From the Department Chair

Minjeong Kim

We begin this Fall 2020 Semester in an extraordinary situation. All our classes are to be taught online virtually and all of the faculty and staff are working remotely from their homes. In-person meetings with our new students have to wait and we do not know when we can do so at the moment. Of course, it is because of the coronavirus global pandemic. It seems like “unprecedented” has been one of the most used words since the outbreak, which tells us that we are indeed living in a remarkable moment.

First, I applaud the Sociology faculty who did an impressive job as they switched to virtual instructions for our students in the middle of the Spring Semester. It was an inordinately challenging time for everyone, and our faculty members not only reworked their lectures for virtual instructions but also enabled our students’ learning to continue by providing support for them. I am extremely grateful to each one of them.

With the sudden campus closure and limited traveling, the Department’s academic review and commencement ceremony were postponed and graduate students had to forego their annual event. However, we still managed. The Department organized a heartwarming virtual celebration for our graduating seniors. The CAL faculty went through virtual interviews with the Dean candidates and sociologist Monica Casper from the University of Arizona was named to be the next CAL Dean.

Yet, the biggest news of the Department was the retirement of four Sociology faculty members: Dae Elliot, Nancy Federman, Tom Semm, and Norma Ojeda. While Professor Ojeda will remain in the faculty on the FERP, the Department had to say goodbyes to the other three esteemed colleagues, and we did so in a COVID style (see page 8). Their departures are a huge loss to the Department, but I wish them a fun-filled and happy retirement.

We also welcomed new members to the Department. Francine Vasquez began working as the Department’s new Administrative Coordinator and she has been amazing. In Spring 2020, two new lecturers, Darwin Fishman and Luciano Cruz, joined the Department. Last but not least, Norah Shultz, who was...
AVP of the Division of Academic Engagement and Student Achievement, retreated to faculty in Sociology. She serves as the Director of Inclusive Curriculum in the new academic year and is looking forward to working in the Department.

I also want to note that Audrey Beck and Tim Brown were promoted to Associate Professor with tenure. With Enrico Marcelli going on sabbatical next year, Tim Brown has been elected to serve as our next Graduate Advisor and Audrey continues as Undergraduate Advisor. Despite the COVID crisis, the Department is welcoming one of the largest MA cohorts next year, thanks to Enrico Marcelli’s tireless recruitment efforts.

This new academic year is going to be another busy one. In addition to the delayed Academic Review, the Department will be working on diversity and inclusion planning, a university-wide initiative. Being away from the campus does not mean slowing down at all, and you can definitely see some of that on our website and social media presence.

Finally, I note special thanks to Monica Cortez, our Administrative Assistant, who diligently worked on creating this newsletter!

August 2020

Undergraduate Advisor’s Message

Audrey Beck

Over the past year, our students were asked to quickly adapt to the newly remote learning environment and rapidly changing social circumstances. Our students committed to their progress by seeking out advising in unprecedented numbers to develop a graduation plan, accelerate their timing, or in some cases, expand their degree program to include an additional minor, major, or prepare for graduate school.

As the advisor, I hosted additional virtual advising hours to contend with the new policy changes and respond to students’ needs, both in and outside the classroom. Our department also hosted our first series of virtual Advising Social Hours, covering how to apply for scholarships, study abroad, do research, or complete an internship. This series invited university and department faculty and staff to chat with our majors and offer guidance.

We have had another successful year institutionalizing a new advising email (advising.sociology@sdsu.edu) and new web content, including a frequently asked questions page called “Advising Assistance” on our department site. We added new content to this site specifically to assist our new incoming students during their virtual orientations. We also welcomed one of our largest cohorts of 31 new freshman and 133 transfer students at this summer’s orientation series.
On behalf of the Department of Sociology’s faculty and staff, and as incoming Graduate Advisor of the Master of Arts (MA) program this fall, I would like to welcome all of our new and returning graduate students. I am honored to serve as your graduate advisor and look forward to continuing to build on the success that such previous advisors as, Dr. Marcelli, Dr. Kim, and Dr. Esbenshade, instilled in our program.

On the topic of success, I am very happy to report that several of our returning graduate students, as well as members of our incoming graduate cohort, received scholarship honors this year! Second year student Kariar Al-naiem was awarded the inaugural SDSU Master’s Research Scholarship. Furthermore, second year student Irma Arias, along with six incoming graduate students (Calvin Liew, Bryan Peraza, Dianna Ratsamy, Andrew Rios, and Marciea Lettieri) were recipients of the John O. and Mary L. Anderson Memorial Endowed Scholarship in Sociology offered through our department!

This brings me to our next big announcement for the SDSU graduate program, I am very proud to state that this year we will be welcoming 14 new students to our graduate program! We are all extremely excited to have you as part of the department and look forward to helping you achieve your goals in the program. During my tenure as advisor, I intend to work closely with you, the Sociology Graduate Student Committee, and other faculty and staff to create more than just another social group or network. To achieve this goal, we have instituted a new program where incoming students are matched one on one with faculty mentors. We also acknowledge establishing this community will be challenging amid a fall semester completely online but with help from our tremendous second year students we have plans to bridge this digital divide.

An additional component to fostering present community is an understanding of the past. Sociology at SDSU began as a “concentration” in 1940 and became an official department sometime in the late 1950s. Your graduate program is over a half century old and was established in 1960! Over these years, the program has had enormous success and we are confident you will add to this tradition. During my tenure as graduate advisor, I plan to encourage us to help create a community of scholar-teachers in which we can both challenge and encourage one another. The good news is that we have students in the program already who are doing this. Furthermore, in addition to many of our past MA students who have gone on to work for community organizations or government, or to teach at various colleges or universities – over the past five years we have graduated more than 35 MA students and more than a dozen have begun Ph.D. programs. We are excited to have you with us and welcome you into our program on its 60th anniversary!

New Staff—Francine Vasquez

Last Fall we introduced our new Administrative Coordinator, Francine Vasquez. Francine started her journey at SDSU in 2017 in Enrollment Services, where she worked as a residency specialist. Prior to coming to SDSU, Francine was employed at California Western School of Law for 4 years and The Art Institute California—San Diego for three years. Francine graduated from Southern Utah University with a B.S. in Public Relations. We are so grateful to have her as part of the team!
Promotion and Tenure

The Department congratulates Audrey Beck and Tim Brown on their tenure and promotion to Associate Professor!

Welcoming New Faculty

Norah Shultz

This Fall we’re welcoming our new Professor, Dr. Norah Shultz, to Sociology. Dr. Shultz completed her graduate studies (M.A., Ph.D.) at Bryn Mawr College. Her initial research centered on the intersection of volunteerism and aging and was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. Her scholarly interests quickly began to focus on multiculturalism in education, now more often referred to as diversity and inclusion, and resulted in the edited volume Challenges of Multicultural Education: Teaching & Taking Diversity Courses (with Jeffrey Shultz). This line of inquiry developed into work related to the relationship of multiculturalism to internationalization in global curricula. Her recent scholarship has focused more broadly on undergraduate student success. She is a huge baseball fan, particularly devoted to the Philadelphia Phillies. One of her pet rabbits is named Bryce opper in honor of one of the players.

Darwin Fishman

This Spring we welcomed our new lecturer, Dr. Darwin Fishman, to the SDSU Department of Sociology. Dr. Fishman has a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Maryland-College Park, an M.A. degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (Social Science) from San Francisco State University and a B.A. degree in Sociology from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. He is currently on the Board of Directors for Continuing the Conversation on Race and Activist San Diego. He is also the Co-Founder of the Racial Justice Coalition. He has served as a Board Member on the Community Review Board on Police Practices for San Diego city and he currently serves on the Commission on Juvenile Justice for the County of San Diego. Dr. Fishman loves to give back to his community through service work and community organizing.
Luciano Cruz

This Spring we welcomed our new lecturer Dr. Luciano Cruz. Dr. Cruz is originally from Brazil, the youngest son of a family of five girls and two boys. He first came to the United States in June 1998 and lived in Ashland, Oregon for seven years. After receiving a bachelor’s degree in Sociology at Southern Oregon University, he moved to San Diego where he attended San Diego State University and graduated in May 2010 with a Master’s degree in Sociology. Last spring, he concluded his Ph.D. in Education at Claremont Graduate University. On the personal level, he is a big fan of soccer, traveling, music, and he prefers cats over dogs. He has a great passion for books and the academic life.

