Notes from the Chair

All of us in Sociology and Criminal Justice Studies have been enjoying the many new and exciting things in our world! You’ve probably already seen our beautiful renovated offices and our departmental classroom, Patterson 205 (some of our majors have considered pitching tents in that room for easy access). We continue to welcome Dr. Rima Zito into our department. We have already enjoyed and benefited from her quick wit, good insights and excellent teaching. We also are fortunate to have Westminster alumni, trustee and retired district attorney Robert Buehner ’75 with us for the year. Attorney Buehner taught a course in Criminal Prosecution last fall, and is helping to organize our spring Criminal Justice Symposium and providing networking opportunities for our criminal justice students. And, last but not least, we welcome our new secretary Mrs. Mary Pitman, whose energy, initiative and made our getting settled a nearly painless process.

At the same time we were sad to say good-bye to Dr. Phyllis Kitzrow, who retired in December 2011 after 33 years of service. Her good cheer and many contributions to the Gender Studies and Criminal Justice programs over the years live on in departmental and campus programming and in the memories of her colleagues and students.

We have some exciting activities planned for this semester, especially a Criminal Justice Symposium for faculty, students and practitioners from Westminster and the larger region. Please read the subsequent article for more details. Our students in our Sociology Interest Group have been and will continue to sponsor programming and to engage in service around important social issues. Together with the Alumni Office, we will hold a speed networking event for sociology and criminal justice careers. Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD), the international sociology honorary society, will host our annual initiation ceremony, banquet and colloquium. We invite you to participate in as many of these events as your schedule allows.

Cheers,
Kristin Park
Chair, Sociology and Criminal Justice Studies

CJS to Host a 2-Day Symposium

On April 4 and 5, the department is hosting the first Criminal Justice Symposium: Innovative Strategies in Criminal Justice. The undergraduate-focused symposium will feature practitioners, academics, researchers, and activists who are working to solve problems within the criminal justice system through innovative responses and proactive programs. We will award $500 to the top undergraduate paper submitted to the symposium. Our planning committee, which includes some of our outstanding undergraduate students (Jennifer Cantella, Jennifer Duval, Kirsten Hess, Tricia Johnston, Zach Jones, and Joe Ritchie), has been meeting since February 2012 to make our first symposium a success. We are excited to announce that Secretary John Wetzel, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, will be our keynote speaker. We will also feature a panel of practitioners who will discuss innovative strategies that they are currently using. Confirmed panel members include Mercer County Juvenile Probation Officer Charlee Beatty, who will discuss Community Court and other proactive programming for juveniles, as well as Honorable Judge John Estrella who will discuss the Veterans Court in Allegheny County. In the afternoon we will also hold a career networking panel which will include a variety of careers in the field including a detective and an FBI agent.

This symposium is being funded through a United Chapters of Alpha Kappa Delta Sociology Honorary symposia grant, as well as through a generous donation from an anonymous alumna. If you are interested in attending, please contact Mary Pitman at pitmanmp@westminster.edu. For additional information on the symposium please visit our website at www.westminster.edu/cjs.
New Faculty in SOCJ

Mary Pitman

We are happy to introduce Rena C. Zito, assistant professor of sociology and criminal justice studies. Dr. Zito comes to us from North Carolina State University where she recently earned her Ph.D. in sociology. Dr. Zito will be teaching a number of courses including Principles of Sociology, Deviance, Sociology Capstone I and II, Data Analysis, Minority-Majority Relations, and Sociology of Family. Her current topics of research are in the areas of family structure, histories, and adolescent behavior and also criminological theory.

“My favorite part of teaching at Westminster College has been the opportunity to form personal, mentoring relationships with students,” said Zito when asked about her first semester at Westminster. “The mentorship I had as an undergraduate student was life-changing, helping me to develop a lifelong love of learning and providing me with the guidance for pursuing my career goals. I love that Westminster College is the kind of place where one-on-one relationships with students are celebrated and professors can have the kind of impact on our students that my mentors had on me.”

