

UIC Sociology presents

Living Sociology

Student Interviews of
UIC Sociology Alumni

**SOCIOLOGY
COLLEGE OF
LIBERAL ARTS
AND
SCIENCES**

UIC

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Letter from the Department Head

Dear Reader,

As Sociologists, we are often asked by others (friends, parents, employers), "What can you do with a sociology degree?" As UIC Department Head, I am thrilled to share with you the answers to this question as provided by our UIC Sociology alumni (from B.A.'s to M.A.'s to PhD's!) to undergraduates enrolled in their Capstone Sociology course. Let me unpack for you how this came to be.

Starting with the Fall 2016 semester, UIC sociology seniors enroll in a Capstone course that reignites their sociological imagination, hones their sociological skills, and prepares them for their next life adventure, whether that's more education or a career. One way we do this is by engaging students in projects with community partners—ranging from Dignity Diner to SGA Youth & Family Services to the AIDS Foundation of Chicago—to apply their sociological knowledge in real world settings. One group stayed closer to home to work with the UIC Sociology Department, which was interested in learning more about what kinds of careers our alumni pursue, with the goal of also helping current and future sociology majors understand the rich variety of jobs available to them.

Honing their interviewing skills and learning to write engaging summaries was made easier by the impressive, engaging, and inspiring life stories of our alumni. In the pages that follow, you will find the product of 30 conversations between alumni (and one very special faculty emerita!) and current students. We originally posted these interviews as a series entitled, "30 in 30: 30 Alumni Stories in 30 Weeks" on our blog and on social media. It was so well-received that we decided to gather them together here, in the same order they originally appeared, to share with a broader audience in a more lasting format.

These alumni features are one instance of the success of the capstone course, rooted in connectedness in the community; they taught students about the range of graduate degrees and career paths a sociology major might pursue, and these dialogues gave alumni the opportunity to recall their time at UIC, offer advice, and learn about the experience of current students. The interviews featured here offer a snapshot of the ways UIC Sociology is engaging with the community beyond our walls, preparing our students to be productive citizens after graduating, and staying connected to our growing cadre of UIC Sociology alumni.

We hope you enjoy learning about our alumni and feel inspired to join the conversation!

Warmly,
Maria Krysan, Department Head



Eduardo Garza

Education

PhD, Educational Leadership, DePaul University, 2013
Master's, Urban Planning and Policy, UIC, 2002
Bachelor's, Sociology, UIC

Current job

Dean of Student Services, Richard J. Daley College in Chicago, Illinois

On studying sociology

Dr. Garza chose Sociology as his major because he is fascinated by the study of people and how they interact. He took an elective with Dr. Nilda Flores-Gonzalez and fell in love with sociology. His background in community organizing was also a good fit with the major.

Remembering his time in UIC Sociology

Eduardo's fondest memories of UIC Sociology are the students he took classes with in the department. They were from many different walks of life, and he learned a lot about them and their diverse perspectives.

What's most inspiring about the discipline of sociology

Sociology courses cover a wide spectrum of practical issues occurring in communities, which makes it a great base for pursuing a career in policy, education and many other areas. Dr. Garza also believes that Sociology allows for individuals to better assess community dynamics. A degree in sociology made him a better communicator and more adept at understanding diverse values.

How a background in sociology influenced his career path

Working in one of Chicago's City Colleges, Dr. Garza has seen first-hand the tremendous deficit in higher education opportunities for minorities. Given the importance of education for success, he was inspired to work as an agent for change in the field of education, which led him to his current job.

Advice for current or newly graduated UIC Sociology students

Exposure to many different topics addressed in sociology will help students to find a career path. While classes like theory and methods are interesting, classes that deal with race, class and other topical issues in the real world will help students find career inspiration. Active participation while they are students will prepare new graduates to represent UIC in various professional fields, including health, housing, education and more.

In his free time

Eduardo loves to be out on the water. He has been sailing for 12 years, which he says helps him to connect with the beauty of nature.

Interview by Luis Duran, UIC, 2016

Dan Lowman

Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 1996

Current Job

Dan is currently at Grenzebach Glier and Associates (GG+A) working as the Senior Vice President of Analytics & Director of the Philanthropy Survey Lab. He works as a consultant for the company, advising non-profit organizations and providing counsel on how to excel at raising philanthropic private support. Dan's clients have included the Advancement offices at UIC and UIUC, as well as hundreds of other universities, healthcare organizations, museums, and national organizations. His consulting with non-profit organizations involves market research, similar to the way that companies research their ideal customers.



How sociology helped Dan find his career

Before beginning his career at GG+A, Dan was applying for graduate school and the U.S. Peace Corps at the same time. The Peace Corps contacted him first and he was soon on his way to Slovakia. He spent two years there and another year traveling around Eastern Europe and Asia. On a flight back to Chicago from Tokyo, he was frantically applying for jobs. He initially started with an interest in journalism or communications, but was called into a job that would channel his statistics skills learned from sociology courses at UIC.

From UIC Sociology to the Philanthropy Survey Lab

He started out as a project assistant at GG+A and worked his way to being the director of a small analytics unit with just two employees. SPSS analysis software, which he first encountered in his first statistics class at UIC, was introduced into the company. Soon, GG+A became known for its approach to "evidence-based" consulting, and it eventually became the Philanthropy Survey Lab. "It's not enough to be right when you are advising a client," Dan says, "you also have to prove it, and they have to believe you."

Why sociology still informs Dan's work on a daily basis

Dan finds that his job relies heavily on statistics, data, and drawing empirical conclusions; he credits his background in sociology as being critical to his success in his industry. He calls this the nuts and bolts of sociology that pull the larger work together. Understanding social science methodology, such as how to write effective survey questions, or framing a testable research question, is something he values in his job every day. Also important is data visualization and the importance of presenting academic quality research to a non-academic audience. Further, his sociological education helps him to see the "big picture" social issues related to philanthropy. This is especially crucial in the way that his market research relies on analyzing data between different and competing donors for non-profit organizations, and how issues of class, wealth, gender, and geo-demographics affect how charitable gifts are made, which organizations will get them, and what impact that has on society. Dan feels strongly that applied sociology must not be purely quantitative, but a mix of logic, math, creativity, and human interaction, all supported by evidence, and this is what makes his career exciting for him.

Fun facts about Dan

Dan and his wife, Robin—a fellow UIC alumna, have three incredibly talented children; one is a champion member of the Chicago Middle School Debate League, another is the banjo player in The Basement Bluegrass Band, and the youngest is very influenced by 80's punk music and yet is still very polite and charming. Last year, Dan traveled to Alaska and in so doing achieved a lifelong dream to visit all 50 states. He is currently working on a book about the history of moonshine and American whiskey, and he admits freely that research on whiskey is more fun than writing about it!

Interview by Jocelyn Diaz, UIC, 2016



Fiamma Gaitan

Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 2014

Current Job

Natatorium Instructor, Chicago Park District

On finding sociology

Like many other alums, Fiamma started out with another major, in biology, which she left after taking a Sociology 100 course. It was SOC 100 that sparked her love and passion for sociology.

What Fiamma loves about sociology

Sociology made Fiamma look at the world from a different perspective. What she loves the most is that it helps her see situations from various points of view. She can always question a situation using her sociological knowledge. Fiamma also thinks sociology is important because it reflects our society, which is always changing!

