



Sociograph

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The Sociograph is the official newsletter of Sociologists of Minnesota

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RETURNING TO CAMPUS IN A PANDEMIC

Sarah Epplen, SOM President

By now most of you have begun your fall semester, in one way or another. College and universities across Minnesota have adapted to the COVID-19 health crisis in various ways. I anxiously refresh my browser's tabs that seem perpetually open to the county coronavirus statistics and the campus dashboard; I've heard of schools in other states already shutting down completely, sending students home, so I am worried of an outbreak. So far, things seem to be maintaining here. I know this can change at any time. The existential dread is palpable.

As I write from my campus office at Minnesota State University, Mankato I am acutely aware of how different things are. The rhythm of the semester feels off, like our drummer took a leave of absence. The grind feels more intense, like late October or November, and our energy levels aren't fresh with enthusiasm like they often are in early September. But still, we grind on because that is what we do. What choice do we have?

While I am teaching my Intro to Sociology classes as FlexSync, with some students in person and more attending via Zoom, many of my colleagues across campus are teaching online or working from home on non-teaching days, as I do. Campus is quiet, but not in the nice way it often is during the break between semesters or in summer, but in an eerie way. Uncertainty surrounds us and things seem to shift by the day. For instance, to prepare for what I believed to be a high demand for in-class seats, I developed a system that would fairly meet as much of the demand as possible. Yet, the number of students choosing to attend remotely rose sharply the first two weeks, with fewer and fewer choosing a seat. They have so many reasons. Some say it is simply easier to join remotely and others have conflicts that prevent them from getting to class on time since a class before or after mine is remote. The campus commute time is too much. Some are afraid of getting sick and infecting their friends and family. Others find the vacant campus depressing. Others haven't told me why they choose remote learning. I don't know.

I have seen more dorm rooms and student apartments via Zoom in the first weeks of the semester than I have seen since I was a college student myself in



the mid-1990s. I've seen students in cars, libraries, makeshift spaces, and most who never turn on their cameras, take class from locations I know nothing about. I am worried about them more than usual, because it is harder to know them, to know if they are okay. Everything is harder these days. There are more layers of difficulty. What used to be basic, rote activity has become stressful. You've probably been having stress dreams about it. I know I have. I wonder what the long-term health effects of this deeply stressful period of our lives will be, and I use that fear to force myself to take some time off on the weekend to rest and be in nature. The need to recharge has never been so dire.

The boundaries between public and private are the blurriest we have ever known. The joys of this include visits from pets and children and a small glimpse into the lives of our colleagues and students, whose homes we usually do not see. But this also comes at a cost in the loss of valuable privacy and natural breaks between home and work that ease the transition between these spaces. It is an odd reality to be fairly isolated from others while also inviting people into your home through the computer screen. At the same time, the people you see in person have their smiles and facial expressions behind a mask, making communicating with non-verbals nearly impossible. *I miss smiles more than I knew I enjoyed them.* I never realized how much I said with my face that I can't convey with my voice. I wonder how this will change our culture. How will our work and families and planet be different because of what we are currently enduring? Sociologically, all of this is, of course, extremely fascinating. I do my best to ruminate on that when experiencing the understandable moments of doom. To find hope and promise in this unprecedented situation.



Perhaps you've noticed that the heaviness of our current moment I've described has not even touched on the increased racial tensions or the upcoming election, both of which surely occupy our minds and add stress to our days, if not keep us awake at night. As you may expect, we had big plans for addressing the doozy of a year that is 2020 at our fall conference.

Fall 2020 Conference: Sociology on the Edge of Democracy

Before COVID-19 changed our day-to-day lives, we had been imagining a timely program for a conference to be held just weeks before what is likely to be one of the most important presidential elections in U.S. history. We hoped to gather sociologists from across the state to weigh in on the various issues of our time. Unfortunately, we have had to significantly alter our 2020 conference to ensure the safety of our members and conference attendees. Instead of canceling the event, we selected a few important features to keep and deliver in a virtual format.

At a time of national distress surrounding health and racial justice, Sociologists of



Minnesota wanted to host a keynote address that would speak to this historic moment. **Dr. Elizabeth Wrigley-Field, from the University of Minnesota,** is doing incredibly important work

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dr. Elizabeth Wrigley-Field, Assistant Professor of Sociology at University of Minnesota and Minnesota Population Center will present: "***The Black Death that America Treats as Normal.***"

Thursday October 22, 2020 6-7:30 pm

Dr. Wrigley-Field is a formal demographer specializing in mortality and racial inequality in the United States, and historical infectious disease. Her research shows that racial inequality in mortality in the United States operates on the same scale as the worst pandemics, and explores length-biased sampling as a unifying concept in population studies.

on racial disparities in health outcomes that helps us understand this historic moment. Sociologists across Minnesota will benefit from her research on this topic. Please join us for this virtual talk and discussion.

Campus/Class streaming fee:
\$100 per campus
Free for Individual Members

Please see socmn.org for payment information or complete the registration form here:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/DesignPage.aspx?auth_pvr=Orgld&auth_upn=ie1939vt@minnstate.edu&origin=shell#FormId=xscRULQKq0ae9PrnSplaf_b6o41FXCIPobEr3sHPw4BUOTk2N1ICTIY2NDE2OTVJRFZLRFkzSkq2OS4u

The webinar will be recorded and shared with our members and registrants.

Caroline Rose Student Paper Competition

A second feature of our annual conference we want to keep is the student paper competition. We are happy to share that the 2020 Caroline Rose Student Paper Competition will carry on! Students from across Minnesota are still encouraged to submit their papers for one of the four Awards. First- and second-place winners will still be announced in the undergraduate

and graduate divisions. All papers written by an undergraduate or graduate student at a college or university in the state of Minnesota during the 2019-2020 year or during the Fall 2020 term are eligible to be considered. Students are welcome to submit empirical or theoretical papers as well as research proposals. Papers co-authored by more than one student will be considered, but co-authors cannot include faculty members. All papers, including those not selected for an Award, will receive comments from the Student Paper Competition Committee on the paper's strengths and places for improvement.

