MU Sociology Welcomes Three New Faces to the Fold

Amit and Srirupa Prasad joined the department in time for the 2006 fall semester.

Just a “couple” of sociologists

Two of the newest faces in the Department of Sociology have more in common than their discipline of choice — they’re husband and wife.

Amit and Srirupa Prasad — natives of India — join the department as assistant professors; Srirupa is a joint appointee with sociology and women’s studies. Both the Prasads share an interest in medical sociology, though Amit also lists science and technology among his areas of study, tying in elements of citizenship and identity.

Amit — already holding a bachelor’s degree in physics — earned his master’s degree from the Delhi University School of Economics. He then ventured to the United States and received his doctorate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, focusing on “transnational processes” surrounding magnetic-resonance imaging technology.

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Brown’s long road leads to Mizzou

For new faculty member Eric Brown, the University of Missouri–Columbia represents the latest step in a path that includes stints at some of the nation’s most prestigious academic institutions.

Brown earned his undergraduate degree in sociology and urban studies, with a focus on urban planning, from Rutgers University and received both his master’s degree and doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley. From there the New Jersey native spent two years at the University of North Carolina, one as a fellow, and the next as a visiting lecturer, meeting his wife along the way.

“All along, I maintained some of the same kinds of interests: urban sociology, race and ethnicity and social injustice,” Brown says.

From Chapel Hill, Brown traveled to Carnegie Mellon, where he took a two-year fellowship at the Center for African-American Urban Studies and the Economy.

“It gave me an opportunity to keep involved in my own work,” Brown says.

Another two-year fellowship followed, taking Brown to Cornell University’s Center for the Study of Inequality, and then he took a one-year position as visiting professor at Wesleyan University. Now Brown brings his interests in social injustice, race and ethnicity and urban sociology.

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Looking Ahead
By Jay Gubrium, Chair

It’s time to take stock of where we are as a department and where we hope to be in the future. For me, this relates to having led a successful recruitment drive for new faculty during the last five years. For the faculty, it stems, as well, from being a new and enthusiastic group of colleagues eager to move ahead.

When I was hired from the University of Florida in 2002 to be the new chair of sociology at MU, my assignment was to “rebuild the department.” Of course, there were additional goals in place such as working on faculty tenure and promotion and to encourage progress in research and teaching. But faculty recruitment was the primary aim.

As with many MU departments, and departments across the country at the time, a large number of retirements were looming, and it was clear that faculty members had to be replaced, and quickly. This was an exciting prospect, but also a difficult one, as seasoned and expert scholars moved out and energetic, but inexperienced, junior colleagues moved in. Now, well into 2007, we’re over that hump, and I’m pleased to say that our junior colleagues are moving along like dynamos on all fronts, developing exciting courses, formulating new research projects, and paying serious attention to programmatic issues and goals for the future.

At the end of my initial five-year term as chair, I’m happy to report that the faculty has chosen to re-elect me for another five-year term. This means that looking ahead is once again on the agenda, but this time with less emphasis on faculty development and more on long-range planning.

This raises three important questions. What kind of graduate program do we hope to have in place in the next five years? (Six years ago, the department initiated what turned out to be a very successful revamping of our undergraduate major, and that’s doing fine.) How can we enhance our external funding to support the research activities expected from the state’s only sociology doctoral training program? And, as public universities become more like private ones in the support they receive, what can we do to raise the kinds of funds to retain a top-notch faculty, attract the best graduate students and to do so in facilities and with the resources that match these aims? The faculty is ready and able to deal imaginatively and effectively with these issues, and I’m pleased to say that the main goal of my next five-year term as chair centers on them.

This note about “looking ahead” relates to our alumni. MU’s is a venerable and distinguished sociology department, over 100 years old. The department has many, many alumni locally and nationally. As part of long-range planning, we hope to include you in our efforts, both in planning for, and making good on, our aims for the future. Do let us know what you’re doing now so that we can more effectively communicate with you about how you can contribute to the department, especially in fund-raising. Telephone or e-mail our office manager, Debbie Friedrich, at 573-882-7711 or at friedrichd@missouri.edu and she’ll pass the information along to the rest of us.

Soon, we will be forming a sociology development board whose primary responsibility will be to help secure the resources that, as they say in the business, make the difference in being a program of excellence. We hope to include our alumni in this effort and expect that those of you who are interested in participating will contact us about this, and as soon as possible. We’re excited about the prospects, especially the possibility of concertedly working with alumni to build and sustain a department that our faculty, future students and alumni can be proud of.
“Intellectually, it’s been very exciting,” he says. “There’s been a lot of energy.”

Asked about his experiences in the classroom during his first semester at MU, Amit says, “It’s been fun. I feel, at least, that I’m pushing (the students) to consider the relationship between technology and society.

“I tell them, ‘Just be aware of it.’ That doesn’t mean you have to be pessimistic about it.”

Srirupa, meanwhile, also earned her master’s degree from the Delhi University School of Economics and traveled to Urbana-Champaign for doctoral studies that ended in 2005 with the successful defense of her dissertation “Sanitizing the Domestic,” which examined the confluence of nationalism and the cultural politics of hygiene in both Bengal and India.

“It’s a project in historical sociology. How notions of hygiene and disease become ideologies of culture,” says Srirupa, who also spent a year in the Department of Medical History and Bioethics at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

She says her interest in sociology stems from a curiosity and concern for everyday life.

“There’s a possibility to look really critically at the social processes of which you are a part,” Srirupa says. “That’s what fascinates me.”

Both husband and wife — married 10 years — said they feel lucky to have found a partner in a professional peer.