How faculty influenced Fiamma

All of the faculty members Fiamma took classes with were very involved with the students in their courses. Not only did they help her with courses, they pushed students to engage with one another in order to create connections and network on campus. Because of the efforts from the faculty in the sociology department, Fiamma's perception of what can happen in classrooms changed.

Bringing sociology to work

Fiamma works for the Chicago Park District as a swimming instructor. She began working for the Chicago Park District at the age of 16 and began to move her way up throughout her undergraduate career. Although sociology does not directly connect to her job, she has found ways to use the skills she acquired as a sociology major to help her be successful. For instance, Fiamma explains how the courses on gender and culture she took at UIC inform her understanding and appreciation of the many types of people she meets every day.

Interview by Itzayana Alvarado, UIC, 2016

Zach Abel



Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 1992

Current Job

Zach Abel works in Commercial Sales in the automotive industry. Although sociology is not directly related to his career, he has acquired many skills from sociology that translate to his field. For instance, he travels the world to educate people about the various parts that are used by his company and explores new communities and cultures. Because of his education, he can appreciate demography, culture, ecology, and religion he finds in these new communities.

What brought Zach to sociology

Zach began his undergraduate career as a business and then psychology major. Neither major seemed to be the right fit. When he took Sociology 100, he found a new perspective on everyday life, so he changed his major one last time. He was intrigued by sociology because it provided insight into how the world works and why it works in that particular manner. As he continued to take sociology courses at UIC, he met professors, teaching assistants, and staff members in the sociology department that were passionate about their field of study, which kept him engaged.

On why sociology is more than just common sense

Although he found sociology fascinating, he often got grief from his friends who thought sociology was “just common sense.” Zach knew that it was more than that; sociology gave him a new set of skills and appreciation for the world and the cultures that he might not have developed otherwise. The sociology club also helped him understand the various cultures on UIC’s campus and appreciate those individuals as well as the university. He began to see how important it is to view the world in many different perspectives.

Advice for current undergraduates at UIC Sociology

His advice to undergraduates is to create a close connection with professors, teaching assistants, and staff members in the sociology department. Those individuals made a strong impact on his life because they took the time to talk to him and guide him when things did not go as planned.

Fun fact

Zach is also an international antiquarian book dealer and a trainer in the tech-industry!

Interview by Itzayana Alvarado, UIC, 2016





Bill McCready

Education

PhD, Sociology, UIC 1972
Master's, Sociology, University of Chicago, 1966
BA, Philosophy, St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, 1963

Current jobs

Dr. McCready is currently Professor Emeritus, Sociology, Northern Illinois University; Visiting Scholar, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan; Senior Fellow for Evaluation at the Ministry Leadership Center, Sacramento, CA and a Senior Consultant at GfK North America.

What brought Bill to sociology

At the University of Chicago he developed an interest in social justice and the social gospel that was stimulated during his time in seminary. He became interested in pursuing sociology and anthropology. Sociology ultimately caught his eye because of its attention to topics like religion, family, and cities and how they come together in society.

What sociology has to offer

Bill believes that sociology is different from other majors because it engages in social criticism. It offers its practitioners experience and skills in survey research, such as data analysis, interpretation, and statistical modeling. These skills provide sociologists with insights that can be used in constructing and critiquing social policies, evaluating social behaviors in many different realms, and in their sociological thinking to translate the data into "big data" and into meaningful patterns of human activity.

Advice for students and recent alumni of UIC Sociology

Because sociology is a diverse discipline, sociology majors may be unsure about the career path that best fits them. Dr. McCready suggests that while the courses students take are very important and teach a sociological way of thinking about society, the influence of professors is even greater. He urges students to get to know faculty, which will help them to navigate future career and graduate school paths.

Claim to fame

Bill McCready was the first Center Director at NORC at the University of Chicago!

Interview by Itzayana Alvarado, UIC, 2016

Ira Wrestler



Education

MA, Sports Management, University of Tennessee
BA, Sociology, UIC 2007

Current job

Ira is the Coordinator of Facilities and Student Development at the UIC Recreation Center on the West Campus. His job in campus recreation involves a variety of tasks including supervising fifty student workers at any given time as well as hiring, scheduling, and mentoring students. Ira's primary goal is to provide outstanding service to the diverse clientele that comes into the facility to exercise and relax by ensuring a safe, clean and welcoming environment.

That "aha!" moment at UIC Sociology

Ira had many "aha!" moments in his sociology classes where he learned to be open to different perspectives and ideas. Ira's experience in the sociology department at UIC broadened his awareness and appreciation for diverse populations, which is relevant for his work with various groups of people that come in and out of the recreational facility. Some of the main skills that he learned in his sociology courses and uses on a daily basis are the ability to effectively communicate, plan, and problem solve.

Ira's route from UIC Sociology to UIC Recreation

Ira reached out to Brian Cousins, who became his mentor, and is the current director of UIC Campus recreation. He took Ira under his wing, and explained to him how he got to where he was in his career. With Brian's guidance, Ira became very active in the national organization for campus recreation, NIRSA, and went to the national conference as well. Shortly after the conference he received a graduate assistantship at the University of Tennessee on a two-year program. While he was studying, he was also working for their recreational facility under their aquatics department. He eventually returned to Chicago to work for Lifetime Fitness, which helped him to successfully apply for his job at the UIC Recreation Facility as a professional.

Fun fact

Ira has visited 5 of the 7 continents! He initially began his "world tour" with UIC Explorers Alumni Travel Program, and only needs to visit Antarctica and Asia to complete all seven!

Interview by Jocelyn Diaz, UIC, 2016





Nakisha Hobbs

Education

BA, Sociology & African American Studies, UIC, 2001

Current job

Nakisha is the current Co-Founder and Principal of the Village Leadership Academy (VLA) which is an independent K-8 school. In addition, she is also the founder of It Takes A Village Early Learning Centers, which serves approximately five-hundred students 0-5 years of age. On top of Nakisha's many responsibilities, she is also involved with childcare advocacy through state-wide commissions and committees that work to influence public policy.

How Nakisha realized the need for the Village Leadership Academy

Prior to establishing the Village Leadership Academy and It Takes A Village Early Learning Centers, Ms. Hobbs initiated a Saturday school tutoring program that helped students in remediation and eventually led to the opening of her preschools in order to help children earlier in their education. However, after students graduated the program, parents continued to bring their children back, because other schools were not serving their children as well. As a result, Nakisha and her co-founder, Anita Andrews-Hutchinson, founded the Village Leadership Academy to educate low-income students of color, guided by a social justice philosophy.

Bringing her sociological and African American studies knowledge to Chicago

Nakisha's interest in inequities in education grew during college, especially while working closely with Amanda Lewis, who has an extensive background in sociology and education. Nakisha originally intended to pursue a PhD in Sociology, but found that simply theorizing was not enough to make an impact on the educational system, so she sought to use the skills that sociology taught her to solve problems. For the founding of and continued work at VLA, Nakisha found her education invaluable. Some of the skills she learned at UIC and still uses daily include critical thinking, employing perspective, and addressing root causes to systematic issues. Alongside her sociological background, her major in African American studies gave her a historical perspective on current inequities in education.

Why everyone should think like a sociologist

Ms. Hobbs encourages everyone to think like a sociologist because she says they are the best critical thinkers and problem solvers. In addition, she feels that sociology has taught her to create more meaningful relationships and perspectives.

