The Scoop

Sociology—A Commodity

For every student who has a parent or significant other (making sure we use the lingo) who cares about them and their academic career, we all remember the first words out of our loved ones’ collective mouths when we announced we were going to major in Sociology “What are you going to do with that?” – always stated in a sense of shock, dismay, and utter defeat, with face buried into their hands, head rocking.

While Hugh Nibley did say “work we must but the lunch is free” I am sure most of us are still trying to figure out how we are going to pay for that “free” lunch. Well, concentrating for a moment only on that side of the justification equation for majoring in Sociology, the use and exchange value of a liberal arts discipline like sociology has rarely been as “marketable” as it is now. A quick perusal of just the New York Times shows there have been 336 articles published in its pages about sociologists and sociological research over the past few years alone. Many of these articles discuss how sociology and other liberal arts undergraduate degrees are increasingly valuable commodities in today’s economy because their graduates can not only think outside of the proverbial box, but they actually recognize there is a box!

One article in particular talks of the huge advantage students who have data analysis and statistical skills bring to the market. (http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/06/technology/06stats.html?_r=1&th&emc=th)

Malcolm Gladwell in his book Outliers makes it clear that there are times when being in the right place gives you enormous advantages – right now, the right place (in the words of a famous Mormon) is in sociology – but only if you fully take advantage of what this discipline can offer you. “Cry no more Mom for I have decided to be a Sociologist!”

BY DR. RALPH BROWN

A Victory for Sociology

Last semester in the Choose to Give (C2G) campaign, more than 1,800 students from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences donated. Each semester when this campaign is launched, students are encouraged to contribute. This encouragement is usually instituted with a fun and friendly competition between all of the majors in our college. Fall semester of 2009, Sociology won this competition within its bracket of competition.

Dean David B. Magleby wrote, “I thank [those] of you who made a contribution. Current economic conditions make that level of participation remarkable. As I hope you know, your education at BYU was made possible by donations of many individuals. Our goal is to encourage students, faculty, and staff to give back to BYU and to establish a life-long habit of investing in BYU.”

On behalf of the Sociology Department, SSA would like to thank all of the majors and minors—both undergraduate and graduate as well as the faculty and staff who contributed to C2G. SSA would also like to congratulate you on winning the competition!
If you are interested in participating in this research, contact Dr. Goodsell at goodsell@byu.edu.

Neighborhood Revitalization Study: an involvement opportunity

You’ve probably already seen news reports: The current economic downturn started with problems in the mortgage market. Foreclosures and “for sale” signs have become outward indicators of financial problems that span institutions from the federal government to lending institutions to individual families. There have been studies of the economics and politics involved, but what is it like for the ordinary people who live in troubled neighborhoods? How do families and neighbors respond to problems like these in ways that (do or do not) help each other and their community?

Dr. Todd L. Goodsell is doing research to understand the experiences and meanings ordinary people have regarding neighborhood change. The research is ethnographic- and interview-based, meaning trained researchers go into the community, get to know the people and how they live, and ask them to tell stories about what has been happening in their neighborhood and what they think about neighborhood change. They are trying to understand the culture of neighborhood revitalization. Most of the researchers are students! It’s a lot of hard work to do this type of research, but it’s also a great learning experience. Talk to Dr. Goodsell if you’d like to get involved.

BY TODD GOODSELL

Look and Ye Shall Find: an undergraduate perspective

As a Latter-day Saint, I had the opportunity and privilege of serving a full-time mission in Samara, Russia. Since I have been back at school, I have tried to maintain my language abilities and gain a better understanding and appreciation of the Russian culture.

Last semester, I took the graduate level ‘Classical Social Theory’ course from Dr. Howard Bahr. During this course, I emphasized my research on Friedrich Nietzsche. The harder I tried to look for Nietzsche, the more I found Fyodor Dostoevsky (a famous Russian author).

What was of particular interest to me was the striking similarities between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche’s philosophies concerning modernity and extraordinary people. I was so intrigued by these similarities that I wrote a paper arguing that Dostoevsky influenced Nietzsche and his thinking.

As I searched for information which would support my argument, I realized that sociology and other fields of the social sciences have neglected this profound influence. Nietzsche is largely disregarded today in the realm of social theory.

For a better understanding of the post-modern movement, scholars would be wise to utilize Nietzsche’s theories as well as pay particular attention to Dostoevsky’s contributions to Nietzschean thought.

BY SONDRA R. FITZGERALD

Last Semester—At a Glimpse

SSA was very successful last semester. We hosted a number of events which allowed students and faculty to socialize and get informed.

At the beginning of Fall semester a fun-filled, mix and mingle opening social was held including lots of pizza, friends, and badminton. Later in the semester SSA participated in the Majors Fair and the World Fest. SSA was also involved with service activities including the Americano-Latino Festival in Provo and the Utah Community Food Co-Op.

SSA also hosted a Major Information Meeting so that undeclared majors could learn more about sociology and what the major entails. SSA organized a meeting so that students could learn more about internship opportunities and how to apply to the Sociology graduate program here at BYU.

SSA ended Fall semester 2009 with a closing social which included a Dead Theorist Costume Competition as well as a Christmas dinner.

