A Message from the Chair

Greetings to all! It’s hard to believe that it’s midterm already. I hope that the semester has gone well so far and will continue so throughout.

There is a lot of great news to report. To begin, the department welcomed its newest professor, Brianna Remster, who holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Penn State and specializes in criminology. Second, Prof. Jill McCorkel has just had her first book, “Breaking Women,” published by NYU Press. Finally, the diligent efforts of Profs. Tom Arvanites and Jill McCorkel have produced a grant from the Sunshine Lady Foundation for $110,640 dollars. The money will be used over the next two years to double the number of courses that Villanova offers in its B.A. program for Graterford Prison inmates. Congratulations to Jill and Tom for these significant achievements. You can read more about these accomplishments in this issue of Interactions.

Speaking of grants, you might recall that the department received funds from sociology grad Carolyn Everson, who is now a top executive at Facebook (see what your degree can do!). Carolyn has agreed to broaden the use of that money to support sociology and criminology students who would like to work closely with faculty members on their research. The department is able to offer seven grants of $1,000 for the academic year. There is a competitive selection process, and interested students should contact faculty members soon for details and to explore possible opportunities.

The department is currently engaged in a faculty search for a specialist in the sociology of gender. We hope to hire someone for the 2014-15 academic year, so keep your fingers crossed.

Several of our alums, both from sociology and criminology, participated in a recent mentoring and networking session sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The students were extremely grateful and found the session very rewarding. We always welcome the help and input of our alums, so if you would like to help our students in some way, please don’t hesitate to contact me. And as always, be sure to check our comprehensive website and to like us on Facebook.

All the best,
Dr. Robert DeFina

On Breaking Women
- by Dr. Jill McCorkel

My new book, Breaking Women: Gender, Race, and the New Politics of Imprisonment, is based on ethnographic research I collected in a state prison for women during the height of the War on Drugs. Although women are generally not regarded as the primary targets of the drug war, tougher drug laws, aggressive law enforcement practices, and restrictions on judicial discretion quickly rendered them collateral combatants. (continues on p.4)
Introducing Professor Brianna Remster

Brianna Remster is excited to be a member of the department and Villanova community. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Penn State. Her primary teaching and research interests are in the areas of crime and deviance, punishment and inequality, and the life course.

Professor Remster’s research agenda consists of two main lines of inquiry. The first examines how incarceration affects individuals, families, and communities. The second investigates correlates of criminal behavior over the life course, specifically mental health and civic engagement to date. Her dissertation research connects incarceration with an extreme form of inequality and residential instability: homelessness. Using data from Pennsylvania’s prisons and Philadelphia’s homeless shelters, she examines the long term risk of homelessness among individuals leaving prison. She finds that the reintegration process for ex-inmates is lengthier and more complex than previous work has appreciated. Other ongoing research examines the influence of various types of adolescent volunteering on later criminal behavior.

Having attended the University of Dayton for her undergraduate degree, a Marianist Catholic institution, Villanova’s emphases on social justice and service made it an especially appealing position to Professor Remster. She also believes she benefitted greatly from the opportunity to work closely with faculty at Dayton and hopes to provide similar opportunities to Villanova students. This fall she is teaching Criminology at ‘Nova. If she does not cross paths with you in the classroom, she is looking forward to meeting you in the halls of St. Augustine Center soon.

Professor Remster is a native of the Cleveland area. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and cooking. Remster and her husband are looking forward to exploring all that Philadelphia has to offer, focusing on one of their favorite pastimes—food! They are also avid Dayton Flyers fans (their alma mater) and are excited to cheer on ‘Nova now too. Go Wildcats!

Upcoming Murals Tour in Philadelphia

The department is sponsoring a tour of Philadelphia’s celebrated murals on October 25 from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm. The tour will showcase several murals sponsored by the City’s Department of Human Services in conjunction with inmates from SCI-Graterford Prison or offenders in rehabilitation enrolled in The Guild program of the Mural Arts Program (for more information, visit www.muralarts.org). The first hour of the tour focuses on the Restorative Justice murals while the second hour showcases a variety of themes, including social justice, historical figures, landscapes, community engagement, and more. The tour will be fascinating in its own right, and will raise numerous questions and issues related to students’ courses of study. Several faculty members will also be taking the tour. Interested students should contact and sign up with Ms. Mary Ann Hostler in the department office.
Social Justice and the Arts
- by Dr. Gay Strickler

My new course this semester, Social Justice and the Arts, is one that I have been thinking about for a long time. Thanks to the privilege of serving as a Visiting Faculty Member in Peace and Justice for the past two years, I was given the opportunity to both create and teach the course, and have it cross-listed as an offering in our department. I have always loved the arts and have been fortunate enough to have had many opportunities to enjoy them. I was also aware of the research which has been done on the correlation between early exposure to the arts and later academic achievement. Unfortunately, the slow, but inexorable disappearance of the arts from many schools, especially poor schools, seems to fly in the face of this positive relationship, particularly for those students who cannot afford to engage in the arts on a private basis.

