The start of the spring semester has certainly been challenging. The snow, ice and rain we have experienced have disrupted our personal and academic lives in many and sometimes in serious ways. I hope that everyone has been bearing up well and taking care.

In this issue of Interactions, we are pleased to include essays by three of our majors. Jessica Dittmer, a criminology major, tells us about the important role that the department has played in her life through her course work, professors and internships. Kenny Tsang explains how his sociology and criminology courses have directly helped him in his current position as a research associate, as he writes and researches about the employment, education and economic prospects of young college graduates. Jessica Flynn, a current sociology major, describes her experience studying sociology in Galway. We greatly appreciate their input and ongoing support for the department.

For those unfamiliar, the Conference brings together undergraduate students from across the Mid-Atlantic region to present and discuss their original research. Students from all social science disciplines are welcome. The event is an all day affair and will take place on Friday, April 11, 2014. Students can refer to our departmental website as well as recent emails for more information about the Conference. I would also urge students to contact the department’s faculty members about the opportunity. They can offer guidance and support regarding participation. And, I encourage all our students to attend, even if only as observers. It’s a great way to support fellow majors and to see the many significant questions that sociology and criminology can illuminate.

We are very excited to announce that we have hired a new gender scholar, Melissa Hodges. Melissa is finishing her Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Melissa will begin in the fall 2014 semester and will be teaching courses related to gender and family policy, along with Introduction to Sociology.

As always, we welcome feedback and correspondence from our current students and our alumni. We would especially appreciate help from our alumni in mentoring our students and providing internship opportunities. And, be sure to let us know if we can do anything to help you.

All the best for the remainder of the semester!

Bob DeFina, Chair
My Professors and Internships Opened Doors

-by Jessica Dittmer, Criminology ’13

As I sat in the Connelly Center at my computer selecting my second semester classes of freshman year, I was glancing at the numerous free electives I could choose from as an undeclared liberal arts student with no real direction when I heard another student mention criminal justice. I quickly searched “criminal justice” in the search bar of majors to choose from, and before I knew it, I was signed up for Professor Hannon’s introductory class. I still remember many of the readings and lessons, but most importantly, I found my passion; in fact, I have not taken a single class in my major that I did not find interesting and educational.

The Criminology and Sociology Department has also assisted me in taking my learning to a hands-on level. During my three and a half years at Villanova, I have had five internships across two continents. After only one semester as a criminal justice major, the department helped me attain an internship at a law firm called JD Spicer & Co. in London, England. This experience threw me into real life before the age of eighteen where I assisted in a kidnapping case, interviewed prisoners, and attended trial at the Royal Courts of Justice. That same summer I also had the pleasure of interning for the Oakland Police Department in New Jersey, which hired me because of my impressive experience abroad. Through the connections that I made at this department, I was able to set up internships for the following summer with the Bergen County Superior Court in the Family Division as well as an assistant to Holly Schepisi, an assemblywoman in New Jersey.

As my Villanova education progressed, I began to take more advanced classes, such as “Criminology” and “Victimization,” both taught by Professor Welch. Professor Welch has not only been an outstanding professor, but a mentor and role model as well. I had the honor of being Professor Welch’s teaching assistant, which taught me both leadership skills and a different perspective of the material. Not only did she allow me to pursue new roles on campus, she has encouraged me to follow my dreams and apply to internships that seemed unfathomable as an undergraduate as well. Last October, I applied online for an internship position for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Right before Christmas break I was sitting in the dining hall when I got the good news: I had an interview with the FBI. I drove to New York City to complete the interview, and a few short days later, I found out that my dreams had become a reality. The ten-week program during the summer was like nothing I could begin to put into words. Nevertheless, interning for the FBI demonstrates how much I have learned here at Villanova. My expanded knowledge of the criminal justice system, law, types of crimes and victims, and theories about the origins of such items all have allowed me to flourish at the Bureau, which is where I hope to build a successful career in the future.

Not only has the Criminology and Sociology Department helped me figure out my passion on a professional level, it has also allowed me to engage in service where I have been lucky enough to help the greater Villanova community. As part of Professor McCorkel’s class entitled “Punishment and Society,” I attended a program in Germantown, PA called “Sisters Returning Home” where students have the opportunity to work with recent female ex-offenders. This experience was one of the most eye-opening and rewarding programs during my Villanova career. I am able to see a different perspective of the criminal justice system, meet wonderful women who teach me so much, and work alongside them, whether it be practicing for their GEDs or raising money to gain enough turkeys for local families during Thanksgiving. Overall, I could not be more thankful at my decision to take “Introduction to Criminal Justice” due to it leading to such important and life-defining moments.
Studying Sociology in Ireland
–by Jessica Flynn, Sociology ’15

Studying abroad has always been a dream of mine, and when I decided to travel to Galway, Ireland this past summer, I could not have been more excited. Looking at the course selection guide, I knew immediately that I wanted to take a sociology course entitled *Irish Society*. I felt that studying my major in another country would give me a chance to see just how different American society is from others around the world. I knew that, as a sociology major, my main priority in my studies abroad would be to get an understanding of the people and the society that I found myself in. I was excited to enter a new place, filled with new ideas, social norms, and expectations.