A favorite memory of UIC

One fond memory that Nakisha has of UIC is participating in the Changing Terrain in Race and Ethnicity Conference that was spearheaded by professors Amanda Lewis and Maria Krysan, and which gave her exposure to cutting edge work among respected sociologists.

Fun fact!

She is an avid yelper because she thinks Chicago food is the best food. She says her love of Chicago's food is balanced by her commitment to walking 10,000 steps (5 miles!) a day!

Interview by Jocelyn Diaz, UIC, 2016

Sarah Spell



Education

PhD, Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, 2016

BA, Sociology & Psychology, UIC, 2007



Addressing inequality through research

Sarah's dissertation examined the ways in which college hookups are racialized and unequal. While she says that often people focus on the "hook-up" aspect of her dissertation topic, she wants to emphasize the inequality revealed in the findings of who hooks up with whom and why. Through her research, Dr. Spell found that the ability to hook up in college was a privilege available to some more than others, revealing that racism and racial inequality are prevalent not only in formal spaces, but also in informal college settings, like sexual and romantic relationships.

Sarah continues her research on inequality in her current job

Dr. Spell is a Senior Research Associate at Pew Charitable Trusts. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania last year, Sarah decided that she wanted a position that would allow her to continue to impact inequality. Her work at Pew Charitable Trusts allows her to do policy research related to fighting old age income insecurity through state level retirement savings policy that results in reports read by a large audience of academics and lay people alike.

Finding sociology at UIC

Sarah's parents did not attend college, so they did not have the personal experience to help her to navigate college. She attributes her early success at UIC to the wonderful resources she found in the Sociology department. In particular, the guidance of Dr. Shawn Neidorf (a PhD alumna of UIC Sociology), her TA in Sociology 100, was tremendously impactful. Shawn helped Sarah not only as a TA but personally connected her to Dr. Maria Krysan, under whom she worked for the Chicago Area Study (CAS) for two years as an undergraduate. Because of their influence, Sarah says that she was able to have many informative experiences that later made her very competitive when applying for graduate school. For instance, she got an internship with Joint Program of Survey Methodology, through which she learned much about survey methods and statistics.

Advice for students and recent graduates

If she has any regrets about her time at UIC, Sarah says, they are only that she wishes she had followed even more of the advice offered by her mentors. She also says she wishes that she had taken more classes outside the department while at UIC, in topics like economics.

Lasting lessons in impacting inequality

For Sarah, the time Shawn Neidorf and Maria Krysan spent with her taught her that if someone asks for help, you should help them! Part of our job is to be of service to others, she says. She also points out that this experience comes full circle for her, because mentoring is a wonderful, personal way to address inequality—not coincidentally relating to her overarching research goal.

Fun fact

Dr. Spell started doing improv comedy about a year ago. She says that it's a fabulous way to hone her presentation skills...no matter what topic arises!

Interview by Halimah Salah and Kirsten Andersen





Barbara Downs

Education

PhD, Sociology, University of Michigan, 1998
BA, Sociology, UIC, 1992

Current job

Director of the Federal Statistical Research Data Center program at the Center for Economic Studies at the U.S. Census Bureau. She began working at the Census Bureau as an Analyst, working on surveys on fertility in the Family branch of the Bureau.

How sociology prepared her for working at the Census Bureau

Barbara says that sociology prepared her for her work by teaching her survey methodologies and how to analyze data. She uses what she learned to create and administer surveys in her work. Broadly, she says that sociology gave her the technical skills to examine the world. Dr. Downs says sociology also helps her in everyday interactions and when gauging sources like the news, asking how information was gathered and processed.

Do you need a PhD to work at the Census Bureau?

Barbara says the census bureau also employs those with bachelor's degrees, just starting at a lower analyst job code than PhDs. If you liked statistics and surveys as a sociology major, you might enjoy working at the Census Bureau!

Advice for students of Sociology

Seek feedback from faculty and keep practicing at the things you think you're not good at, until you are!

A favorite memory of her time in school

Dr. Downs once had a professor who made students write and re-write the same essay over and over until it was perfected. She learned about editing, continuing to practice your skills, and how to take feedback from mentors.

Interview by Halimah Salah

Angela Mascarenas



Education

PhD, Sociology, UIC, 2010

MA, Sociology, UIC, 1987

BA, Social Psychology, University of the Philippines, 1983

Current work

Dr. Mascarenas works in New York using her analytics background (she worked in Chicago as an accounts analyst for an investment firm in Chicago for 12 years). She is currently consulting for a leading Swiss chocolatier. She is also excited to be facilitating a theater workshop for 1199SEIU (Service Employees International Union) summer camp as a way to engage and develop critical thinking among minority children ages 8-12 years old. She will be adapting a curriculum that she developed in her work at CIRCA Pintig.

Other related work

Angela is the Co-Executive director of the community theater organization, CIRCA Pintig, established over 25 years ago. The organization uses the arts as a way to address social problems. Dr. Mascarenas manages operations, solicits grant support, helps with workshops, and participates in the creation of performances. Performances also include “talkbacks” afterward that engage the audience in the issues that the performances address. She loves her job because it helps her to bring her academic knowledge and the world together.

The strength of sociology

Dr. Mascarenas appreciates the complementarity of anthropology, psychology, and sociology, but she was drawn to sociology for graduate school because the discipline focuses on the structure of society as well as groups’ beliefs and cultures. She says that sociology is uniquely intersectional as a discipline. Students of sociology learn qualitative and quantitative methods that are useful for analyzing relevant social problems, and the subject helps students to learn to think critically instead of taking things at face value.

Advice for students and UIC Sociology

To best serve students, Angela suggests that the department work to introduce as many students and alumni to one another as possible, so that students can appreciate the range of careers sociology prepares students to succeed in after graduating. She says this will also help students to access networks and possibly gain hands-on experience.

Interview by Luis Duran, UIC, 2016 and Kirsten Andersen



Rosemarie Dominguez

Education

MA, Latino American & Latino Studies, UIC, Expected 2018

BA, Sociology, Applied Psychology and Latin American & Latino Studies, UIC, 2015

Current job

Rosemarie is currently working on her Master's degree in Latino American and Latino Studies (LALS) and works as a Teaching Assistant while working on her degree.

How sociology chose Rosemarie

She says that being a brown-skinned Latina from Little Village, she feels that sociology really chose her. It was a great complement to her knowledge of and involvement with grass-roots and community organizing. Sociology helps students to develop critical consciousness and helps them to become revolutionaries as they learn more about social stratification, class and racial injustice, and more through a sociological lens.

Advocating for her own success

While she was challenged by some, and witnessed other students of color being challenged for their ambitious goals to double or triple major, Rosemarie found great support at UIC from others. Her academic advisor in LALS, Juanita del Toro, encouraged her to take on the challenge of completing three majors, which she did successfully. This experience taught Rosemarie that students should advocate for themselves, as well as seek out mentors who believe in their abilities.

Using sociology beyond the classroom

In addition to pursuing her Master's degree and working as a TA, Rosemarie is a Community Assistant for La Casa Student Housing, an initiative of the Resurrection Project. She also serves as a mentor for first generation students who are pursuing their bachelor's degree.

Fun facts

While Rosemarie loves to support students, volunteer in her community and stay, she also loves a good nap. She also cherishes time spent with family, which is incredibly important to her as a Latinx woman, because family is "everything" in Mexican culture.