Sociology Participates in New International Studies Major and Minor

Kristin Park

Starting in the fall term of 2012 Westminster has a new major and minor in International Studies. The major reflects the need for students to be better prepared for their careers and graduate study in an increasingly globalized world. All students in the major take several core courses in language, economics, politics and cultural study. Students then focus their study by choosing a concentration in International Politics, Global Development or Cultural Studies. Students interested in Sociology choose the global development concentration and its sociology emphasis, which focuses on contemporary development issues and their historical contexts in Latin America, Africa and Asia. A semester of study abroad is part of the major, in the past Sociology majors have studied in France, Spain, Costa Rica and Cameroon. Students may also choose a disciplinary major with a minor in International Studies. Students graduating with this major might go on to graduate study in international development, human rights or area studies. Possible careers include work in nonprofit organizations focused around youth, human rights, poverty, healthcare, or immigration or refugee issues, doing research for international organizations or being an international recruitment and admissions counselor in college admissions offices.

Contact Dr. Kristin Park at (724) 946-7251 or kpark@westminster.edu for more information on the Global Development concentration and Dr. Michael Aleprete (program coordinator, Political Science) at alepreme@westminster.edu for more information on the International Studies Program in general.

Farewell Westminster

Debbie Sanchez, former secretary, Departments of SOCJ and Political Science

It’s hard to believe that after 11½ years I am no longer at Westminster. After we moved to Cheswick (near Pittsburgh) in 2009, I drove more than 120 miles a day to be part of the department and campus that was like family. I developed some health problems that made it impossible for me to continue that commute. I now am working 10 miles away at the library in Natrona Heights as the circulation desk manager, and also at a brand new library located in the Pittsburgh Mills Mall, just three miles from home. I am excited to be a part of the new mall library, a rare and different kind of place. There, I am running a writing group, and I am developing new groups. I also lead a program which encourages people to read and discuss the books that are associated with new movies. The current selection is The Hobbit by Tolkien.

While I miss the people at Westminster, I do not miss the commute, especially on bad weather days. Although, I must admit that there are some (beautiful weather) days when I do miss that drive.

Announcement

Please join us for the presentation of “The Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center Dancers” at 7 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 21, in Berlin Lounge. Refreshments will be served.
Two Sides of the Criminal Justice Coin

By Jennifer Cantella
Senior Sociology-Criminal Justice Major

This summer I had the privilege of working alongside and learning from two very different groups of people within the same realm of work. The first group of people I was working with was the detectives of Beaver County. Throughout my internship with the Beaver County Detective Bureau I got to experience many different situations. For example, I bagged and recorded evidence, retrieved DNA from a man facing criminal homicide charges, witnessed an autopsy, sat-in on a homicide trial, and participated in a SWAT training, just to name a few. The county detectives are in charge of handling all major crimes within the area and assisting all local municipalities with their investigations. The main focus of all the detectives is to find the “bad guy” and gather all evidence possible in order to get the conviction they want.

The second group of people I worked with was the women of the State Correctional Institute of Cambridge Springs. This is one of the only two women’s prisons in Pennsylvania. The knowledge I gained while at the prison was unlike anything I have ever experienced. At SCI-Cambridge Springs I was co-teaching a Sociology of Family class alongside Dr. Robison and Joseph Ritchie. This class consisted of women varying in age, race, beliefs, and convictions. While at SCI-Cambridge Springs we also conducted focus groups with women who were not in our class. This allowed me to experience different types of inmates, their interactions with me, and some of their feelings toward education.

I felt extremely blessed to have been able to experience not only one, but two amazing atmospheres this summer. I had the opportunity to encounter many situations and people that most college students never have the privilege of experiencing. However, doing all of this at the same time really made my mind spin. Four days a week I was working with the detectives trying to solve crimes and lock people behind bars. I saw the victims and families that were affected by crime and how much time, effort, and work goes into each and every step of the criminal process. I found myself wrapped up in wanting to uncover the “bad guy” maybe even more than the detectives. However, every Wednesday I would take a break from that life and flip the switch in my mind while we traveled to Cambridge Springs. I had to wrap my mind around the fact that I spent the majority of the week looking for people who have committed crimes like these women, and then once a week I would come to teach them just like “normal” students. How would I ever be able to keep an open mind?

Honestly, the first day at SCI-Cambridge Springs I was nervous and had no idea what to expect. I was also nervous for them to learn that I was interning at a detective bureau or that I plan on making a career in law enforcement, because I didn’t want any of the women to think that I was judging them. Throughout that first class, however, I started to relax and it began to feel just like a regular classroom. The women were so eager to learn and participate. The time in class is so precious to them and you can see the joy on their faces when they started to connect the things they were learning in class to their own lives.

Week after week I would go through this struggle in my mind, back and forth between the thought that all criminals should be locked away for a long time and the thought that some of these people truly have the ability to change and just need someone to believe in them and they would make it in the outside world. I still struggle with myself trying to pin down exactly what I believe is the best way to handle people who break the law. I believe that rehabilitation should play a big role, and that men and women need to be looked at separately, because their needs and traumas are much different than one another. However, I also understand that rehabilitation will not work for everyone, so what do we do with those people who don’t respond to rehab? I don’t think I will ever have an answer as to what will work best for the “system” but I can say that my experiences this summer have really opened my eyes. I am still looking to pursue a career in law enforcement, however, the women of SCI-Cambridge Springs have definitely elevated my level of compassion. Every time I think of them, I will think of hope.

Faculty Committed to Quality Teaching

Kristin Park

All our departmental faculty use a variety of teaching techniques both inside and outside the classroom, including debates, role plays, Socratic Seminars, service learning, guest speakers and field trips. Dr. Kristenne Robison was recognized for her innovative teaching by being awarded the prestigious Sage/Pine Forge Teaching Innovations and Professional Development Grant designed to prepare a new generation of scholars and teachers. As a recipient of this award she attended a teaching conference, presented by the most respected scholars of teaching and learning in sociology, held before the 2011 American Sociological Association conference. I can’t help bragging that Colby King, Westminster alumnus and Sociology ABD student (University of South Carolina) was another recipient.

Dr. Kristin Park was one of the Westminster nominees for the 2012 Case Professor of the Year Award sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The award recognizes faculty around the nation who are creative and effective inside and outside the classroom and who contribute to larger campus and national discussions around the scholarship of teaching and learning.
First of all, I am loving retirement. I'm not sure I would if I weren't writing this book, but being able to have full days to write and revise and read things for it is so much easier than trying to fit writing in around a regular schedule. And haven't I mentioned not driving two hours a day? That is also wonderful.

The baby in the picture is Maya who will be one soon. I go in and take care of her on Tuesday afternoons. That sounds so easy and fun but I come home and collapse on the couch, totally worn out. But I am really enjoying the time with her.

The other part of my life takes place in my office upstairs where I have everything pertaining to the book laid out (those of you who remember my office will be able to visualize the chaos). The book is due next month and I think I'll make it! I have just finished Chapter eight, the final chapter, and now have to read and polish everything (including that awful Chapter five) and do the bibliography and make sure I haven't repeated anything.

The book is about 65 women who finished law school by 1975 and what happened to them. They are now 60+ (some much older) and are either retired or in the last stages of their careers. One woman is 90 and still practicing. I'm looking at whether they were successful (using a variety of definitions) and why or why not. Part of the emphasis is on the work/family issues and the extent to which they have changed (or not) from young women professionals today. It feels great to have written the final chapter and will feel even better to turn in the complete manuscript. The book is being published by Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Good luck, everyone, whether you're making up those finals or taking them. Hope to see you on my next trip up to Westminster.