First- and second-place winners in both the undergraduate and graduate divisions will receive a cash prize and SOM membership for a year. Winners will also be honored during a virtual awards ceremony held in November 2020; winners will not need to give a presentation during the ceremony. To be considered, all papers must be submitted by no later than **October 16, 2020**. To submit, students must email their papers to Aaron Hoy (Student Paper Competition Committee Member) at aaron.hoy@mnsu.edu. All papers will then be evaluated by at least two members of the Committee using a rubric available at the SOM website (www.socmn.org). Students, please consider submitting your papers – it's easy, and it looks very good on your résumé! And faculty members, please help and encourage your students to submit!

Decision to carryover board membership

The business meeting at the annual fall conference is the place where we elect and initiate new Board leadership. Since we will not be meeting as planned this year, we made the decision, by Board member vote, to freeze the current Executive Board Membership for the year. The board membership will remain the same for the 20-21 academic year and new Board members will be elected at the Fall 2021 conference.

Find us on the Web

<http://www.socmn.org/>

Members: Please renew your membership by completing our new membership form!

https://forms.office.com/Pages/DesignPage.aspx?origin=shell#FormId=xscRULQKq0ae9PrnSplaf_b6o41FXCIPobEr3sHPw4BUODQ0TFo4MIY4VIY2T0hJNVdDM1hIMEhQy4u

Want to get involved with SOM?
Contact SOM President at
sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu

A Note from Erik Larson, MSS Liaison to SoM

Hello, colleagues. I serve as the Minnesota State Director for the Midwest Sociological Society (MSS), in my last year of a three-year term. I write to share a few updates from MSS, reflections on MSS and SOM, and to request your input and involvement.

Typically, at this time of the year, as we put the finishing touches on our course syllabi, we're preparing to welcome students back to campus. That rhythm of the academic year starting—the fresh energy of new students, the increasing engagement of our returning students—provides us with a reminder of the cycle of our pedagogical work.

Our other scholarly work also has a cyclical quality—we have the SOM meetings in the fall, the MSS meetings in the spring, and (for those of us able to attend) the ASA meetings at the end of summer. Invariably, I find these meetings important for sharing (and learning about) research and having the opportunity to catch up with academic friends who live and teach close to me. Oddly, we seem to have to travel much further from our homes to get together than we would have to travel if we were to just find a time to meet while at home.

These past months have disrupted that familiar cycle and have made that short distance from colleagues feel even greater than the distance that we travel to conferences. The MSS cancelled its spring 2020 meetings scheduled for Omaha, the ASA moved to a “virtual engagement” format, and the SOM has pared back its fall 2020 meeting into a modified virtual format. Recently, the MSS also announced that its spring 2021 meeting that was scheduled for Des Moines will be held in an online-only format.

The decisions about the MSS meetings came after careful deliberation from the Board. The decision to cancel the 2020 meeting appears even wiser with hindsight—few people would have travelled to Omaha in early April and due to the timing of a stay-at-home order in Nebraska, the MSS was able to minimize financial losses due to cancelling the conference. Similarly, MSS Board members reflected on what their institutions were recommending with respect to off-campus travel (for both students and faculty) and what our responsibilities are to those who might be affected by an in-person conference. As a result, the Board decided to cancel the 2021 hotel contract in advance with a reduced cancellation fee (which was further reduced by negotiation with the Executive Office and the conference hotel in Des Moines). At the same time, the Board decided to go ahead with a virtual 2021 program—look for information about submitting a paper or session proposal on themss.org in the coming weeks.

Beyond the annual meeting, the MSS is a valuable professional organization for sociologists in Minnesota. The MSS is one of the strongest regional sociology associations, having a healthy endowment that supports a range of initiatives, including a small grant research program and generous support for student involvement in the organization. In addition, the MSS recognizes amazing organizations each year with its social action awards. Finally, the MSS provides a range of opportunities for involvement in the organization through its robust committee structure. You might know that Minnesota has been one of the largest two states for members of the MSS (even having the largest number of members a few years). If you have not joined (or renewed), please do!

On a personal level, I feel fortunate that I continue to have contact with a wonderful group of colleagues both at my own institution and at many other institutions across the state and region due to the occasional MSS and SOM board meetings. Nevertheless, I am disappointed that we have not been able to meet in person for MSS, SOM, and ASA. In particular, I was looking forward to working with the SOM leadership to welcome conference attendees to Macalester's campus. (Hopefully, we will be able to host a meeting at Macalester in the near future and welcome you to St. Paul.) In addition, I had planned to coordinate a Minnesota Night Out at the MSS in Omaha, providing another opportunity to connect with colleagues.

During the coming year, I hope that we are able to make our online state and regional meetings valuable resources for faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. To do so, we welcome your participation at both the SOM and MSS meetings.

The personal connections that we forge and renew at conferences through intellectual encounters and casual conversations help make our work that much more rewarding. While we will not have the chance meetings that somehow happen at each conference, we can work to expand on the opportunities to meet and share ideas with colleagues in the state. Having occasional conversations on topics of relevance—whether related to the state of sociology in Minnesota, resources related to policy or civically engaged sociology, or ideas about adapting teaching to the current environment—can happen both during our annual meetings and in less formal ways that can respond to more immediate needs. ***If you have interest in participating in a conversation, please reach out to larsone@macalester.edu whether you have a topic in mind or would just like to connect with colleagues.***