Interview by Luis Duran, UIC, 2016

Eman Aly



Education

Master of Divinity in Islamic Studies, American Islamic College, 2017
MSW, Social Work, UIC, 2009
BA, Sociology, UIC, 2001

Current job

Health Communications Manager at National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago

How Eman found sociology

Eman studied business and education before finding sociology through the Social Problems course in the department. Professor Steve Warner taught the class, and his instruction and guidance inspired her to take more classes and eventually to major in sociology. Combined with her passion for youth, Eman's background in sociology prepared her to successfully complete a Master's in social work.

Sociology: Bridging the personal and the public

Sociology is personally relevant for Eman, with regard to the political climate and immigration policies affecting the Muslim community in the United States. Eman believes that sociology offers an ecological model for examining society and the groups that comprise it at a macro level. This is particularly helpful for her, as she is deeply involved in grassroots efforts in the Muslim community here in the Chicago area, while understanding the connections between the experiences of the local community and the issues facing that community nationally.

Using her sociology degree at NORC

She says her sociology degree was a platform for her career in communications, marketing, and as a digital strategist. At NORC, Eman conducts social research, using media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, which provide rich data about human behavior. As the Health Communications Manager, her work ranges from digital marketing research, to presenting findings and consulting, so each day is different!

A range of careers

Eman has leveraged sociology to connect social media, the Muslim community, and health, and she believes that students of sociology are being prepared for a range of careers, including human resources, project management, public health, and non-masters level social work. Eman's example demonstrates the adaptability of a BA in sociology.

Fun facts about Eman

- Eman just read and enjoyed *Year of Yes* by Shonda Rhimes...she would recommend it!
- She has also recently learned to knit and make soap. She says she applies her research skills to hobbies, learning all she can about them.
- Eman also spoke at the Women's March in Chicago in 2017.

Interviewed by Myia Scott, UIC, 2017





Salma Ayaz

Education

MSW, Aurora University, 2017
BA, Sociology, UIC, 2014

Current work

After researching graduate programs, Salma decided on a Masters of Social Work (MSW) because she felt the program best combined her love of psychology and sociology.

Salma's experience with sociology at UIC changed the way she saw the world and has led her down a different path than the one she started on. She currently attends Aurora University where she is working on her MSW.

How sociology changed Salma's view of the world

Salma says that people are often unaware of what others experience, which makes it difficult to see beyond a narrow lens. Taking classes on race and gender helped her learn about the historical and current struggles that others experience, allowing her to become more aware and open-minded. Salma's most memorable class was a 400-level race class with Dr. Amy Bailey. This advanced-level class not only increased her sociological knowledge, but prepared her for her master's-level courses. Salma believes that everyone, despite their college major, could benefit from a sociology class in race and gender – it changes minds!

Advice for new students of sociology

Salma recommends paying attention in class, reading the material the professor gives you (yes, even you seniors!), and to attend professors' office hours – they are there to help you. She thinks it is important to participate in class, especially when you have a unique perspective to offer.

What will Salma do with her MSW?

Passionate about working with children, Salma is completing a school social work emphasis through her MSW. Sociology helped her realize that because environment can impact one's actions, working with kids while they are young can help change their lives and their patterns. As part of her master's program, Salma interns at a local elementary school as a School Social Worker. As a social worker, she provides extra support for school children, helping them learn to interact better with others, control their anger and emotions, and learn to express themselves more adequately. Her responsibilities also involve working with all those who have an impact on the child, such as parents, teachers, and various agencies. This challenging job is both time-consuming and emotional, but interacting with the children and seeing positive breakthroughs has been extremely rewarding for her.

Down the road

Salma's eventful past year getting married may seem just a prelude to her coming year's graduation and relocation to Texas, where she hopes to find employment as a school social worker. Her passion to help traumatized children will eventually lead to the realization of her own private practice. In addition, Salma hopes to be able to contribute to her field through research, and perhaps instruction in a college class shaped by both sociology and psychology.

Interview by Jamie Yager, UIC, 2016

Jenny Calero



Education

MA, Urban Planning and Policy, UIC, Expected 2018

BA, Sociology, UIC, 2014

UIC's diversity drew Jenny in

Growing up in Cicero, a predominately Latino neighborhood, Jenny felt that she was not exposed to a lot of diversity, but she wanted to explore differences in cultures and races.

Driving down I-290 with her parents, Jenny would always notice the big University of Illinois at Chicago sign. When it came time to explore college options, she remembered the sign and decided to research the university. She learned that UIC had great diversity among its student body and it was close to home, making UIC an easy choice.

Finding sociology

Jenny decided to take an Introduction to Sociology class, which sparked her interest in the field. The class included the topics of race and gender, which Jenny wasn't used to hearing people discuss. Talking about such controversial topics only sparked Jenny's interest even more in the field and led her to choose sociology as a major. During her time as an undergraduate, Jenny had the opportunity to work with Dr. Lorena Garcia on an independent study in which they worked to connect the book *Barrios to Burbs: The Making of the Mexican American Middle Class* by Jody Agius Vallejo to race.

From Sociology to Urban Planning and Policy

After graduating, Jenny decided to apply to UIC's Urban Planning and Policy Master's program. She was accepted and will graduate with her degree at the end of this year! Jenny says her sociological background is a great way to bring a different lens to working with communities in urban planning. Once she graduates, Jenny plans to work for the City of Chicago or a small municipality like the town she grew up in.

Working toward her degree

Currently, Jenny works as a population health coordinator. She works directly with patients and the doctors; Jenny's goal is to make the patient comfortable enough to want to follow through with their healthcare. She loves her job because she gets to work with patients one-on-one and she feels that her sociological background allows her to be able to understand the patient's background and understand where they are coming from when they make certain decisions.

Fun facts!

During her spare time, Jenny loves to learn new and exciting things and travel to different countries, learning a new language, and learning how to play the piano. She also enjoys running and tries to set new goals all the time. Because of those goals, she will be running her first marathon this year.

Interview by Jacqueline Elizondo, UIC, 2017



Chiquita Collins

Education

PhD, Sociology, University of Michigan, 1996
BA, Sociology, UIC, 1990

Current work

Dr. Collins is the Director and Associate Dean for Diversity and Cultural Competence at the School of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland. She is also Assistant Professor of Medicine. She says that a sociology degree prepares you for work in any field because of all the skills students acquire in their training as sociologists. Although Chiquita did not pursue a medical degree, she always wanted to work in the medical field. Dr. Collins' current position at Johns Hopkins allows her to work in the medical field, using her PhD in sociology. As an Associate Dean of Diversity, Chiquita brings a different perspective to innovations while diversifying higher education at John Hopkins medical school. As a diversity officer, she assists 33 departments in the School of Medicine. She focuses on diversifying faculty, training, and challenging unconscious biases at work to provide a pipeline for young people.

Dr. Collins' time at UIC Sociology

Chiquita enjoyed her time at UIC Sociology in large part because of the instructors and mentors she encountered. Dr. Darnell Hawkins and Dr. Richard Barrett, now emeriti faculty, are some of the professors whose mentorship guided her through her undergraduate experience and encouraged her to attend graduate school, a possibility she had not considered prior to her time at UIC. As an undergraduate, she was interested in population studies and demography, and she continued research on migration, mortality, and birth during her graduate studies.

Advice for students of Sociology

Dr. Collins says that everyone has to write their own story. She encourages students to be bold and try new things!

A true Chicagoan at heart

Dr. Collins wore her Cubs gear for a week straight after they claimed victory in the World Series last year. Although she no longer resides in Chicago, she will always be a Cubs fan. Fly the W! When she is home visiting Chicago, Chiquita enjoys visiting with family and eating Harold's chicken and Chicago-style pizza.