The apparent lack of social justice inherent in this phenomenon led me to consider how an examination of the arts in general could elucidate various aspects of social justice. I was not disappointed. The arts provide a vast laboratory for the study of gender, racial and disability equality, while a look at the business end of the culture industry has proved to have much to reveal in this context. The ethics of public art and the role of the arts in social healing and restorative justice are also examples of the fruitfulness of an inquiry into the arts. I hope that by the end of the semester, my current class will have enjoyed the subject as much as I have!

New Funds for Postsecondary Education at Graterford Prison

For the last 40 years, Villanova University has partnered with the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Graterford for the benefit of both the inmates and our students. Each year, students from selected courses have an opportunity to tour the facility and meet with four to six inmates in a classroom. On two occasions, nearly two dozen students spent a Saturday afternoon running laps in the prison yards with approximately 200 inmates to raise money for “at risk” youth. Since 2007, 96 students from a variety of majors have travelled to SCI-Graterford on a weekly basis for the entire semester to provide one-on-one literacy training to an inmate. (This program is run by the Office of Service Learning under the direction of Ms. Noreen Cameron).

In turn, Villanova offers college courses (usually 2-3 per semester) at SCI-Graterford for selected inmates. Since 1991, 54 inmates have completed an Associate’s or Bachelor’s Degree. These students generally take 1-2 classes per semester. It usually takes a minimum of 12 years to earn a Bachelor’s Degree. (Villanova is one of at least 8 colleges or universities that offer these programs). We are sometimes asked why “we do this?” and the answer is easy: It is consistent with Catholic Social Teaching. In the Statement on Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice (November 2000), the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops wrote that “more prisons with too little education do not truly reflect Christian values” and programs in prison “such as education that reduce recidivism benefit society and help offenders reintegrate into society.” Last month, the Sunshine Lady Foundation (founded by Ms. Doris Buffet) contributed $110,640 to expand the program over the next two years. The inmates at SCI-Graterford and we at Villanova are very grateful for their support.

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Plus, check out our Research & Writing Tools section, designed to assist students with collecting data, writing research papers, and citing sources!

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The BRIDGE Society of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences is sponsoring a Mentoring & Networking Event
November 6, 2013
6:00pm-8:00pm, Garey Hall Cafe
VIP Mentors Student Panel

This event will feature a group of experienced Villanova interns who have or are currently participating in an internship. They will share advice and wisdom with the audience.

Sponsored by the Office for Undergraduate Students
as.internship@villanova.edu
Registration is required.

Upcoming Panels:
10/24/13 from 5-6pm
11/21/13 from 5-6pm

On Breaking Women
(continued from p. 1)

By century’s end, dramatic increases in the number of women behind bars brought women’s prisons around the country to the brink of chaos. Most faced severe overcrowding problems, recurrent budget crises, and political pressures to “get tough.” The prison I studied had more prisoners than beds and was faced with a series of inmate-initiated lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of overcrowding. It proved to be a crucial moment in the history of this prison. What initially began as a crisis over resources deepened into a crisis of meaning. Administrators and line staff struggled to reconcile the prison’s legacy of paternalism and reform with the rising incidence of institutional disorder and mounting external pressure to adopt technologies of control already in use in men’s prisons.

In the wake of these crises, new strategies of control began to emerge in the prison. However, these strategies were not replicas of the “get tough” practices appearing in men’s prisons. Women’s prisons, like men’s, abandoned rehabilitation in favor of more punitive tactics, but the tactics they adopted were guided by assumptions about gender and race. My primary aim, then, in undertaking a study of a women’s prison during this period was to understand how punishment, in terms of its constitutive logic and practices, changed and to document the implications of these changes for prisoners, line staff, and administrators. As the handful of ethnographic studies of men’s prisons made clear, the “get tough” movement not only changed who gets sent to prison, but also how punishment gets enacted therein. How these changes impacted the institution of the women’s prison and prisoners themselves is the subject of my book.

This semester, I’ve assigned the book as required reading in my Punishment & Society course. The course explores the sociological significance of punishment (why do we punish, what forms does punishment take, and what are the consequences for civil society) and considers the social and political ramifications of mass incarceration and “get tough” sentencing policies. In having students review the data and arguments I present in the book, I am hopeful that they will be able to evaluate contemporary punishment policies from at least three angles. First, we will consider how abstract criminal justice policies impact concrete practices and ideologies within the prison system. How, for example, do state actors interpret and implement these policies? Second, what are the consequences of these policies on prisoners and their families? Do changes in how we punish increase public safety and reduce the likelihood that women will commit additional crimes upon their release? Finally, the book invites students to analyze prison as a gendered institution. For this, I pair my book with Total Confinement, an ethnographic study of control units in a men’s maximum security prison. Students analyze how and to what extent punishment is differently enacted across each institution and consider how gender informs these distinctions.

Note: The photo for this book cover was taken by Dr. McCorkel and the model is alumna Shericka Ward, class of 2012.