Greetings to all. I hope that your semester has been progressing well.

The department is thrilled to welcome two new members this fall – Dr. Meredith Bergey and Dr. Glenn Bracey. Dr. Bergey specializes in medical sociology, while Dr. Bracey’s expertise is in race and social movements. They are each teaching courses in their respective fields. This issue of Interactions has articles that introduce you to them. I encourage you to stop by to say hello and wish them well as they start their new careers at Villanova.

Several professors in our department will be on sabbatical this academic year, taking time to concentrate on research projects. Professor Jill McCorkel will be gone for the year, doing a fascinating cross-country study of the interaction between penal systems and families of incarcerated members. Professor Melissa Hodges is on a junior sabbatical this semester pursuing her research on gender inequalities in the workplace. She will return in spring. Professor Allison Payne, who was recently promoted to full professor, will be out during the spring semester, as mentioned in a previous issue of Interactions. She plans to work on two studies related to deviance in schools. Congratulations to Allison on the promotion, and good luck to all with your important work.

Congratulations also to Professor Rick Eckstein, who earlier this year published a new book titled How College Athletics Are Hurting Girls’ Sports: The Pay-to-Play Pipeline (Rowman and Littlefield). The book is a sociological study of youth sports and the impact they are having on the lives and possibilities of the people involved, especially girls.

The current issue also has articles by two of our majors, Anna Dalcortivo and Noelle Gambale. Anna, a sociology and criminology double major, has had the opportunity to assist Professor McCorkel with her aforementioned study. Part of the work concerns the penal system in Ireland, and Anna spent time there with Professor McCorkel last summer, helping to interview various people involved in the system, including administrators and incarcerated individuals. As you will see, it was an incredible experience. It is worth emphasizing that the department has a very research-active faculty. Our professors are investigating a wide range of significant social issues, and publishing their work in top journals and academic presses. I would encourage you to explore the possibility of assisting a professor with their work as Anna did. It’s a chance to apply the essential knowledge you have been acquiring, to advance your analytical skills and to see first hand the relevance of sociology and criminology to real world concerns.

Service experiences can be another way to complement your studies. Noelle Gambale, a criminology major, writes about her time tutoring students at Graterford Prison. Graterford is the largest maximum-security prison in Pennsylvania, and Villanova is involved in education there in several ways. One is PLP, the Prison Literacy Program, in which Villanova students help Graterford students improve their reading and math skills. In many cases, they are striving to pass the GED. Service such as Noelle’s is not only valuable in its own right, but also promotes critical reflection on material learned in the classroom about the criminal justice system.

Enjoy reading Interactions, good luck with the rest of the semester, and please let me know if I can help you in any way.

- Dr. Robert DeFina
Welcome Dr. Meredith Bergey!

I am very excited to join the Department of Sociology and Criminology. With four alumni in my immediate family, I am also thrilled to become a part of the Villanova community that is so near and dear to our hearts. This position will provide a fantastic opportunity to pursue my research into the social dimensions of health, health care, and health policy while providing the perfect platform for teaching and mentoring students in these and other sociological topics.

My current research agenda focuses on social determinants of mental health; the globalization of medical conditions; and health coaching as an adjunct or alternative to medicine. These interests permeate my teaching as well, where I try to inspire students to take action to create a more just and equitable health care system, something which aligns well with Villanova’s emphases on community service and social justice. During my previous post at the University of Virginia, I mentored students in developing a health intervention program for vulnerable populations. We partnered with staff at a local clinic to help address socioeconomic determinants of health by linking patients to community-based resources. I look forward to participating in the vibrant service-oriented community at Villanova.

Other research includes the changing roles and responsibilities for inpatient nursing teams after the introduction of health information technology; an analysis of World Trade Center Cough as a case of “stalled medicalization;” and a transnational volume entitled ADHD in Global Perspective: Social Dimensions of Diagnosis and Treatment in 16 Countries which will be published in early 2018.

I deeply enjoy teaching and mentoring and seek to engage students in critical thinking, from different angles, about complex health issues. My multidisciplinary background in sociology and social policy (PhD, Brandeis and the Heller School for Social Policy and Management), medical anthropology (MSc, Oxford), public health (MPH, Brown), and biology/community health (BA, Brown), helps me achieve this aim. Additionally, I worked as a biostatistician for the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, epidemiologist for the Rhode Island Department of Health, research consultant for the Value Institute in the Christiana Care Health System, C. Everett Koop Health Policy Fellow at Brown, and researcher for Brown’s International Health Institute.

I am excited to be teaching Medical Sociology and Introduction to Sociology this fall at Villanova. When I’m not teaching, my family and I will be cheering on our Wildcats. Go Nova!!

The Prison Literacy Program: Putting a Face on Mass Incarceration

- by Noelle Gambale, Crim ’19

Before tutoring at Graterford Prison, the term “mass incarceration” was simply that to me: a term. It brought to my mind disproportionately large numbers of African American men in prison caught up in America’s so-called War on Drugs. That was the problem: I could only picture crowds. As a college student at Villanova, so far removed from their world, no part of me was able to comprehend the humanity that lay behind this “term”. After tutoring within the Prison Literacy Program (PLP) at Graterford for a semester through the “Theology, Ethics, and the Criminal Justice System” course, the term “mass incarceration” now brings to mind individuals: individuals who have not only a story, but hopes for a better future. This experience was so moving that I am continuing to tutor for another semester.