On FERP (Faculty Early Retirement Program)

Norma Ojeda

Professor Norma Ojeda has been a faculty member of the Department of Sociology at SDSU since 1999. She served as Chair of the department from 2013 to 2018. After 21 years of interrupted teaching and research, she will start teaching every other semester under the FERP - Early Retirement Program beginning the fall semester of 2020. Her courses include: SOC301, SOC350, SOC421, SOC522 and SOC554. She will also continue doing research. She specializes in sociology and demography of the family, gender and women’s reproductive health, concentrating on two particular groups: the population of Mexico and the Mexican-origin populations living in both sides of the US-Mexico Border Region. Over the years, her scholarly work produced more than sixty manuscripts including articles and chapters published in specialized journals and books in the United States, Mexico, Spain, France and Venezuela. Her ongoing research project focuses on the intersection of family, gender and migration. This is an interdisciplinary study focuses on gender socialization practices, and early sexual education of children and adolescents among Mexican-origin families in both sides of the San Diego-Tijuana border region. As professor-in-residence at Autonomous University of Baja California during her sabbatical leave in the fall semester of 2019, she worked with the College of Medicine and Psychology conducting a large convenience survey of 1,280 of parents in Tijuana. This led to her most recent publication. Coyuntura Demográfica, the leading journal of demography in Latin America, accepted for publication her Spanish-language manuscript, "Share and Shift Gender Roles: a case study in the northern border of Mexico."

About Faculty Early Retirement Program: FERP provides eligible tenured faculty unit employees the opportunity to retire and continue to work for a maximum of five (5) years at 50% of their regular time base (based upon the year immediately prior to retirement).

On Sabbatical

Enrico Marcelli

Professor Enrico Marcelli will be on sabbatical during the 2020-2021 academic year, and engaged in two research projects. The first will investigate the “Social Sources of Adult Mexican Immigrant Distress and Census Participation” and the second is entitled “Religion and Spirituality: Effects on Distress and Happiness among Adult Legal and Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States. “He looks forward to incorporating some of his findings in the courses he will teach upon returning in the fall 2022.
Retirement

On July 2, 2020, the Department celebrated the successful career of three esteemed Sociology colleagues, Nancy Federman, Tom Semm, and Dae Elliot. Because of the restrictions in gatherings due to the global pandemic, the Department honored them with a surprise vehicle parade. The Department cannot express how much we appreciate the work that three lecturers did for us over many years. Their retirement will be a monumental loss for the Department, but we wish them only the very best.

Nancy Federman

Nancy graduated Cum Laude from SDSU in 1983 with a degree in Social Work. Then, she went on to the University of Southern California where she earned a Masters in 1987 in Sociology. She earned a Doctorate in Philosophy in 1993, also from USC. Nancy began teaching at SDSU in 1988 and has been teaching here for the last 32 years. She has regularly taught a variety of courses, including Introduction to Social Problems, Minority Group Relations, and Contemporary Social Problems, sharing her knowledge with and inspiring 11,086 students. She is well known for adding a flare of hilarity to her lectures and her unique sense of style has deemed her unmeasurable. Teaching has been her passion for decades and her love for her students know no bounds. She has been recognized numerous times with various teaching awards. Nancy's greatest accomplishments are her two brilliant daughters.

Tom Semm

Tom earned his MA in Sociology at SDSU and stayed on as a lecturer. Over 25 years, he taught 12,699 students through introductory courses as well as required theory and upper-division courses. He also ran a special course for seniors, allowing them to teach and mentor freshmen in SOC 101, which created meaningful experiences for them. Tom was a great inspiration to all students who listened to his lecture. He has been recognized as the Favorite Faculty Member countless times.

Special words from Jung Choi

Before retiring at the end of the 2020 spring semester, P. Tom Semm was a dedicated member of the sociology department who devoted his time, energy, and passion to teaching thousands of SDSU students for over two decades. The positive impact that he has had on his students is simply unparalleled. Not only was he a remarkable teacher, he was also a mentor who the students looked up to. Their respect for Professor Semm’s outstanding teaching and his commitment to protecting the rights of the students is evidenced by the countless amount of excellence in teaching awards that he received during the past twenty years. Just as impressive as the awards is the respect that he has garnered from his students. One of his former students has this to say about him: “Professor Semm was an educator unlike most others. Students enrolled in as many of his courses as possible with a hunger for knowledge that many of us had never quite felt prior to his classes. Though his teaching style and the readings were intense, it didn’t take long to figure out his ‘intensity’ as an educator is fueled by his integrity and unwavering commitment to fighting for a world that truly values everyone. For many of us, hearing of Professor Semm’s retirement was difficult, as it is frightening to imagine a world with one less amazing educator. However, I know with certainty that the education Professor Semm gifted us with undoubtedly left a lasting, reverberating mark on the thousands of students that he taught. Thank you, Professor Semm.” Indeed, thank you Tom from all of us who had the fortune to work alongside of you as a colleague and friend.
Dae Elliot

As we mark her retirement, we asked Dae a few questions to which she answered.

What did you enjoy most about teaching in the Sociology Department? Teaching has always been about seeing the light bulb go on. I remember that moment in my own life and know how disrupting it can be but also how exciting. Most of my students were new at Sociology and certainly research methods. In many cases, it challenged what they thought they knew. Watching them wrestle with those challenges and then recognize and participate in the process of looking at the world sociologically was always the moments I valued most.

What are your most memorable moments? There are so many! Early on, I had students turn in journals which I collected and graded a couple of times during the semester (this was when our LARGE classes were 40ish). One student was having a particularly hard time with the content and the idea of his white, upper middle class, cisgendered, heterosexual, and male privilege. Needless to say, I was getting an earful. I called him into the office so we could discuss it. One of his fellow conservative students was there as well. We had a wonderful discussion and he left recognizing that if he was judged, it would be how he used his privilege, not that he had it since he did nothing to get it and couldn't give it back. About a year later he came back to talk with me and his final line was, 'I just want to tell you, I know I will be taking over my dad's company but I promise you, I will be one of the 'good' guys and work to make things better.' For all that we may have disagreed with each other on how that was to play out, it still moves me that he did that. Another time, more recently, I had a student who had taken my research class. She was challenged by it and as a good student, that was somewhat new to her. The following year I received a letter saying that she was studying in Sweden. They were doing a research project and most of the students initially discounted her because she was an American. She was able to jump right in and ended up being the lead in class for the research project because she was so well trained. She thanked me and said even though she was so frustrated in my class, she was so glad that she had me because that wouldn't have happened otherwise. It felt good to get that feedback since both 'Research Methods' and 'Statistics' are rarely classes people say they had fun in or that it was transformative unlike the other classes I have taught. Those are just two of many wonderful moments I have had teaching for the last quarter of the century. Every time I thought to quit, they would be there and I would be sucked in for another year!

What are your plans for enjoying your retirement? I plan on doing a lot of overdue reading and research that I've wanted to do for a long time, travel throughout the world and do a lot of hiking. Of course, this is also the strategic time to do things with my 5 grandchildren as well.

When you were younger, what did you think you were going to be when you grew up? I planned on going into Psychology first but then was diverted to Religion and Education while in the Navy. Once I graduated, I considered Business or Law. Yes, I was one of those. Two hundred credit hours later, I stumbled upon Sociology. I was in my early 30's. I can remember the first time I took a Sociology class. It was love at first sight and it hasn't waned since.

Best piece of advice for students? Take advantage of this time, engage with your classes and professors. I know it seems like you are overwhelmed trying to piece together time for studying, working, socializing, etc. but I still look back at the long discussions I had with my professors and fellow students about all that we were learning. The practicalities of life catch up and work/family responsibilities tend to make it much harder to do that after you leave the university.
Parade for Retirees
Student Highlights

Kariar Al-Naiem, Sociology Recipient of the Master’s Research Scholarship

The protests throughout the United States that were sparked by the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor have seen police response in full riot gear and the use of tear gas and non-lethal projectiles on peaceful protestors, which exposed the public to the issue of police militarization. This volatile situation led Kariar to his research question: does increased militarization lead to an increase/normalization of violence amongst officers/law enforcement agencies? For his master’s thesis titled “Pentagon 1033 Program, Minority threat, and Police Brutality: The influence Police Militarization Has on Use of Force in Minority Communities,” Kariar plans to examine how the excess use of military equipment, via transfers through the US Department of Defense program (Pentagon 1033), not only increases militarization (material, cultural, organizational, operational) but how the heavy use of this program might affect communities of color. To this end, his thesis will match data on the 1033 program concerning police expenditures on military equipment with data on police brutality while controlling for community variables gathered from the U.S. Census.

Kariar is grateful for the mentorship he has received from several faculty members in the Department, especially, Dr. Brown. Also, shoutout to his cohort for their friendship.

Chasejamison Manar-Spears, Recipient of SDSU’s Zahn Spirit of Innovation Award

Raised in Oakland, granddaughter of a Black Panther, Chase recognizes Africa as her ancestral land. Ghana is where famed sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, whom Chase greatly admires, decided to live out his life and contributed to the pan-Africanism movement.