Interview by Myia Scott, UIC, 2017

Ronisha Edwards



Education

MSW, Boise State University, Expected 2018
BA, Sociology and Criminology, Law and Justice, UIC, 2015

Current work

Ronisha hasn't stopped for a moment since graduating from UIC in 2015. She is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Social Work while working as a Case Manager at Metropolitan Family Services (MFS). Prior to her work at MFS, Ronisha was a clinical coordinator for sickle cell patients at UIC hospital, a job she was offered after several years volunteering there as an undergraduate. The job was near and dear to her, as Ronisha not only supports the sickle cell community, she lives with the disease as well.

Ronisha's time at UIC Sociology

Ms. Edwards began as a biology major, but soon decided to follow her passion for sociology and never looked back. She said that her time at UIC opened her eyes to social stratification, oppression of women, the workings of capitalism and many other challenges of society. Sociology taught Ronisha about power, and that it doesn't just come from money. She has chosen to use her power to impact the world by counseling youth and supporting minority communities. Her degree helps her to understand why people do what they do, and how groups are impacted by their position in broader society when working with these communities.

An award-winning student

Ronisha was also the winner of the Patrick Juris Award while at UIC Sociology, which is awarded each year to a graduating senior who has achieved academic excellence and been of service to the community.

Advice for students of UIC Sociology

Do what you love and never be ashamed of who you are!

Future plans

There is no pause ahead for Ronisha. She intends to publish the research she did while working at UIC hospital with sickle cell patients in the near future. After completing her Master's in Social Work, Ronisha also eventually plans to get a Master's in Public Policy, to prepare her to serve in Congress one day. In addition to her busy work and school life, she is also preparing for her wedding in the coming year. Congratulations Ronisha!

Interview by Stephanie Munoz, UIC, 2017



Magaly Flores

Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 2015

Current work

Magaly is a Project Assistant for the Campbell Institute at the National Safety Council, which informs organizations of best practices related to environment, health, and safety standards. Ms. Flores' favorite part of her job is building relationships with and working closely with volunteers at the Campbell Institute.

What attracted Magaly to sociology

Magaly has always wanted to help people, so she thought that an education in sociology would help her to do just that. Since people are often comfortable with those who are like them, she wanted an education that would help her break out of her comfort zone and learn more about others who are different from her.

Shout out!

To Dr. Amy Bailey in the department, whose passion for sociology inspired Magaly to learn more about it and ultimately to declare sociology as her major.

Finding a job as a sociology major

While Magaly encountered a few potential employers who did not know the skill-set that her degree in sociology equipped her with, many others recognized the value of her degree. Magaly found that being confident in her skills and knowledge and applying to a wide range of jobs was a winning combination for finding the job she now has and loves!

Advice for sociology majors

Get involved with the sociology department because it opens doors for students, through relationships, mentorship, and other opportunities. It will also help you to meet new people, including other undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty. Also, when applying for jobs, cast a wide net. You never know all the jobs your sociology degree has prepared you for, until you apply and interview.

Fun facts

Magaly loves to listen to music in her free time, when she's working out or relaxing. She loves a variety of music, from Spanish music to rock, and recently has enjoyed Arctic Monkeys and Interpol.

Interview by Stephanie Munoz, UIC, 2017

Laura Garza



Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 1997

Current work

In 1997, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) had an influx of Latino workers who needed immigration and labor help. The demand for a bilingual liaison to assist with this new relationship led to the beginning of Laura's important work that has spanned two decades. Laura is currently the Secretary/Treasurer for SEIU and her responsibilities are numerous. She currently oversees union operations for Midwest states outside of Illinois. Additionally, she oversees SEIU's research department and, as treasurer, the union's funds. Part of her job is working to build relationships with building owners, contractors, and community leaders as well as continuing her crucial immigration work with the union.



Connecting the personal and the social through sociology

Laura always wanted to work with communities in some capacity. Unsure of what that would look like, she was inspired by a friend and mentor – a sociology student at UIC – who suggested she take a sociology class. Social movements and sociology of gender classes were particularly interesting to Laura, and she remembers the impact Prof. Nilda Flores-Gonzales had on her, which continues to this day. Laura's own experience as a Latina immigrant from Mexico, whose mother was a single mom of four, helped her connect with many of the concepts she studied in her sociology classes.

Advice for young students of sociology

Laura was a hardworking and involved student during her time at UIC and her advice to other students represents what her life's work has been about: get involved. Although UIC is primarily a commuter school, Laura suggests that it is important to not just come and go, but find ways to connect at the school. She points out that there are many good things happening at UIC that can expand minds.

Inspiring the next generation of advocates

A wife and mother of two, Laura's family is incredibly important to her, and she spends as much time as possible with them. Her passion for community involvement has rubbed off on her children; her daughter was recently involved in school action to save a teacher's job. Laura, with her extensive know-how, was able to guide her daughter in the art of successful labor action. Laura's advice to her daughter was that making an impact is not a one-time event, but an ongoing campaign that may require different components such as sit-ins, marches, media, and letters.

Future plans

Apart from continuing her important work with the union, Laura—a lover of dance—has promised herself that she will take some dance lessons before she hits retirement age!

Interview by Jamie Yager, UIC, 2016





Korie Edwards

Education

PhD, Sociology, UIC, 2004

MA, Sociology, UIC, 2000

BS, Civil Engineering, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1994

Current work

Dr. Edwards is an Associate Professor of Sociology at The Ohio State University. Her research primarily focuses on the intersectional relationship of race and religion. In particular, her work examines how religious organizations and religious leaders address and are impacted by race. Dr. Edwards says that her favorite part about her job is teaching graduate level courses because she learns new things from her students, who have their own experiences and backgrounds. Korie also loves that her job enables her to produce new knowledge, a task at which she has excelled. She has published three books and fifteen chapters/articles, delivered fifty-five presentations, and worked on four different grants, the largest of which totaled over one million dollars for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

From Civil Engineering to ... Sociology?

Dr. Edwards' undergraduate education was in civil engineering, and after graduating she took a job with the Illinois Department of Transportation. After working and attending church with groups of people in which she found the leadership to be consistently white – despite colleagues of color with equivalent degrees and qualifications – she began to ask questions about the privilege some groups have over others. Research in her local library led her to the topic of sociology, where she found her true passion. Korie applied to the sociology doctoral program at UIC and never looked back!

Dr. Edwards' time at UIC

Korie gained the ability to understand her world, experiences, and history while studying sociology at UIC. Her experience in graduate school was more than she expected because it opened her eyes to the world, gave her the tools to understand and study it, and to be able to produce knowledge to share. During her time at UIC, Dr. Edwards came to believe that underprivileged groups have, in some ways, a responsibility to produce knowledge, because knowledge can only be produced from a person's individual standpoint.

Advice for students

We can only understand our social world once we understand who we are in relationship to others in a given social group. To develop this understanding, you should cultivate your sociological imagination (C. Wright Mills).

Fun facts

As a child, Korie wanted to be a dancer, and still loves to watch Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater whenever she has the chance. Her ultimate dream is to own a beach home where she can relax, read a book and enjoy the beautiful view.