The student I worked with was twenty-three years old and had already served six years of his sentence. When we began working together, he was one test away from passing his GED and a month away from being released early on parole. With a job lined up with a janitorial organization run by former inmates and a burning desire to visit Dorney Park when he was released, (continued on page 3)
I am honored to be one of two new assistant professors joining the Department of Sociology and Criminology. There are few departments in the US with as rich a tradition of community service, committed teaching, and outstanding research. I hope to add to that tradition and help further manifest the “unitas, caritas, and veritas” values that Villanovans espouse.

A defining feature of my life is that I have been blessed with excellent cohorts of exceedingly talented and generous mentors and peers. My parents were teenagers when they married and started their family. Both prioritized education for my sister and me, which included my mother working in our preschool and elementary schools so that we could access resources beyond our neighborhood. My parents’ efforts gave my sister and me opportunities through school, sports, and church to connect with people who nurtured and encouraged us. They taught us to prioritize the good of the community and work for the collective good. Joining this department is yet another opportunity to work with an outstanding group of people who do excellent, socially meaningful work.

I try to carry that legacy in my work and scholarship on social movements. As a student at the University of Florida, I began investigating civil rights abuses, such as de facto segregation in public bars and stores. Later, I volunteered briefly with a union in Houston to help organize Latino janitors before working with allgo, a queer people of color organization in Austin, TX. Working with those organizations, I learned that activists were frustrated that little academic research was accessible and applicable to them. Therefore, I determined to produce scholarship that activists would find more useful.

At the moment, my scholarship has two threads: 1) examining the racialized aspects of white evangelicalism, which I argue is a powerful, race-based social movement; and 2) investigating contemporary lynchings to discover why such violence continues and how nonwhite communities can effectively defend themselves. My hope is to produce work that speaks to academic questions of racialized power while providing resources activists can use to promote social justice.

In addition to working with/on social movements, I am an avid sports fan and politics junkie. As everyone who takes my classes knows the NY Mets, UNC Tar Heels, and Florida Gators (football) are sacred. No mention of rivals or heartbreaking defeats is allowed (I’m looking at you, 2016 Wildcats). Of course, I am true to my school, and I look forward to energetically supporting all of our students and teams.

The Prison Literacy Program (continued from p. 2)

I was thrilled when he passed his last test. Despite all these seemingly good things ahead for him, I still knew that he would carry a type of label with him that would forever hold him back as he tried to start a better life for himself. The hard-working and willing individual I had come to know over the semester, would remain one of the mass of people known as “criminals.”

Most scholars agree that “mass incarceration” is a direct result of changes in legislation, and that the approach has not reduced crime as anticipated. Indeed, the fact that in 2005, 76.6% of released offenders in 30 states were rearrested after 5 years, suggests that mass incarceration as a policy initiative has not had the intended effect.1 Also, 1 in 3 black men are likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime as opposed to 1 in 17 white men.2 This shows the overwhelming racialization of our criminal justice system.

For me, working with the PLP has brought to life the people hidden by the term mass incarceration. They are a group of students at Graterford and in prisons across the U.S. working to better their lives and hoping for a second chance.

What Is It Like To Spend Three Weeks On A Research Trip With Your Professor?
- by Anna Dalcortivo, Soc & Crim ’18

On June 27th I landed in Dublin, Ireland with my professor and mentor, Dr. Jill McCorkel. I was hired as her research assistant to work on a comparative study of the impact of prison policies on children in the United States and Ireland.

In Dr. McCorkel’s “Punishment and Society” course, I wrote a paper on the collateral damages of maternal incarceration. My research found that 2.7 million children in the U.S. are affected by parental imprisonment. I analyzed the effects of parental imprisonment on children in general, but delved deeper into the unique effects experienced by children who grow up with their mothers in prison. Following this research, I was incredibly excited to work on Dr. McCorkel’s project.

Prior to our departure, I spent a great deal of time collecting data and organizing findings so that we could hit the ground running. I identified advocacy organizations working on behalf of prisoners’ children and families, collected relevant reports, mapped out key officials of the Irish Criminal Justice System, and identified individuals to interview.

We conducted a number of interviews with leaders of progressive initiatives including the Family Links Program and the Bedford Row Family Project, as well as Limerick Prison’s Governor and correctional officers. As the research assistant, I was given the task of transcribing these interviews. While I learned a lot through this process, the most memorable lesson may have been this: Irish accents can render the English language absolutely foreign!

We also explored Irish current events, expanded our understandings of Irish history, and did a little sightseeing. Most interesting for me was our visit to Kilmainham Jail (pictured below) which operated as a prison from 1796 to 1966. The jail is known for holding and executing Irish revolutionaries, including the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. The tour, infused with politics, was a telling of Ireland’s history through the site of the jail. The most noteworthy part was seeing the East Wing, which was modeled after Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. The Panopticon is designed so that all prisoners could be observed at all times without them knowing whether they are being watched. I had learned about this design in several criminology courses and it was fascinating to see Kilmainham’s version. Since our visit, Dr. McCorkel and I have been discussing the phenomenon of “dark tourism” specifically looking at the parallels between Kilmainham Jail and Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary as tourist sites.

So, what is it like to spend three weeks on a research trip with your professor? It’s incredible. I learned so much, not only about Irish prison policies, but about what it means to be a sociologist, to ask important questions, keep an open mind, and be on the lookout for new issues to investigate. I would like to thank Dr. McCorkel again for giving me this incredible opportunity that undoubtedly marks three of the best weeks of my college career.