

SocioNews

Fall 2014

Presented by Alpha Kappa Delta

Welcome to SocioNews!

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Welcome to the Fall 2014 edition of the sociology department's SocioNews! Written and produced by The College of New Jersey's chapter of Alpha Kappa Delta - the national sociology honor's society - this biannual newsletter focuses on student's experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Inside you will find students' sociological connections to their internship, study abroad programs, and theses. Additionally, there are insights from a professor and a program assistant about their continuing experiences with sociology. We hope you find our newsletter not only informative, but enjoyable too!

Sara Manzon, editor

Karen's Corner!

By: Karen Dubrule, Sociology Program Assistant

I remember sitting in my own SOC 101 class oh-so-many moons ago. It made a huge and lasting impact on me as I learned about the economic disparities within the U.S. and among the countries of the world. It was eye-opening to say the least and sparked my interest in Sociology. Did you know that I minored in Sociology in college? Yep. I never had to take the likes of 302 but I loved the electives that I took and felt they complemented my major course of study which was Russian and Russian studies. At the time, Russia was really going through tremendous social change (I suppose it could be argued that they have never stopped) as the big-ol' bad-ol' days of Communism were rapidly coming to an end. As a foreign-language major, it was strongly encouraged that we study abroad but I truly loved college and had a 'fear of missing out' even then, so I chose a summer program in Moscow. Again, another life-changing experience. Back in the Soviet days, we were completely monitored pretty much at all times including our exchanges with the students from our host institution. Nevertheless, we made wonderful friendships and learned so much not just about Russia, but also about perceptions of the U.S. I knew I had to find a way to return.

After graduating, I was like

many students with no clear path and waiting for life to kind of happen. Fortunately, a family who was posted at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow was looking for a nanny for their toddler for a year and somehow I saw their ad and even better, they liked me enough to take a chance on me. Living at the Embassy was an experience itself – we had American food, entertainment, and could even call home when we wanted once a week, rather than stand in line for hours at the Central Telegraph office. Life in Moscow was also incredible – we did get used to standing in lines for ice cream at Baskin Robins, for hamburgers at McDonalds. Whenever we saw a line of people, we jumped in as it was usually for something desirable and hard to find. I journaled extensively during my time there as I wanted to record my observations and impressions. My training in Sociology allowed me a unique perspective that colored my entire time abroad.

And now the point of this whole backstory – as students of Sociology, we all experience things differently than those who have not had such a background - so get out there and experience! Lest I tread too much into Dean Rifkin territory, you need to make the most of this short time you have as undergrads. Seek out our wonderful Sociology and Anthropology pro-

fessors for support for internships and even independent research. In the department office we have a new binder full of organizations that seek interns so come check it out. And of course, I encourage you to consider an experience abroad – summer, semester, or even short-term volunteer. I hope that the articles in this newsletter may inspire you to seek out your own program abroad (or even somewhere else in the U.S.!) and will get you thinking about all of the ways you can enhance your classroom experience with real-life experience.

I recently heard some of our Senior Sociology majors speaking to our Freshmen majors about various experiences they have had in their time here at TCNJ and it made me think of my own college experience. I had fun and studied hard and did an internship or two, but still wish I had done more. Enjoy this time but make every class, every experience, every moment count. And if I can help you with anything – assistance or guidance – I am always happy to do so. Seeing you majors is the best part of my day (and I have candy!).

Why Czechs Got it Right: Studying Abroad in the Czech Republic

By: Andrew Wilson

I recently studied abroad in the Czech Republic in the beautiful city of Prague and while I was there I quickly learned how challenging it was to adapt to a new culture. Based upon my experience I am going to share a few highlights of how such a vastly different culture recently out of Communism could change someone for the better.

Every society has its flaws, whether it is centered around the government, the economy or social issues and yet when I studied abroad in Prague this past semester I couldn't help but notice how much the Czechs got right. They emphasize personal relationships and many Czechs I spoke to noted that they make friends for life while it seems that Americans have friends that come and go. There is a very collective view of society as well, people recycle and respect the environment because they see it as their collective job to do so. Everyone takes public transportation regardless of class or income because it is faster, cleaner, and more efficient. Finally and perhaps most importantly, Czechs enjoy life. Many Czechs I spoke to were confused why Americans always

rush through everything and view life more as a means to an end; Czechs loved sitting out in parks, reading books, drinking beer, and cultivating new friendships.

Study abroad changed me and turned my world view upside down; it's almost as if I realized that there was more than one way to live my life. I struggled often with the native language, I bought the wrong foods at the grocery store, I got laughed at for wearing shorts and struggled when I forgot to bring bags to the grocery store. I learned to trust myself and revel in the friendships I had and I learned the value of sitting in a park alone and without my phone on a sunny day. Culture shock helps you find out a lot about yourself and how well you can adapt to a new way of life. Study abroad was one of the best experiences of my life because it changed who I am as a person by expanding my worldview and giving me a greater broader perspective on life.



How Sociology Followed Me Across the Globe

By: Alyssa Scull

As a Sociology student, I am used to studying and comparing the way various groups of people live. Before last winter, however, the majority of my real-life experiences with different groups of people apart from, say, students of different majors or from different states, were theoretical and based on readings and films. It was during my time studying abroad over winter break, my first time out of the country, that I was really exposed to other cultures for the first time, and the experience was invaluable.

During winter break, I participated in the faculty-lead program called "An Odyssey in Greece and Turkey: An Exploration of Ancient Greek Culture and Places" in which we spent 18 days travelling to different cities in Greece and Turkey while learning about

the history and art related to the ancient civilizations which once inhabited those cities. Being able to stand in the middle of ruins and be surrounded by architecture and art which was made thousands of years ago was astonishing. Staring up at the enormous Temple of Apollo at Didyma or walking through the Agora gave everyone on the trip some perspective on their lives and our current society. We learned so much about these ancient people and how they lived, both from reading their literature and from seeing the remnants of their lives firsthand.

It is no surprise that I learned about ancient cultures on the trip; that was the point of the class. What I did not realize was how much I would learn about modern cultures. After visiting sites and learning in an academic setting during the day, we were able to do whatever we wanted during the after-

noon or evening, which meant that we were immersed in the culture whether we wanted to be or not. Luckily, I wanted to be. I kept subconsciously comparing Greece and Turkey with America, or analyzing this new culture, asking myself questions like: How do the residents here interact with the cultural artifacts in the middle of their city? Why do they have these types of foods on their restaurant menus if they do not necessarily eat like this in their homes? Why do the airports seem so much more relaxed? How do people react to being asked for assistance from foreigners? I could not help trying to understand their culture and learn even more about it. My Sociology courses followed me across the globe and helped me understand each new place I visited, and the ability to acquire knowledge like this has truly sparked my interest in travelling even more.

“You’re A White Guy”

By: Dr. Tim Clydesdale

On October 26, I was delighted to accompany 17 students from SOC375 “Religion and American Culture” to the Sikh Gurdwara in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. This Sikh house of worship opened about seven years ago in an industrial section off Baker’s Basin Rd. It is one of nine such houses of worship now in New Jersey, serving the Punjabi immigrant community.

Field trips are a favorite activity in my elective courses. In my “Education” course, we visit a boarding school and a Philadelphia public school. In my religion course, we visit a religious university, a Black Baptist Church in Trenton, and usually a mosque or a synagogue. This year, however, I contacted the Lawrenceville Gurdwara and requested a visit. The president of the Gurdwara, who is also a pediatrician in Mercer County, responded quickly and with utmost welcome, and we set the date for our visit.

I had never been to a Sikh Gurdwara before, nor am I an expert on world religions, so I was as new to this experience as all 17 students. But like every other field trip to worship services, we were greeted warmly, treated like honored guests, invited to ask any and all questions, and given a wonderful introduction not only to the religious

beliefs but also to the community that is formed through the shared observance of this religion.

One of the top reasons I like field trips is for the experience of “otherness” that they can engender. That is, when students encounter those whose life worlds are so very different from their own. It gives students a taste, brief to be sure but nonetheless important, of what it might be like to experience America from a non-dominant cultural and ethnic location.

On this day, I got a taste of otherness myself. Near the end of the service, the congregation collectively receives a warm, sweet ball of brown sugar and butter – whose consumption leaves your hands and face a bit messy. When a little girl maybe 4 years old came by distributing napkins, she stared at me suspiciously, then whispered: “you’re a white guy!” I told her she was absolutely right. She pondered my answer for a moment, then decided she would give me a napkin too. It was a delicious and unforgettable moment of outsidership, and joined many welcoming moments on that day, creating a memory that will stay with me and all of us for years to come.