On behalf of the department, SSA would like to thank all of the students and faculty who participated in our activities!
Life After Graduation: a graduate perspective

As much as you’re enjoying your third junior year, the truth is, at some point your undergraduate career will end and you’ll enter a new life of… something.

Maybe you’ll continue your education and get an advanced degree, or maybe you’ll try to find a job. Either way, you’ll be prepared to try something new. Even better, as a sociologist you’ll be equipped to analyze the social factors that led to your decision. That was a joke.

My experience has allowed me the chance to experience employment, while also later returning for a graduate degree. Working as a professional has some clear positives. It’s a neat thing to watch the numbers in your bank account get bigger. It feels very rewarding to have the skills you’ve developed for years finally be used. Be careful though, right now the job you want may not be the job you get, and making good money is a poor substitute for doing what you dream of. That realization helped me decide to return to school.

Graduate school is a blast. The team environment in a graduate cohort is conducive to the skill development that a masters program provides. The faculty and departmental support is tremendous. You can feel yourself get closer to what you really want, although it can be frustrating to only get closer and not be there yet.

You’ll be surprised by how applicable your undergraduate education in sociology really is to whatever you do. I can promise you that your new life will be… something.

BY MICHAEL RUTKOWSKI

Stratification of Dance: an alumni perspective

Who would’ve thought my two areas of study from BYU would one day be professionally intertwined? Certainly not my parents, who weren’t sure about my spending so much time dancing around a ballroom while I had a full load of Sociology classes to deal with! Now 7 years post BYU graduation, I am a full time professional, competitive ballroom dancer based in Orange County, California… a far cry (and a few degrees) from my native Fairbanks, Alaska. I compete around the country in 25+ competitions a year, and teach private dance lessons while not competing.

Countless times, something in my work reminds me of my Sociology days at BYU. From trivial details of dance life, to much more significant issues, certainly one cannot know life as a dancer without contemplating many interesting sociological issues on a daily basis.

One matter of consequence to me is the dismally non-diverse social stratification of ballroom students and enthusiasts. Dancing can be so good for many people and for many reasons, but too few have the opportunity to enjoy its benefits. Though many factors contribute to this, one of the most influential reasons is the lack of exposure to ballroom and other forms of dance, from childhood through adulthood. While Utah public education sets an excellent example of exposure to dance in schools, very few other places offer anything like it. And for adults? Even fewer opportunities are available without high expense.

Current television programs such as Dancing With the Stars and So You Think You Can Dance, and movies like Take the Lead and Shall We Dance are addressing this issue. As so many diverse individuals become interested in ballroom dancing, clientele is very slowly changing. A wider variety of people participate in lower-cost dance activities such as group classes and studio-sponsored dance parties, and dance studio “walk in” clients fit the “typical ballroom student” mold less frequently. However, there are just not enough low-cost opportunities currently available to make ballroom dancing a truly diverse and inclusive activity. I believe as mass exposure to dance continues through mainstream media, the demand for accessible dance programs will increase enough to propel the creation of many new, interesting, and affordable dance experiences.

BY MELAINA LARSON
M.P.A. University of the District of Columbia
B.S. Brigham Young University – Major: Sociology, Minor: Ballroom Dance
4. Which breakfast cereal would you rather eat?
A. Spanish granola with chocolate chunks
B. “Classic” granola
C. Shredded Wheat
D. Corn Bran

5. Which book would be the most likely one to change your life?
A. Bonds That Make Us Free by C. Terry Warner - “It changed the way I thought about emotion.”
B. Modernity and the Holocaust by Zygmunt Bauman - “I felt like it made me really understand sociology.”
C. Contemporary Theories About the Family by Burr et. al. - “It’s essential to understanding family theory.”
D. The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoevsky - “It deals with the issue of why bad things happen to good people.”

6. What music would you not want to live without?
A. Chamber Choir Music - “It’s sung by my children.”
B. Wilco, Spoon, Beck
C. “Surfer Girl” by the Beach Boys
D. Vivaldi - “I like classical music”

7. If you had one week left to live, how would you most likely spend your time?
A. Go home - “I would spend time with my family and say no to everyone else.”
B. “I’d try to figure out why I’m dying and why I’m aware of that fact.”
C. “I’d try to find a way to ensure Uncle Sam’s estate taxes don’t wipe my wife out.”
D. Go to the beach with my family

8. What do you like most about BYU?
A. The Students
B. “It’s a fun place teach.”
C. The Faculty
D. “They gave me a job.”

BY ROBBY MELDAU

Which BYU Sociology Professor Are You?: just for fun

1. What non-sociological career would you be most interested in pursuing?
A. Professor of Russian Literature
B. Mortician
C. Architect
D. Physician’s Assistant

2. What profound question are you most likely to ponder late at night?
A. “None- I can’t stay awake late at night.”
B. “Who gets what and why?”
C. “What didn’t get done today?”
D. “Something related to helping people”

3. Which social theorist do you think sounds most interesting?
A. Emmanuel Levinas - “He takes the moral dimension seriously.”
B. Charles Tilly - “He blends historical, comparative, and interpersonal approach to equality in creating a compelling theory.”
C. Glenn Elder - “He put lifecourse framework into the sociological mainstream.”
D. John Bongaarts - “He fully understands the fertility rate transition process.”

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BY ROBBY MELDAU

Mostly A’s
Mostly C’s
Mostly B’s
Mostly D’s

Results: