



# UAB Department of Sociology

Spring 2007

## Mission:

The UAB Department of Sociology fosters a creative and supportive interdisciplinary environment that provides quality graduate and undergraduate training, original research advancing knowledge, promoting health and social justice, and service to the discipline, community, state, nation and world

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## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

Sociologists know how important social ties are for personal wellbeing and health. But in 1999 when Associate Professor **Shelia Cotten** moved from North Carolina to Boston to do a post-doctoral fellowship, she quickly realized how critical new communication technologies had become for maintaining those social ties. Most of her friends and colleagues were still in North Carolina. As she communicated with them via email, she started wondering how information and communication technologies (ICTs) might be changing the way people talk to each other and how these changes affected well-being and health in America.

Since that time, she has studied these health and well-being effects among varying age groups. She is one of the first medical sociologists to note the Internet's importance for enhancing quality of life and the implications this has for future research in medical sociology.

Her research on young adults shows that ICT usage increases self-esteem, decreases depression, and enhances a sense of mattering. Given the widespread use of the Internet among younger individuals such research raises important questions about the future. For example, given the pervasive use of cell phones and text messaging among youth, what impact will usage have on their transition into the work world, when employers may not want them 'constantly available' to everyone? If new work regulations are imposed, what effects will that have on social support and well-being? Clearly communication patterns are changing, and the implications for social structure and quality of life are wide ranging.

The impact of these changes are likely to affect all age groups. Because of that, Cotten is now turning her attention to older adults' use of ICTs. She, along with two Medical Sociology Ph.D.

Students, **Will Anderson** and **Cullen Clark**, recently presented findings at the Southern Sociological Society's annual meeting in Atlanta on the factors that influence ICT access among older adults. They found that age was consistently related to the number and type of ICTs used; however, functional health status was not related. Almost all people reported having access to traditional 'landline' telephones, but only 86% reported having cell phone access. While 89% reported having computer access, only 72% had Internet access. Dr. Cotten hopes to continue this research with older adults who have a wider range of health impairments. In particular, she notes that research is needed that examines the impact of family and friends on older adults' ICT usage, how retirement impacts ICT usage, and how this usage generally affects quality of life among older adults.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## FROM CLASSICAL TO CLASSIC ROCK : SOCIOLOGISTS KNOW HOW TO PLAY

Sociology and music have a natural affinity. Since sociology studies how people combine patterns of individual activity into coordinated collective action, it's just natural that some of us are fascinated by music. While most don't play it, we have some talented musicians on the sociology faculty who perform regularly in the local com-

munity.

**Ferris Ritchey** is an old rocker, steeped in the music of the Stones, Hendrix and Clapton. He formerly drummed for "Poppa Jack" a rock band that played in local clubs. He now has a blues/rock group called the "Prisoners of Love". Ferris says the group is distinguished by its 16-year old lead guitarist, Ken-

nedy Davidson, who can "play the pants off of classic blues artists, such as Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughn, B.B. King, and the Allman Brothers". Ferris has tamed it down a little over time, he also plays drums in a contemporary Christian band at Discovery United Methodist -the sole  
*(Continued on page 3)*

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Along with undergraduate Honor's student, **Sarah Ray**, she is examining the use of the Internet in assisted living facilities. Currently, very few residents of assisted living facilities use computers, but those who do primarily use it for e-mail. Reasons for not using the Internet include: lack of knowledge of computers; lack of perceived need for it; and a feeling that the technology had "passed them by". Users saw the Internet as an important tool linking them to others outside the facility and helping them feel included. It helped them "keep up with the rest of the world" and avoid being left behind. But most residents are not going to use ICTs until they are convinced that they can be easily incorporated into their daily lives and truly improve their quality of life. Cotten suggests workshops on computers and the Internet be offered in order to

make them easier to use and understand, and to alleviate potential users' concerns about online theft and scams.

Dr. Cotten worked with the Center for Aging on an interdisciplinary sponsored workshop held in May to further examine ICTs impact on quality of life among elders. She is also working on an ICT intervention for residents of assisted living facilities that provides training on computer usage and gauges the impact of its use on quality of life over time.

She is currently involved in an NSF funded project examining the social impacts of ICT usage among middle school students. In the largest study of its kind with middle school students, Dr. Cotten and colleagues recently surveyed 1700 students to assess gender differences in perceptions, uses, and impacts of ICTs

and their effects on career intentions. For further information on Dr. Cotten's research, please contact her at 205-934-8678 or [cotten@uab.edu](mailto:cotten@uab.edu).



In a recent survey, 72% of elders report having internet access.

## SOCIETY CAN MAKE YOU SICK

William Cockerham, Distinguished Professor, has written a new book, [Social Causes of Health and Disease](#), Cambridge, UK: Polity. It makes a strong case for social factors as having *direct* causal links to health and disease. He argues that class position, stress, poverty, unhealthy lifestyles, and unpleasant living and work conditions can all be directly associated with illness.

Chapters are on the social causation of health and disease, theorizing about health and disease, health lifestyles, the power of class, and other topics such as class, age,

and race as structural variables, neighborhood disadvantage, and social capital.

Noting a new emphasis on social structure in both theory and multi-level research techniques, he argues that a paradigm shift is occurring in 21<sup>st</sup> century medical sociology, that looks beyond individual explanations for health and disease. As the old gives way to the new in medical sociology, the field is headed toward a fundamentally different neo-structural orientation.

This lively and accessible book challenges many aspects of the existing literature. It should be a good read for all students and scholars of Medical sociology, especially those with the courage to confront the possibility that society really *does* make people sick. Cockerham concludes that the debate over whether or not social factors are fundamental causes of health and disease is essentially over. The book will be published in August 2007.

## SOCIOLOGY MAKES BEAUTIFUL MUSIC (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Methodist church in the area with contemporary-only services.

Until his move to Birmingham, newly recruited Assistant Professor **Casey Borch** played drums and a little guitar with "The Fobbs" a group that plays regularly at local campus hangouts in Vernon, CT. They play mostly classic rock with some classic heavy metal and a dash of 90's alternative rock thrown in for good measure. The songs range from Neil Young, the Beatles and Pink Floyd to Coldplay, Sublime, Pearl Jam, and many others. Besides their regular gigs in the local bars, Casey's group just played a successful benefit show for a number of charities related to violence against women. "It might sound crazy," he says,

"but sometimes for fun The Fobbs would show up for an open mic night at some local bar with their guitars and bongos and just start playing. They never kick us out."

Assistant Professor **Erika Austin** doesn't particularly care for classic rock, she rather prefers all things classical. Quite an experienced choral singer, she went on sabbatical from choral singing for a number of years until she moved to Los Angeles, where she auditioned for the Angel City Chorale. While with that group she performed a wide variety of music, including songs from and about New Orleans for a benefit concert following Hurricane Katrina and a number of traditional Hebrew pieces in support of the group's most recent CD. Upon mov-

ing to Birmingham and UAB she auditioned with, and was invited to join, the Birmingham Concert Chorale, the official chorus of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra. She started the 2006-7 concert season as a first soprano for the Chorale. Major performances over the past year include a concert version of "The Music Man", Saint-Saens' "Samson et Dalila," the Verdi Requiem, and Lauridsen's "Lux Aeterna." In addition, she was selected to sing with a small chamber chorus that performed Handel's Messiah at the Alys Stephens Center during the holidays. Erika hopes to continue performing, looking back now, she can't imagine how she lived for so many years without music in her life.

## MIKE WILSON WINS PRESIDENT'S DIVERSITY AWARD

Sociology is an award winning department. Over the years we have won some of the most prestigious awards given to faculty at UAB including: The Carolyn and Charles Ireland Award for Scholarly Distinction, The Odessa Woolfolk Award for Distinguished Community Service, and the President's Teaching Award.

This year Dr. Michele Wilson, Associate Professor, was awarded the UAB President's Diversity Award at a banquet in January for her years of courageous and dedicated service to the University, community, and State in furthering the cause of diversity and social justice. Dr. Wilson has spent a career integrating her research and teaching interests into a broader effort to promote social change in the region. Her concern for issues ranging from gender and racial inequality to worker's rights has not only motivated her activism, but her research agenda as well. She has not been shy about taking on complex, contentious social issues.

Dr. Wilson was a founding member, and chair of The Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women which provided opportunities to educate and activate the community on women's issues. As a Commissioner she organized numerous workshops to provide opportunities to work for change.

She served as local President of N.O.W., served on its State Board, and as the elected representative to the National Board. More recently, she founded the Alabama Women's Health Institute, an educational and advocacy group working on behalf of the health of Alabama women and girls.

Because of this record of accomplishment and commitment she was also nominated this year for UAB's Odessa Woolfolk Award for Distinguished Community Service.

From Left to right: Patricia Drentea, Jack Zylman, Michele Wilson, Akilah Dulin, Becky Trigg, and Mark LaGory



## WOMEN'S STUDIES EVENTS 2006-2007

### Liberating Barbie

Becky Trigg and Michele Wilson were the hosts of the most recent "Liberating Barbie" auction. This annual event is a fund raiser for Women's Studies scholarships. The Barbies are modified by the students in the "Barbie" class. The premise of the course is that the doll, Barbie, represents a number of norms governing women's behavior in America. The doll and the culture surrounding suggest gender norms governing presentations

of self, sexuality, occupation and, of course, appearance. For many, Barbie essentializes the objectification of women which leads to devaluing females and finally to the victimization of women.

Each student in the course is asked to significantly modify a teen fashion doll in a manner which reflects how the norms exemplified by Barbie affected her. Often the dolls graphically represent the pain of not conforming physically, victimization, and hurt.

The auction was a great success with almost one hundred people attending! Many of these are repeat friends of Women's Studies and collectors. The reception, provided by the Women's Studies Advisory Council was great. Special thanks to Susan Mims for providing the wonderfully presented hors d'oeuvres and desserts. The bidding was spirited and almost \$800 was raised.