Sociology Will Serve You

By: Catherine Morgan



I am not a conventional Sociology major. I am double majoring with Chemistry and I fully intend to go to graduate school for Chemistry. I became a Sociology major on a whim during my freshman year. I did not know what it was or what I wanted to do with my life – I took a chance. I do not plan to become a sociologist or a social worker or have any other “expected” career for a Sociology major. As a result, people often devalue the Sociology part of my degree. I have been asked, “What does that have to do with Chemistry?” or “What are you going to do with THAT?” Honestly, I do not know what I’m going to actually do with my Sociology degree. Probably nothing. However, I know that Sociology will serve me.

The most important thing that I learned at college is that there is not a single “right way.” Everything is simply different. It is

when you widen your perspective that you can truly understand human interaction, the ultimate goal of Sociology. I have been challenged to understand why an American-Hmong immigrant family could possibly refuse western medical treatment for their epileptic daughter based on religious conviction. I have come to understand why Samoan people include a third gender, rather than uphold a usual dichotomy of “male and female.” I have learned why those in the slums of Brazil would rather save money for their own coffins than have enough food to eat while they are still alive. Instead of automatically judging others’ ideas as “incorrect,” I have been trained to literally walk a mile in their shoes so that I can fully understand them. I attribute this training to my Sociology coursework.

My message is simple: Sociology will serve you. If you plan to become a sociologist

or a social worker, then you know exactly how this training will serve you. You will be actively using it to understand, instruct, and counsel others. If you are like me and Sociology does not perfectly fit in to your career plans, then know that regardless of what you will be, Sociology will serve you. It will serve you if you are a supervisor dealing with a conflict in the workplace – you will be able to understand others on a deeper level and come up with a more thoughtful solution. It will serve you whenever you encounter a “strange” person who does not follow norms – you will try to put yourself in their shoes and deal with them respectfully. No matter where you end up in life, your Sociology training will continue to widen your perspective and give you the tools to successfully understand and interact with others.

The Greater Trenton Nutrition Study: A Look into a Senior Thesis

By: Peter Peliotis

It was only one year ago that I began my thesis on “food deserts” and nutritional inequality with Dr. Bates, and I feel as though my mind has been pushed and bent in many ways in tackling the subject. According to the FDA, food deserts are “urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.” I found the topic fascinating because it incorporates structural, political, cultural, and economic forces and their influences on individuals’ health. Moreover, I suspected that the current “food desert” model had many deficiencies and I tasked myself with further investigating the mechanisms at play so that I could (maybe) make my own contribution to the body of literature on the subject.

The study investigated peoples’ food choice preferences, mode of travel, shopping frequency, and a number of other factors in order to get a clear picture of how and *why* people choose the foods they choose and if any shopping habits differed between race or income level. Preliminary findings so far suggest that shopping frequency is one of the most important variables in the equation and shopping frequency itself is influenced by structural constraints. Simply put, fresh foods are healthier but they spoil much more quickly than convenience foods. My data so far suggests that when adjusting for income, those who identified as African-American shopped less frequently than those who identified as white or Hispanic/Latino. Moreover, people of all incomes shopped at numerous places for various reasons - price, selection, familiarity which refutes the “food desert” hypothesis and shifts the investigation toward social and cultural aspects, those of which exist as a product of structural inequality and cumulative adversity.



Social Norms: East vs. West

By: Kerrie Hannen

Sophomore year, I embarked on a student exchange experience to the University of California, Berkeley that challenged the social behaviors I learned at TCNJ. When in Berkeley, I had the opportunity to meditate at the beginning of my classes, attend seminars on self-actualization, participate daily in protests, and watch drum circles in the middle of campus.

Just when I thought that things couldn’t get any more different, I joined the Quidditch team on campus (the epitome of coolness at Berkeley). After only a week of being a chaser, I tore all of the ligaments in my knee and spent the rest of the semester on crutches. To my surprise, this only mildly tainted my experience because I was heralded by strangers and friends in California whenever I told them my injury was Harry Potter induced. Harry Potter, Doctor Who, and reading on the weekends was not only accepted in Berkeley but celebrated with lavish parties and fish fingers with pudding (Doctor Who reference for those non-Whovians).

Upon my arrival to New Jersey, however, I was met with very different reactions. Harry Potter was not only absent from the general social norms, but playing a magical flying sport was simply unheard of. After becoming the personal comedy act for my knee doctor, New Jersey friends, and anyone who asked about my injury, I decided to make up a new cool excuse for the crutches: fist pumping too hard at the club. So, next time you find yourself with a knee injury, familiarize yourself with the social norms of the area and save face before you become the flying Harry Potter dork with a demolished knee.