to approach subjects on my own.

I have been doing this research since 1995, and in that time I have spent thousands of hours as a participant observer in prisons in Delaware and Illinois, as well as in impoverished Philadelphia neighborhoods like Strawberry Mansion, Kensington, and Hunting Park. I have interviewed hundreds of men and women involved in the drug economy and over the last ten years, I’ve managed to maintain good relationships with a number of my earliest informants.

In all my experience, I have never been robbed, injured, or seriously threatened while conducting research. I attribute this to the fact that I always treat my informants with respect, avoid making judgments about the choices they make, and am honest about who I am and why I am interested in talking to them. Although I often think warnings and claims about poor neighborhoods are exaggerated, I recognize that there are dangerous aspects to my work. Nonetheless, I believe that it is vitally important to capture the impact of public policy on those whom it targets. It is critical to give voice to those who are routinely denied opportunities to speak.

Dr. McCorkel's current research is titled "The Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration for Families and Neighborhoods." It has received funding support from the Center for Research on Families at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and the Villanova Summer Research Grant Program. This three-year study will conclude in August 2009.