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## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR STUDENTS

The Department's Annual Honors and Awards Ceremony and reception was held on the evening of April 23rd in the Henley Room of Mervyn Sterne Library. A very large crowd of family and friends of recipients attended the ceremony. Dr. LaGory presented awards to the following people for their outstanding achievements in the undergraduate and graduate programs:

Caroline Robinson	Outstanding Graduate Student
Meghan Cash	Outstanding Undergraduate Student
Lesley Irwin	Undergraduate Academic Excellence Award
Sarah Ray	Undergraduate Research Award

Dr. Tennant McWilliams, Dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, was present to announce that Caroline Robinson had also been chosen as the School's Outstanding Graduate Student, and that Sarah Ray had been selected as the School's Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher.

Several students were inducted into Alpha Kappa Delta, the national sociology honors society including: Chrystal Boyles, Kevin Bridgmon, Ellen Bryant, Lesley Irvin, Julia Kunin, Jennifer Land, Jennifer Nichols, and Amber Stifflemire.



Outstanding Graduate Student Caroline Robinson (center) with Chair LaGory (left) and Dean Tennant McWilliams (right).



Primary Business Address  
1212 University Avenue  
Ullman 237  
Birmingham, AL 35294

Phone: 205-934-3307  
Fax: 205-975-5614  
E-mail: socdept@uab.edu

We're on the web!!  
<http://www.sbs.uab.edu/Depts/Soc/SocHome.html>

#### ATTENTION ALUMS UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE

Tell us how you're doing. Please keep us informed about what's going on in your lives—new job, new location, a change in your household. Write to us at [mlagory@uab.edu](mailto:mlagory@uab.edu). We want to put your story on the web if you'd like to share it. Don't forget to send a picture.

### WOMEN'S STUDIES EVENTS 2006-2007 (Continued from page 3)

#### Vagina Monologues

UAB's V-Day event, under the auspices of Women's Studies, is undertaken to raise awareness of violence against women. The Vagina Monologues, directed by students, Sarah Hereford and Emilie Soffee of UAB's Honors Program, was a great success with near full houses for each performance. Students, their friends and community members participated. Over \$4000 was raised for the Rape Response Program and the YWCA's Family Violence Center.

The effect on the attendees was overwhelming, running the gamut from tears at the continual rape of an imprisoned Bosnian woman to sharing the joy of a woman coming to know her own body. For many, the performance was a life changing event.

#### Jackson Katz

Jackson Katz, author of [The Macho Paradox, Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help](#), was brought to UAB by an informal

alliance of organizations and divisions of the university. Katz' approach to violence against women is that it is a man's problem: that most violence against women is perpetrated by men. According to Katz, the only way this violence is going to be stopped is if men who are not violent speak up and make clear that violent masculinity is not acceptable.

This approach is based on norming theory, the idea that humans are influenced by what they think are the acceptable norms in their environment. One's view of the dominant norms are affected by the media, video games and music, much of which depicts masculinity as involving disdain for women, their objectification and violence. However, not all men are not violent but many would be uncomfortable their peers thought they are not appropriately masculine. The task, according to Katz, is to organize these non-violent men to speak up, to be models. This would then present a different set of norms for men.

### DISSERTATION RESEARCH OF OUR RECENT GRADUATES

**Caroline O. Robinson . "Life Course Religiosity and Spirituality and Their Relationship to Health and Well-Being Among Homebound Older Adults"**

This study explores how religiosity and spirituality across the life course influence homebound elders' health and well-being. Findings indicated that extrinsic religious practices and religious support were positively associated with physical health. Extrinsic and intrinsic religious practices, instrumental and emotional support and being African American were positively associated with mental well-being.

**Roland Michael Taylor, "Deprofessionalization of the Corporate Optometrist? Contrasting Characteristics of the Bureaucratic and Professional Models"**

This study investigates differences in professional status between corporate and noncorporate optometrists in terms of autonomy, income, and job satisfaction.



**Juan Xi. "Age Differentials In Involuntary Migration-Induced Distress"**

This study examines potential age differentials in stress due to involuntary migration in China's Three Gorges area. It confirms lifecycle differences in the migration experience. Forced migration has a significant negative effect on older persons, but little effect on younger migrants. In addition, whether a stressful event results in distress depends on the social position and resources of those exposed to the event.

#### Mrs. D'Anne and Dr. Walter McCoy Endow Medical Sociology Scholarship

Walter and D'Anne McCoy have given \$25,000 to endow the first graduate student scholarship in Medical Sociology. The McCoy's are longtime supporters of UAB, having given generously to the Reynolds Historical Library, WBHM, UAB Center for Palliative Care, and the Alys Stephens Center. Dr. McCoy is a graduate of the former Medical College of Alabama and Tulane University School of Medicine. At age 93 he still volunteers his services as medical director of the Plasma Care Center and continues his passion for sculpting. Mrs. McCoy is a long-time community volunteer.

#### WISH TO CONTRIBUTE TO UAB SOCIOLOGY?

To make financial contributions to the Department, please make checks payable to the UAB Department of Sociology and send them to:

Mary Balfour Van Zandt  
Development Officer  
University of Alabama at Birmingham  
HB 302, 1530 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35294-1260