For her study abroad, Chase studied at the University of Ghana, where she, other California State University students, and community leaders created Roots Collective, a worker-owned co-operative which sells consumer products repurposed from plastic waste. The hope is for the group to become a self-sustaining organization in Ghana.

Majored in Sociology and minored in Leadership, Chase is looking forward to going back to Ghana to further work on Roots Collective.

The Zahn Spirit of Innovation award recognizes a graduating senior who has shown exceptional entrepreneurial achievement as an undergraduate. The award is now in its fourth year and comes with a $25,000 scholarship.

Alumni Spotlight

Alexa Megna from the class of 2012 is currently working as senior qualitative strategist at Gongos, Inc., and living in Connecticut.

“My day to day job is moderating focus groups, ethnographies, and in-depth interviews. My Sociology degree has greatly impacted my career by setting me up with the skills and tools to be able to excel at my job. It has also helped me be a better strategist with the foundation of social structures and context around these institutions as well as given me tools for managing small group dynamics.”
In lieu of in-person commencement due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the Department organized a virtual celebration for Sociology graduating seniors on May 15, 2020.

In addition to acknowledging all graduating seniors who attended the celebration, four retiring faculty members, Professors Dae Elliot, Nancy Federman, Tom Semm, and Norma Ojeda gave congratulatory remarks. We also recognized the Outstanding Graduating Senior, Alexis Paul Monroy and his Most Influential Faculty Member, Professor Michael Roberts. Students also had a chance to talk and give thanks making the celebration more intimate.

Q&A with Alexis

Being the son of an immigrant father from Mexico, I was brought up with the hopes and aspirations of living the 'American Dream.' My father instilled in me the work ethic and drive to excel in life. Both my parents preached the importance of 'serving the community.' As an adolescent, I knew my calling was to elicit change and be a voice for the often muted. I am pursuing a Ph. D. in cultural studies in hopes to bridge the gap between the scholar and activist, and I am looking forward to taking the next steps that bring me closer to achieving my goal of a Ph.D.

What experience at SDSU has changed your life the most?

The sociology department’s faculty have been an influential part of success and growth as a young scholar. I will be forever grateful for their time and guidance.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

There is no such thing as a traditional path in education. So be persistent and forge on.

WE CONGRATULATE ALL OUR GRADUATES!

Congratulations!!! Dr. Roberts was selected as the Most Influential Faculty Member by Alexis Paul Monroy, Outstanding Graduating Senior
Last year, the Department’s Center for Qualitative Research has been renamed to the Center for Community Research and Engagement. The new name and mission statement reflect many of current Sociology faculty members’ ongoing projects and interests that promote student engagement with research and community issues and organizations, contribute to community well-being through the development of evidence-based analysis and policy, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. This year, we launched the Center’s website, ccrc.sdsu.edu, created a logo, and established service learning agreements with different community organizations.

Also, Jill Esbenshade organized the first CCRE event and led the first CCRE publications. We hope that CCRE plays a critical role in bridging Sociology and SDSU to our communities.

CCRE Event

The Right to Seek Asylum: Migrants’ stories of their struggles for human rights, dignity and peace in the United States, was held on Human Rights Day, Tuesday, December 10, 2019, at SDSU’s Scripps Cottage. It was presented by the ACLU and the SDSU Center for Community Research and Engagement (Department of Sociology) and was co-sponsored with the SDSU CAL Interdisciplinary Human Rights Initiative.

In the News

Nuevo reporte revela violaciones a derechos humanos de migrantes en centros de detencion. (December 10, 2019)

Denuncian maltratos a migrantes que solicitan asilo en EU (December 11, 2019)

CCRE Publications

The Right to Seek Asylum: Migrants’ Stories of the Struggle for Human Rights, Dignity, Peace and Justice in the United States

ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial Counties and CCRE (December 2019)

Non-Compliance with Earned Sick Days Law in San Diego

Center on Policy Initiatives and CCRE (July 2020)


Cruz, Luciano. 2019. “For-Profit Postsecondary Education: Effects of limited cultural capital and increasing demand for academic credentials on vulnerable student populations.” The Claremont Graduate University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019. 13896806


Grants and Awards

Beck, Audrey. July 2020. “Building an Integrative Community Platform to Alleviate the Workforce Aging Crisis” (Co-PI, $149,999, National Science Foundation, Smart and Connected Communities Planning Grant)


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Improving Human Well-Being by Investigating Social Inequalities