The new Chair, Jerome Levi, enjoys communicating with symbols

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THE EMIC* is the newsletter of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Carleton College.

Brought to you by your DCCs:
Ariel VandeVoorde
Sabrina Peterson

* As used in the social sciences, the term emic refers to a description of belief or behavior in terms meaningful to the actor, in other words it is an “insider’s view.”

Note from Your DCCs

Hey team,

As the social captains of the Sociology and Anthropology department, we were delighted to see so many of you at the potluck a few weeks ago. The food was great, kudos to all those who brought something, but the company was even better. Thanks to Jim for graciously inviting us into his beautiful house! Jay has offered to host next term so we can all look forward to his famous stuffed cabbage. Yum!

We have to apologize for the tardiness of this publication. Sabrina and I have been otherwise occupied, as many of the seniors in the department have been, with the prospect of comps. Do forgive us. Although to make up for it we are making the Emic HOLIDAY THEMED this term. You may not actually notice a difference but there is definitely an infusion of holiday cheer.

So good luck with finals. Have a great break and please don’t come back with any broken bones (and heal the ones you already have).

Love always,

Ariel and Sabrina, your dedicated DCC’s

Letter From the Chair

I would like to extend a hearty welcome to all our new students and also welcome back our returning majors. Together with new faculty and new courses, this should prove to be exciting year in the SOAN department. There was a wonderful turn out at the Fall potluck and, now that Jim Fisher is on the mend, I would say that we are off to a great start of the 2008-09 academic year.

In view of the recent election, I think it apropos, besides noting that Barack Obama’s mother, Ann Dunham, held a Ph.D. in Anthropology, to relate a relevant story told to me about thirty years ago by the late Kumeyaay elder and traditional leader, Rosalie Pinto Robertson. Over the years, Rosalie worked tirelessly with many scholars documenting the language, culture, history, and rights of her people, as her family had done for generations. (Her uncle, Jim McCarty Helmiup and grandfather, Payon [“Piercing Arrowhead”] had likewise worked in the 1920s with Leslie Spier, a prominent student of Franz Boas.)

When Rosalie was young, she ran away from her home on the Campo Indian reservation in east San Diego County, California, and set off to see America in the company of two other young women, an Italian—whom Rosalie said was darker than she was—and a Native American girl from Washington state—who was lighter than Rosalie. Among other things, they wanted to see the White House. When they got to Delaware, Rosalie bent down to take a drink from a drinking fountain when all of a sudden a policeman poked her in the side with his nightstick. “Can’t you read?” said the policeman, gesturing to the signs overhead, one of which said, “White” and the other “Colored.” “You’re in the wrong line!” Neither Rosalie nor the other women had ever seen anything like that before, but since they were getting close to Washington, D.C., they thought our nation’s capital “would be like that too,” as Rosalie euphemistically phrased the racial segregation they experienced. After much discussion, they decided to turn back, thinking they might not be able to go into the monuments and museums. “We thought the White House was also just for white people.”

With the election of Barack Hussein Obama as the 44th President of the United States, never again will there be doubt that the White House is just for white people.

I look forward to a terrific year working with all of you.

Sincerely,

Jay

Jay and son Max at the Wailing Wall
New Faculty Spotlight

Kate Goldade

Kate Goldade is joining our department next term teaching two courses: Introduction to Anthropology and Migration in the Global Perspective. We are lucky to have her considering only a month ago, on October 14th, Kate gave birth to an adorable (and tiny!) baby girl. This is Kate’s second daughter.

Kate’s professional experience centers on topics of healthcare and migration. Her research is specifically on the migration of undocumented women from Nicaragua to Costa Rica for the better healthcare services provided across the border.

Her passion for Central America began when she was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nicaragua directly after hurricane Mitch tore the country apart in 1998. She witnessed many women crossing the border during her two-year tenure looking for a better way of life.

Right now Kate lives in St Paul with her husband, who was also a Peace Corps volunteer, and their two young daughters.

Start a conversation with Kate:
- How did having a newborn affect your research in Nicaragua?
- Explain the “Health Without Wealth” concept.
- What are some interesting ideas that Nicaraguans have about health?
- You are from a very large family, how does that affect your own values?

Liz Colville

Liz Colville is a visiting professor from Hamline University in St Paul. This term she taught Introduction to Anthropology and Language and Culture. Liz has a very dynamic research background which focuses on the anthropology of language.

Liz is very much a “fieldwork anthropologist” in the sense that she values very highly the work that is done in the field. Much of her research has taken place in Indonesia with the Toraja, who are an ethnic group indigenous to a mountainous region of southern Indonesia.

Her current projects include a translation piece with a French Ethnomusicologist and ideas about work on the oral history in Indonesia.

Start a conversation with Liz:
- Talk about some of the people that you hope to include in your next research.
- Do you feel as if David Sneider at the University of Chicago heavily influenced you?
- What is this idea of “reform after repression”
- How did you become interested in Indonesian culture?
Emily Brosius, ‘09

What most attracted you to the SOAN department?

I think it was the diversity of courses and professors that initially attracted me to the SOAN department and is what continues to make the choice to be a SOAN major the best fit. There are so many ideas and theories that we discuss within the classes; I do feel like I have gained, to use anthropologists’ favorite term, a “holistic” view of the world. Issues regarding marginalization and domination throughout cultures are what continue to fascinate me the most. I definitely think sociology and anthropology, when applied to actual events and experiences, have the ability to confront problems within societies, including our own.

What has been your favorite class so far in the department? What did you like about it?

I’d have to say the class I am in currently, Ethnography of Reproduction, has been my favorite class thus far, with Anthropology of Gender being a close second. Both courses deal with issues of stratification regarding gender and reproduction within a diverse range of cultures. Both classes are taught by Professor Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg and are wonderful. I love the readings, discussions, and lectures. The small class size we have now in addition to the great group of thinkers that make up the class makes the conversations really interesting. Even though we diverge a lot from the specific topic of the day, I think I learn even more this way. Plus, it’s just a really fun class – probably the shortest feeling Tuesday - Thursday class I’ve had.

Is there a particular area of SOAN or the world that you find especially interesting? (i.e. economic anthropology, South Asia, Latin America, sociology of the US, etc). Why?

As I said above, I’m most interested in applying anthropology and sociology to real world issues. Although I loved studying abroad, I feel a greatest pull toward working within the United States. Before becoming a SOAN major, I almost majored in biology. I am still really interested in the natural sciences, biology especially. I really enjoy some aspects of public health, generally the educational spheres that work with actual people. So I guess I would say my favorite area of SOAN is that which focuses on public health issues, however loosely.

In your opinion, is there a class the SOAN department does not offer that it should?

I would like there to be more courses directly related to public health with an ethnographic focus. Anthropology of Health and Illness explicitly deals with this, but I would love to see more classes focusing on a specific region of the world or the United States with regards to health.

Do you have any idea what your future career plans might include?

In my immediate future, I am hoping to do an Americorps internship, working at some sort of social service/public health organization. After that, I may go into medical school, nursing school, midwifery, graduate school for public health, or something completely different.

Briefly, what are you doing for COMPS?

I am doing ethnographic research at an adult day program for older adults with dementia over break. The plan right now is to examine various perceptions of aging and dementia within the day program (of the staff, clients, family caregivers, etc.) and see the role it plays in the daily lived experience of the clients.
What most attracted you to the SOAN department?

I set out to be a philosophy major, until I realized that what fascinates me about ethics, logic, metaphysics, and epistemology is how they relate to—and how they’re constructed through—the experiences of people interacting in society. I feel so much more comfortable with a discipline that allows me both to explore theory and to attempt to apply it to my own life and those of people around me.

What has been your favorite class so far in the department? What did you like about it?

Well, I’ve only taken four classes in the department, and great things are probably just around the corner (I’m tripling up next term, so they have to be, right?). But out of my experiences so far, the best came last fall in my first class, Intro to Sociology. Adrienne assigned a qualitative research project that asked us to study a part of Northfield. So I observed the weekly Bridge Square peace vigils and described them through Goffman’s model of the front. It was the first time I had an opportunity to bring class work and participation in a community together like that, and it made me really excited about where I could go with sociology.

Is there a particular area of SOAN or the world that you find especially interesting? (i.e. economic anthropology, South Asia, Latin America, sociology of the US, etc.) Why?

Lately, I’ve been concerned with questions of power and privilege in a number of situations, but the subdiscipline I think about most is criminology, or really, penology. I’m fascinated by the classification of former and current prison inmates as something less human and justifiably voiceless, and by the intersections here with gender, sexuality, and race.

In your opinion, is there a class the SOAN department does not offer that it should?

A few considerations based on my limited experience:

a) I loved Anthropology of Gender, but there’s a lot of material one could cram into the department’s only class dedicated to extensive study of gender. Perhaps there could be a sociological parallel that shares some of the existing course’s theoretical works (Butler, Weston) but also incorporates Foucault and other thinkers, while drawing from contemporary sociological research in women’s and men’s studies and queer theory.

b) Sociolinguistics?

c) Perhaps we could use a course focusing on the influence of politics and political systems in people’s lives, but I’ll reserve judgment on whether this is a gap we need to fill until after I take Law and Society and Intro to Peace Studies (next term!).

Do you have any idea what your future career plans might include?

My career plans right now involve neither much planning nor what you might call a career, which disturbs me less than it probably should. I’d like to work in activism—maybe something prison-related—and write fiction when I can.
What Do SOAN Majors Do???

Nora Mahlberg talks about her summer internship with the Navajo Department of Justice

This summer I interned with the Navajo Department of Justice in Window Rock, AZ. There, I worked with senior attorney David Taylor and indexed documents from the U.S Department of Energy regarding the remediation of vicinity properties affected by the uranium mining and subsequent contamination that occurred in the 1940s to 1960s. I had to summarize the findings and highlight information that indicated inconsistent procedure in the property contamination assessments and whether the government remediated the property or not. My learning curve was HUGE because in the first few days, I didn't know what was significant or not, but by the end I had learned a lot about legal procedure, chemistry, and the historical and current situation of uranium contamination on the reservation.

Both my highlight and lowlight of the experience would have to be my visits to the contamination sites. I was shocked at the volume of contamination that remained unaddressed by the government and the number of people that remained living in the area of the contamination, drinking the water, grazing their cattle, and living in homes built from contaminated material.

This experience was invaluable to me. While I probably could not work with the Navajo Department of Justice for a long time (because it would be too frustrating and depressing), this experience solidified my interest in pursuing environmental law. While I do regret that I did not get to know more people on the reservation (since I lived in Gallup, which is off-reservation land), I did learn a lot, got to do a lot of hiking, and made a place in my heart for the southwest.

Sociology and Anthropology major Kate Harding ‘02 awarded the prestigious Wenner-Gren grant

The Wenner Gren Foundation is a non-profit that supports anthropological research. The foundation has two major goals: to support significant and innovative anthropological research into humanity’s biological and cultural origins, development and variation and to foster the creation of an international community of research scholars in anthropology.

Kate Harding, who graduated from Carleton with a degree in Sociology and Anthropology in 2002 went on after Carleton to become a PhD candidate at Cornell University in New York. During her program she took a brief hiatus to work as a senior researcher at National Geographic. Her current dissertation work explores the Maoist reconciliation process in Nepal.

Kate was directly inspired by her comps project during her senior year at Carleton on War memorials in Vietnam. During this project she became fascinated with the idea of memory and the narratives of violence that shape human experience and consciousness. Kate also helped to found the Periscope program at Carleton’s radio station, KRLX, where she became interested with media.

Her current project, titled "Redemptive Narratives and the (In)Coherence of Violence: Retelling War in Post-Conflict Nepal" has grown organically from her passions and combines many of the skills that she used for her senior thesis. She intends to use three different methodologies--fieldnotes, audio, and film--in an effort to capture the ways that violence disrupts our relationship to language and forces us to communicate in unspeakable, non-verbal ways.
Peter Brandon:  
The Story of a Man (Who, in fact, is not From Snowy River)

Did you ever wonder how an Australian sociologist came to be an expert on the American social welfare system? It is a surprising connection, to be sure, so a couple weeks ago I found Peter Brandon in his office to ask how he found his way to our cornfield oasis.

Peter Brandon grew up in a small town outside of Brisbane, Australia where he was the eldest son of a self-professed blue-collar family. He reminisced that most of his childhood and formative years were spent “in the outback” riding around on horses and ATVs. “I was basically a cowboy,” I finally made him admit during our interview. And cowboy he was.

Brandon would wake up every morning before dawn to chop wood because his most important daily chore was to start the fire in the hearth so that the house would warm and breakfast could start for the day. This timing was relatively serendipitous considering his favorite pastime was kicking the cows from the top of the fence as they were herded down the road to the dairy for milking at daybreak.

Don’t be fooled by his decidedly pastoral childhood though. Oh no, while Brandon was tamely wreaking havoc on the local bovine population in rural Australia, he was also developing other talents, namely a mind for sports and a taste for good beer. It was this that got him into a prestigious prep school when he was a teenager (the sports, not the beer) as well as an incredibly high level of intellect and a knack for talking his way out of trouble. So, instead of continuing on with an apprenticeship with a local carpenter, Brandon entered into the world of academia. Though Brandon was modest about his achievements during school it is obvious that he performed at an incredibly high level in sports, both tennis and rugby, as well as in his courses.

When Brandon left school, instead of going to university he took a job with the Social Services Department in nearby Brisbane. Though this may seem fitting considering his current passions, it was not completely out of choice that Brandon took a job in the city. His family had been going through a hard time and it was out of necessity that Brandon took the job. He spent 3 years in Brisbane sending every penny he earned back to his family. It was an interesting 3 years from what he explained, especially considering the tenuous relationship between the weather and the economic conditions in rural Australia—Brandon definitely had his hands full.

When he was ready to go to University, Brandon applied to programs in the states. Among those he was accepted at were Harvard, but he decided to go. Here I must regress. I don’t know what it was that made me assume that Peter Brandon was an overly rational man, but I have a renewed sense of our new professor.

If you gave an Australian cowboy, with strong ties to family and a background in social service a choice between the Ivy League and the love of a beautiful girl what do you think he would choose? Love, obviously. Welcome to Carleton Peter Brandon. I am a little less informed on this piece. I don’t know whether it was Brandon or myself that was more embarrassed but I did gather that he followed his mystery woman to Michigan and continued his education from there.

Peter Brandon has hardly changed since he followed love to the states. Modest even after years of international connections he is a family man who loves to be with his wife and two young boys in their “really big kitchen.” He still has a fondness for the taste of good beer, or as he says “beer that actually tastes like beer.” He also has never lost his talent for carpentry and has offered to give the Carleton rugby teams a few pointers from his international coaching experience (there was a brief stint mentioned with a Geneva-based rugby league).

So what is up next for Peter Brandon? He is ruminating on the idea of creating an abroad trip to take students to Australia to study, amongst other things, the different systems of government and societal relationships. Interesting fact: all Australians are required to vote or they have to pay a fine. There is definitely much more to come on the Australian baritone—check out his courses for next term, including Introduction to Demography.
Departmental Potluck November 7th: A Grand Affair

On Friday, November 7, SOAN students and professors alike gathered at Professor Jim Fisher’s home for a departmental potluck dinner. Many scrumptious dishes were brought, including pasta salads, regular salad, mashed potatoes, tofu chocolate and peanut butter pie, enchiladas, brie cheese, wine, and other delicacies.

Despite a few awkward moments at the beginning of the evening, the event soon picked up and it wasn’t long before everyone was chatting and having a good time. Several professors even brought family members, including Peter Brandon’s two sons, Pamela Feldman Savelsberg’s daughter, and Adrienne Falcon’s daughter, who spent most of the evening listening to the Wall-E soundtrack.

Did you know?

Did you know Obama’s mom was an anthropologist? According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, Stanley Ann Dunham Soetoro earned a Ph.D. in anthropology with an 800-page dissertation about blacksmithing in Indonesia. “She spent long stretches of time learning to love and rescue the cultures and communities of total strangers, at the cost of not always being around while her son was coming of age in Hawaii. Yet she had an indelible impact on him, teaching him to appreciate cultural diversity and have faith in people’s ability to understand each other across borders and identities.”

For more, see Ruth Bahar’s