Interview by Stephanie Munoz, UIC, 2017

Maria Lopez



Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 2016

Current work

Maria is a Recovery Coach Technician for the non-profit organization, Mom's Recovery, a short-term residence for adult women who are pregnant or have children and need help due to mental illness or substance abuse. For many women, this temporary step allows them and their children to stay together while the program provides mothers with counseling, health care, parenting support, housing and job help, and a safe place to live. Maria's responsibilities include supervising and encouraging good parental practices, helping her clients manage their appointments and responsibilities, and making sure the house runs safely and effectively.

Finding sociology

Maria Lopez came to the United States nineteen years ago from her home country of Spain to find a puzzling condition in America. While taking English classes, she and her classmates often discussed how much inequality exists in America, despite its great wealth. Desiring to know how inequality could exist in her new country, Maria became a sociology major hoping to find answers to this surprising discovery.

Advantages of a sociology degree

Maria feels sociology majors have an advantage in the marketplace. Working alongside colleagues with different degrees, she has seen how her unique skillset helps her to better analyze the world around her. Using her critical thinking skills and her knowledge of sociological concepts, Maria is better armed to understand how social structures work, allowing her to see how people are impacted by these outside forces. This gives her the tools she needs to better assist them.

Advice for current students

Upon graduation, Maria found there to be challenges in the job market, the greatest of which was her lack of formal field experience. Many desirable job opportunities required up to two years' experience working in an applicable field, which prevented her from applying. She encourages undergraduate students to find internships and to work summer and part-time jobs in the field they are interested in. This not only gives much-needed experience, but also allows students to explore diverse options and find what sparks their passion.

More about Maria!

Because she currently works at night, Maria jokes that she likes to sleep in her free time! She also enjoys time with her four children, and walking along Lake Michigan. Growing up by the Mediterranean, Maria says, instilled a love of the water.

Interview by Jamie Yager, UIC, 2016





Imilya Mirza

Education

MA, Public Health, DePaul University, in progress
BA, Sociology, UIC, 2014

Current job

Imilya works as a Nutrition Operator at Northwestern Hospital. In her role as Nutrition Operator, she works with patients, monitoring dietary intake and restrictions such as allergens. In this position, Imilya uses her sociological research skills, such as making observations and analyzing them. Having a sociology background not only prepared Imilya for the work place but it also prepared her for graduate school. Imilya believes that a sociological background prepares one to work in many different professional careers such as non-for-profit, community outreach and research. Her sociology undergraduate experience also prepared her to do professional research in her current job and in her graduate program in public health.

How sociology led Imilya to public health

In her training as a sociologist, Imilya most enjoyed conducting research. Through sociology, she found an interest in the medical community and social psychology. The ability to explore different subfields in sociology enabled Imilya to see overlap of sociology and health and led her to her career and graduate school pursuits in public health.

Why sociology is a broad, applicable degree

Sociology gave Imilya a platform to study issues that interest her. Imilya's concentration within sociology is studying society through culture and geography. She appreciates the broadness of sociology and all the transferable skills you gain from your sociological training. For instance, in classes for her public health degree, Imilya has found herself ahead of classmates because of her training in research methods and data analysis once she gathers the research.

The travel bug!

Imilya loves to travel and has been to Washington D.C., California and Australia, and had upcoming plans to go to Europe at the time of our interview. She loves to experience the art, music, museums and food from all of the places to which she travels as well.

Interview by Myia Scott, UIC, 2017

Bianca Monzon



Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 2014

Current work

Bianca landed a job as a data technician at the University of Michigan. She did this by first getting an internship with them as an undergraduate, which led to employment after graduating. Her job consists of scripting, clearing and processing data, programming, and on the job learning. Bianca loves what she does because her job shares research from government institutions with the public so that more people can see and use it. She loves that her work gets to be viewed by others and that it provides a place where researchers and academics can access the open database freely. She also deeply enjoys the people that she works with. Interestingly, her coworkers usually come from sociology backgrounds. The work environment is collaborative, and they often have thoughtful discussion about important issues.



Leveraging work experience in pursuit of graduate school and beyond

Bianca may be able to get funding for her graduate degree, as she is employed by the University of Michigan. She is currently debating pursuing her master's degree in statistics because it would help her to pursue a career in sociology or policy. She is interested in policy because our political leaders are overwhelmingly white, male and upper class. She says that people of all backgrounds need to be at the table where decisions are being made. Bianca is motivated by an activist she heard who said, "I am no longer accepting the things I can not change. I am changing the things I can not accept." She believes it is very important for people to unite to make change, rather than to be passive and accept the social injustices that occur daily.

Advice for current sociology students

Bianca urges undergraduates to get involved with internships, programs, and networking during their undergraduate years because all of these help greatly when applying for a job after graduation. She says that many people put limitations on themselves and don't apply to jobs because many think they are simply not qualified for it. This is why it is important to step out of your comfort zone and to apply to jobs for which one might not feel qualified. She believes anyone with a sociology degree can get a job after graduating as long as they put in the time and effort searching.

What attracted Bianca to sociology

At the beginning of her undergraduate career, Bianca learned that humans' genetic makeup is 99.9% identical. Learning this was very eye opening for her, because there are so many social inequalities between humans who have such significant biological similarities. Sociology as a field of study has made her more aware of social injustices and how much policy, culture, class and more is interconnected; it gives her a greater awareness of her surroundings. Bianca would highly recommend a sociology major to anyone!

An interesting fact

Bianca is Puerto Rican, but people often think she is white. Her family looks very different from her, and because of this people often react to her and her family very differently.

For Bianca, success is...

Making an impact, not money. We need more people who care about people rather than superficial values. She intends to pursue this impact in her career and personal life.

Interview by Stephanie Munoz, UIC, 2017





Jennifer Parsons

Education

MA, Sociology, UIC, 1993

BA, Sociology, UIC, 1991

Current work

Jennifer is Research Operations Director at the Survey Research Lab (SRL) at UIC. She has been a part of SRL since she graduated in 1993. Her job includes three distinct parts.

The first part is administrative, which includes supervising staff, project coordinators who work with clients, and the field staff who oversees data and collection activities. The second part of her job is doing intake. When a client calls and is interested in working on a proposal, Jennifer is the one to work with them. She helps them figure out the best study design and methods for their research. Once that is decided, she then helps prepare a customized budget for each project, which varies depending on the research. Different considerations go into creating a budget, such as pricing out the costs between a two-page mail survey and a twenty-page booklet. If a proposal and budget is approved, Jennifer draws up the contracts, and they all get to work on the project. The last part of her job is working one-on-one with the client to make a good survey and, ultimately, a quality research project. Jennifer also is the person who submits the projects to the IRB. She is always managing multiple projects. Her favorite part about her job is the challenge that each new project brings.

Happening upon UIC

Jennifer began her undergraduate career in Iowa but decided to take a semester off to go to England with two friends. The three friends got work visas and, despite arriving in London with no jobs or apartments, quickly found work at Harrods. While there, her mother fell ill and she returned to Chicago to help at home. One she was back in the United States, Jennifer transferred to UIC to continue her studies.

Deciding between graduate school and a career

As an undergraduate, Jennifer took a survey methods course with Richard Wernicke, a faculty member in sociology at the time. Having developed a great relationship with him, he offered Jennifer a research internship after receiving her bachelor's degree. She took the research internship with Richard Wernicke and an internship with the American Medical Association in the survey department, and started her master's degree in sociology. Jennifer completed her master's degree in 1993 and jumped right into the Sociology PhD program at UIC. As she started working more at the Survey Research Lab, she was not able to devote enough time to her PhD. Jennifer took all the classes and took the exam but did not finish her dissertation and she does not regret it one bit. She was pulled more towards work than her education, and now she enjoys her career and considers it to be very academic.