On day one, I fell in love with my sociology course. For me, that feeling reconfirmed to me that I was truly in the right field and taking the right path in life. The course taught me so much, especially because the professor had been born in the United States and made many comparisons between her life in the U.S. and Ireland. Overall, I was surprised to discover how different day-to-day life in Ireland is when compared to my experience in the U.S., as that was not something I expected. Living in Ireland for just six weeks also taught me that the country is making huge progress in many areas such as reproductive issues, racial inequities, and legislative initiatives. Through all of my assignments, group projects, and observations, the most important lesson I learned is that each society is truly different, and that it is extremely important to always take an objective lens when studying other cultures. Overall, my experience allowed me to gain a greater understanding of society in a global context and I look forward to using the knowledge I gained in Ireland to supplement my studies here at Villanova.

Come to the Conference!
–by Dr. Brian Jones

Even after twenty years, the words still sting.

One of my best students at the time sat down during office hours and looked me dead in the eye. “Dr. Jones,” he said, “I need to get more out of this major.”

At first, I was shocked. He had taken our most advanced courses and received a string of A’s. It stung me to think a star student thought the sociology program was not rigorous enough.

But that wasn’t it. After considerable discussion, his point became clear: he wanted to actually use sociology for something other than getting good grades.

Ever since that day I have been on a bit of a crusade to get students to do something real with their sociological knowledge, mainly, to conduct original research and present it in a conference setting.

This semester, that setting will be right here on campus on April 11. We would like you to attend as a presenter or attender, preferably both. Student presenters simply need to register by March 24 – our departmental website (socandcrim.villanova.edu) displays all the information you’ll need to register and get ready for the conference. Aside from the obvious benefits for your résumé, the positive feedback I get about the conference experience takes all the sting out of my former student’s words.

So: have you done enough essay tests, quizzes, précis, journal entries and comparisons of Marx and Weber? Do something real with your sociological knowledge: come to the conference.
My Courses Set The Foundation For Future Success
- by Kenneth C. Tsang, Criminal Justice ’13

Like so many graduating seniors, in the few months before commencement I was consumed by anxiety and uncertainty about my future after leaving Villanova. I had heard it from my friends, family, and even my professors: The job market was tough, and my liberal arts degree wasn’t exactly going to put me ahead of the curve. After many failed attempts at securing an offer from prestigious graduate schools, I began sending out more job applications than I can even remember. After many unanswered cover letters and e-mails saying “we decided to go with a different candidate,” I finally landed a job as a research associate at the National Association of Colleges and Employers in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania – about an hour north of Philadelphia.

My position involves conducting data analysis using SPSS as well as researching and writing about a variety of topics related to the employment, education, and economic prospects of young college graduates. My experience as a student of sociology undoubtedly put me in an advantageous position. We are taught to recognize when arguments aren’t logical, when statistics and opinions just don’t make sense, and when you are being presented with information that is simply not right. In addition, while they are perhaps the most unpopular components of many classes in our department, research projects and term papers that require any combination of literature reviews, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and sociological interpretations are what can transform students into highly skilled activists, researchers, writers, and practitioners. I encourage students in the department to refine their abilities in these areas and not waste the opportunity to excel in required courses and to take advantage of the multitude of electives than can turn them into lovers of knowledge and, from a practical point of view, attractive job applicants.

As my boss puts it, I had a certain “intellectual curiosity” that is more important than practical skills that could be developed on-the-job. A love of knowledge cannot be taught to someone, but can only be gradually developed through both opportunity and perseverance. The flexibility I had at Villanova allowed me to take almost one and a half times as many sociology and criminal justice courses than was required to earn the degree. I also was able to pursue other interests in rhetorical communication and complete a summer research fellowship through the Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships. In combination, these experiences provided me with the opportunity to cultivate stronger skills in effective and clear communication, to understand the effects of misinformation, and to accumulate knowledge not simply to know something, but rather to do something.

I wish you all good luck as you complete your course work and move on into graduate education and the workforce.