In her free time

When Jennifer is not managing research projects, she enjoys watching her son play basketball, baking with her daughter, and watching old movies. Jennifer and her daughter like to bake scones, cookies, bars, cobblers, and pies. At the time of the interview, her family was watching all the Hitchcock films. Jennifer is married to a Greek man and says that when they first started dating, her life was like the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. She has traveled to Greece a few times with her husband, but this summer was the first time they went as a family!

Interview by Jacqueline Elizondo, UIC, 2017

Russell K Schutt



Education

PhD, Sociology, UIC, 1977

MA, Sociology, UIC, 1975

BA, Sociology, UIC, 1972

Finding sociology, Russell's greatest academic love

Dr. Schutt grew up interested in science and in social problems—civil rights, diversity, and the Vietnam War were topics of interest—and when he took his first sociology class he knew he had found the right fit for both his love of science and social issues, and in his words, he “never really had another love in academia from that point.” Dr. Schutt says that people interact and impact the world in positive ways, but also create challenges that need to be understood and addressed.

A distinguished career in sociology

Upon finishing graduate school, Russell accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at Yale University, working on a Sociology of Social Control program before accepting a full-time position at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, where he has been for twenty-seven years. Currently a professor in the sociology department at UMass Boston, his areas of expertise include homelessness and mental health services, research methods, sociology of organizations, and sociology of law.

Research

In addition to his responsibilities at UMass, Dr. Schutt has been involved extensively in research, working with such organizations as Harvard Medical School, The Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center. Dr. Schutt has written five research books; his latest, *Social Neuroscience: Brain, Mind, and Society*, was published by Harvard University Press in 2015. He also has several contributions to textbooks and has had numerous journal articles and book chapters published.

A commitment to engaged sociology

Dr. Schutt also enjoys working with people in community centers on important projects that include homeless shelters, women's health programs, public health, and mental health issues. These projects have allowed him to meet great people and given him an opportunity to connect in the social world and to help improve communities.

Advice for students of sociology

Russell would advise sociology students to use their college years to enrich their futures. This can be done by immersing oneself in the social sciences and developing important skills, such as writing, critical thinking, and seeing social issues from the perspective of multiple disciplines. Most importantly, Dr. Schutt encourages students to be open to learning throughout their lives; stay engaged by reading, thinking, and interacting with others and never stop learning.

Interview by Jamie Yager, UIC, 2016





Elyse Bielser

Education

BA, Sociology, UIC, 2014

From central Illinois to Chicago

Elyse grew up in central Illinois and coming to Chicago for college exposed her to many new languages, cultures, and experiences. She took classes at both the UIC (Chicago) and U of I (Urbana-Champaign) campuses and felt that she learned more and different things from her classes at UIC, where, for her, the professors and the diversity had much more to offer. Elyse fell in love with sociology at UIC and took multiple classes in sociology and gender and women's studies. She felt that the more classes she took, the more everything started to make sense.

Digging deep

During her time at UIC, Elyse took classes in which she learned a lot about Jim Crow laws, the War on Drugs, the prison pipeline, and gentrification. Because of where she grew up, Elyse was not exposed to such topics. The class showed her the effects such structures and processes have on groups of people. She learned a lot while studying at UIC, particularly about different perspectives and how things affect people differently, which has helped her in her current job.

Advocating for children

Currently, Elyse is a child abuse and neglect investigator in Kansas, and is in the process of becoming a foster care caseworker. Her main responsibilities as an investigator are to read the reports that are made regarding abuse or neglect of a child. She responds to the report by conducting interviews with the child to see how the children's report does or does not reflect the formal report. After meeting with the child, Elyse speaks with parents and does a home visit. She will also talk with school staff, teachers, and anyone else connected to the child to get as much information as possible. This work requires her to use interview skills, to analyze the information given, and to draw conclusions about the next steps to be taken.

Watching children flourish

Elyse's job is emotionally challenging but she loves what she does. Her favorite part about the job is engaging with the children for whom she is advocating and protecting. She loves seeing them grow and their personalities change.

For fun

If she's not working, you can find Elyse taking mini road trips with her husband, white-water rafting, and planning for her next accomplishment: graduate school! She plans to go to law school or obtain a master's in sociology.

Interview by Jacqueline Elizondo, UIC, 2017

Jerry Hendricks



Education

PhD, Sociology, UIC, 2016

MA, Sociology, UIC, 2010

BA, History, Northeastern Illinois University, 2008

Using his research background in the private sector

Dr. Hendricks currently works as a Senior Research Analyst at the Resource Systems Group (RSG) in Chicago. On most days, Dr. Hendricks' analyst position allows him to consult with companies about consumer trends and survey design and administration. He conducts quantitative analyses and presents results to clients. "No day is the same," Jerry says, which is something he loves about his job at RSG.

Changing paths

While Dr. Hendricks was working on his doctoral degree in sociology at UIC, he worked as a teaching assistant and adjunct professor. Because he enjoyed and excelled at teaching undergraduate students of sociology at UIC, DePaul University, and the Illinois Institute of Technology, he thought he would pursue work as a professor after graduating. However, after graduating, Jerry found his job at RSG, which enables him to combine his love of sociology, the research skills he attained in graduate school, and serve a client base.

Advice for students

Dr. Hendricks says if you really want to use your sociology degree to your advantage, practice relating your undergraduate coursework and professional experience to a potential career. "If I could go back in time to give myself some advice, I would say learn to code, because it is a very valuable skill to have." Being able to speak the language of computers will make you an asset to any company, particularly when paired with a sociological lens on the world.

Why choose sociology?

Jerry believes that sociology is a degree that many people pursue intending to engage in activism and social justice, but a sociology degree applies to much more than activism. For him, sociology has shaped the way he understands and interprets the world. He feels that if more people had the knowledge of a sociologist, they would understand that society is made up of individuals and without one, the other couldn't exist. For instance, sociological research can demonstrate how institutions affect individuals and circumstances, which can also be useful to policy makers searching for more effective solutions.

For fun

Since completing graduate school, Jerry has been able to spend more time with his family. He also plays in a rock band called Mile.

Interview by Myia Scott, UIC, 2017





William "Buddy" Scarborough

Education

MA, Sociology, UIC, 2015

BA, Sociology, Alma College, 2009

Two loves in one

Buddy began his undergraduate career at Alma College playing football and intending to pursue social work. That is, until he took a sociology class. He says that sociology sort of "fell into his lap" and he really enjoyed learning about social issues and inequalities, as well as how such disparities are created and perpetuated. He says he fell in love with sociology during his first class at Alma College, but that wasn't all! He also met his future wife, Emily, during his first sociology class. It was loves at first sight!

From Michigan to South Africa

After graduating from Alma College and getting married, Buddy and Emily joined the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps brought them to South Africa, where Buddy says he learned what sociology had provided the background for him to understand. During his time in South Africa, he learned how to speak Zulu and SiSwati. He also ran programs for children, through which he helped address some of the educational inequalities in South Africa.

From South Africa to Chicago

After finishing his time in the Peace Corps, Buddy was ready to apply for graduate programs in sociology, having affirmed his love of the discipline through his work in South Africa. He decided to pursue his degree at UIC in the Windy City. He has completed his Master's degree and is currently writing his dissertation. His research primarily focuses on inequalities in the labor market in large cities in the United States. Specifically, he looks at gendered wage inequalities. Buddy enjoys the ability to run as many statistical analyses as he needs in pursuit of his findings.

Advice for others

Buddy says that a degree in sociology can help people in any industry – from dentistry to teaching or research. If everyone shares the knowledge they've acquired as students of sociology, the knowledge of the discipline will be able to effect change in society, such as the gendered differences in compensation and in work environments.

A great support system

Buddy says he is grateful to sociology for bringing him to the love of his life, who is a wonderful support. He also gets terrific support from his advisor, Prof. Barbara Risman, who works hard to guide and teach Buddy as he works toward completing his doctoral degree.

Interview by Jacqueline Elizondo, UIC, 2017

Alison Moss



Education

MA, Sociology, UIC, 2010

BA, Gender and Women's Studies, Indiana University, 2007

World experience led to further education

After finishing her associate's degree at the age of 19, Alison got married, traveled the country following some bands, and worked in a family business. She realized that she did not find her work fulfilling and decided to return to school at Indiana University South Bend. She earned her bachelor's degree in Gender and Women's Studies. During her time at IU South Bend, she took a class on the sociology of gender and knew that she had found the discipline for her. This passion grew and she continued on to UIC, where she received her master's degree in sociology.

The power of sociology

Alison believes there is great benefit for those who study sociology, as it helps students to understand not only society but themselves as well. For Alison, a queer woman of color, sociology was empowering, as it helped her to understand the social structures that have made accomplishing some of her goals more difficult. Because of sociology, Alison understands the structural and institutional forces that have negatively impacted her life.

Advice for students

Alison encourages students of sociology to pursue a range of careers without even needing to pursue graduate degrees. For instance, Alison believes that those with a sociology degree would be an asset to the medical field, because they interact with diverse populations. She says the ability to collect and analyze data is a valuable skill that employers will appreciate. She also suggests that sociology prepares students to be successful in marketing and business because these industries require professionals to administer surveys and conduct interviews. Because it is a diverse area of study, Alison believes that students of sociology have a broad selection of job opportunities.

Alison's passion

Alison discovered that her passion is in teaching. Her dream position is to be a faculty member at Indiana University South Bend, so that she can teach students who have not been exposed to diverse people and situations about the reality of society.

Interview by Stephanie Munoz, UIC, 2017



Kevin Lamarr James

Education

PhD, Sociology, UIC, 2010
MA, Sociology, UIC, 2004
BA, Sociology, Hampton University, 2001

Full circle at UIC Sociology!

Dr. Kevin James is the current Director of Service Learning in the department of Sociology at UIC. Dr. James is interested in many things, as was obvious by his oft-changing undergrad plans, but upon taking his first sociology class he realized that he could get a degree in – not just something that interested him – but in something about which he felt passionate. Frequenting local book stores’ social science sections became the norm as he soaked up sociology topics that resonated with his own experiences growing up. While working on his PhD, Kevin started teaching both at UIC and in South Bend, Indiana. Realizing that teaching was a good fit, he joined UIC as a full-time professor.

His desire to work with students and be involved with them has led him to his current position of Director of Service Learning, which entails creating partnerships in the community for UIC seniors to work with during their senior capstone course. The partnerships allow students both to gain experience and to give back to the communities that UIC serves. What’s his favorite part about his job? Working with the students and the community – the personal component. He loves to see the students take learned theoretical ideas and turn them into practice.

The “ultimate inter-disciplinary degree”

One specific thing Dr. James likes about sociology is the distinctions between levels of interaction from the individual up through the institutional and cultural, and he believes that being aware of these different interactions is knowledge that can be applied to any field a person chooses to go into, allowing sociologists to do well in many different career areas. Kevin thinks that it is beneficial for students to study sociology so they become aware of “the issues that exist in society and see them in the different layers they actually appear in.” He also believes that sociology is the “ultimate inter-disciplinary degree” and that to get the most out of it one should pair it with a double major, a minor, or grad school to help narrow your interests.

Advice for current undergraduates

Kevin has two pieces of advice for current undergraduate students: Don’t avoid opportunities and people because of fear and don’t worry about trying to please everybody! He especially suggests that students take advantage of everything college has to offer – which is what they are paying for. If a class sounds interesting, take it – you might just find your passion!

Future plans?!

Passion has recently hit Kevin again as he ponders the too-low graduation rates at UIC and a desire to do even more to help the UIC community has been stirring inside of him. He dreams of creating an organization that can mentor and guide college students – especially those lacking outside support – in navigating the often-overwhelming institution that college can be.

Out in nature

When he’s not mentoring students, Kevin can be found at his property in the Chicago suburbs, allowing him to foster his love of nature and the outdoors – though he admits he would prefer to do a little more relaxing in said nature and a little less weed-pulling. His one-year-old giant schnauzer, Oscar, and his three cat siblings have no complaints!

Interview by Jamie Yager, UIC, 2016

Mildred Schwartz, Professor Emerita



Education

PhD, Sociology, Columbia University, 1965

MA, Sociology, University of Toronto, 1956

BA, Sociology, University of Toronto, 1954

Pursuing sociology

Dr. Mildred Schwartz was raised in Toronto, Canada, and attended the University of Toronto, where she found sociology. After finishing her bachelor's degree, she went on to work in a government agency, a workplace she found to be rife with sexism. Inspired by her work experience, Mildred decided to return to school, with hopes of effecting change. She finished her master's degree in sociology in 1956, after which she started to work at an advertising agency. However, her love of sociology drew her once more, and she applied and completed her PhD in sociology at Columbia University in 1965. She applied to many teaching positions in the United States after finishing her degree and found a job with UIC's Circle Campus!

A lifetime love of sociology

Dr. Schwartz's favorite part about her academic career is research and writing. She also very much enjoyed spending time with her undergraduate students. Mildred says she loves the field of sociology because it is limitless! Sociologists never run out of questions to ask and there are always new and different ways to go about finding answers.

Despite her success, Dr. Schwartz did encounter hardships in her career. One of her main battles was against the frequent sexism she encountered. For instance, she did not receive equal pay compared to her male counterparts, endured discriminatory remarks, and faced resentment for her success in publishing and teaching. Despite these challenges, she forged ahead and had – and continues to have – a successful career.

Advice for current students

Dr. Schwartz believes that a sociology degree is suitable for many fields. She has worked for a government agency, advertising agency, and in the academic field using her sociology degrees. She also says there are many not-for profit and some for profit agencies that hire students with sociology degrees. Undergraduate students learn statistics and theory that is very beneficial in a wide variety of workplaces. Dr. Schwartz says that although the world is a very different place than it was in her time, sociology is as relevant as it has ever been because it teaches you to be more intelligent about the world in which we live. She says if she could go back in time and give herself a piece of advice, it would be to have more confidence in herself. She grew up in a household where she was not encouraged to continue her studies, and she encourages others to be confident in their interests and capabilities.

Prolific, even in retirement!

Mildred is currently retired and resides in New Jersey. However, she still does sociology for fun! In her free time, she reads and writes about sociology because it keeps her engaged in the world. For fun, she likes to go to New York University to spend time with students and colleagues. Five years from now, she sees herself starting a new project and to continue publishing books. Someday she says she will really retire and take a break from her academic career...just not any time soon!

Interview by Stephanie Munoz, UIC, 2017



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