“Sociology for the both of us is mostly about awareness,” Amit says. “In that sense it bears on our lives.”

“The good thing is, we share our work a lot,” Srirupa says. “And other times we can just be a couple.”

Prasad

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Brown

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race and ethnicity, urban sociology and social policy to MU.

“I’m looking into the formation of the African-American professional middle class in the post Civil Rights era,” Brown says. “It’s a mix of historical research and interview research.”

Aiming for a book, Brown’s research stems from his dissertation and focuses on the first generation of the post-Civil Rights era.

Brown said he was attracted to Missouri in part by the department’s history.

“I like that the department has a tradition in critical sociology,” Brown says, “I liked the apparent sense of collegiality.”

And as to where Brown sees his place in MU sociology, “I think I can cover some areas that the department once covered: race and ethnicity, social stratification, urban sociology and social policy. My own research tries to incorporate all four of those areas.” (See a related story about Brown on the back cover.)

Make a Gift

Gifts from our alumni and friends provide the opportunity to enrich the life of the department. We use gift funds in a variety of ways that benefit our students. The department provides annual cash awards for outstanding papers by undergraduates in our Mauksch Award competition. We also offer travel grants to scholarly conferences to graduate students who present research papers and attend sessions. Notably, in the past few years, we have received larger gifts that allowed us to address major needs such as purchasing personal computers and a copying machine. We are immensely grateful, too, for gifts that help us build our endowment. Indeed, your generosity helps us advance the department in general.

Do make us one of your philanthropic priorities for 2007. A solid base of alumni support is one of the principal factors that distinguishes the best universities and departments from the rest. We hope you will be able to help us this year with a gift of $50, $100, or more. For your convenience, simply place a check payable to the University of Missouri–Columbia in the enclosed business reply envelope and mail it to us. Questions may be directed to our office manager, Debbie Friedrich, at the Department of Sociology, 312 Middlebush Hall, Columbia, Mo. 65211-6100. You may also contact her at 573-882-7711 or friedrichd@missouri.edu, or the department chair, Jay Gubrium, at Gubrium@missouri.edu.

We pledge to use your contributions wisely, and we thank you for your support!

— Jay Gubrium
During the last week of July, in the woods by the shores of Lake Wappapello, the sons and daughters of American laborers — about 22 youths aged 13–17 — gathered for a different kind of summer camp, and two representatives of University of Missouri–Columbia sociology were there to lead the way.

MU sociology graduate student Sara Petrowsky and Charlie Edelen IV, BA ’05, played camp counselor for the 2006 Romeo Corbeil Labor Camp, sponsored by the Office and Professional Employees International Union. The MU Labor Education Program also supports the camp, which was held on a section of University-owned forest near Poplar Bluff.

Both Petrowsky and Edelen deemed the camp — geared at fostering awareness and leadership among the campers — a success.

“I wish they had it when I was a kid,” says Petrowsky, who grew up in a union household and now studies labor movements. “What we want (the campers) to understand is how unions work, how they protect workers.”

Edelen, who has worked for Labor Notes, the Vermont Labor Board and Jobs with Justice since graduation, says the youths were exposed to concerns ranging from sexism and racism to immigrant labor.

“It’s really good to hit these issues head on,” Edelen says. “It’s good to have people who are so young talk about unions. They just don’t get that in the mainstream.”

The organization of the camp was geared to put the power in the campers’ hands, Petrowsky explains.

“On the first day, they elect officials and form committees,” she says. “They negotiate with the counselors. We are the ‘business.’”

Petrowsky also took her role as one of three female counselors to heart.

“I wanted to be a good role model, a good leader,” she says. “It’s about teaching young women that they don’t have to be treated certain ways just because they’re women. You need to respect your bodies and so do the men in your lives.”

Petrowsky says she made a particular connection with Anabella, president of the 2006 campers. “She and I were really close,” the counselor says. “We had some real heart-to-hearts.”

Both Petrowsky and Edelen say they have remained in contact with campers.

As for camp programming, which included old standbys like a float trip, socially conscious elements remained at the forefront, including a screening of a documentary on sweatshop labor. Sara described the film as the “moment where it all came together” for the campers.

“It was the a-ha moment,” she says. “Being pro-union is being anti-sweatshop.”

And with the success of the 2006 camp, both Petrowsky and Edelen say they are ready for more, if asked to reprise their roles this summer.

“It just re-energizes you to go there…and make contact with these kids,” Edelen says.
Faculty Kudos

Eric Brown’s article “The Black Professional: Middle Class and the Black Community” will be published in *African American Urban History: The Dynamics of Race, Class and Gender Since World War II*, expected in 2007 from University of Chicago Press.

David L. Brunsma has been elected to the executive committee of the Southern Sociological Society. He organized and presided over the following conference sessions: “Globalizing Sociology Without Borders” and “Reparations and Human Rights” in a session co-sponsored by American Sociological Association and Southern Sociological Federation at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Montréal, and “Racial and Ethnic Identity: Construction, Maintenance, and Negotiation” held at the annual meeting of the Association of Black Sociologists in Montréal. *Social Science Researcher* published Brunsma’s 2006 article “Public Categories, Private Identities: Exploring Regional Differences in the Biracial Experience.” He presented “Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community?” as a member of the panel discussion for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Day at MU. He presented the following papers at professional conferences: “Sociology as Documenting Dystopia: Imagining a Sociology Without Borders, A Critical Dialogue” during the annual meetings of the Association of Humanist Sociology in St. Louis; “Bringing Down the House: Reparations, Universal Morality, and an Epistemology of Social Justice” (with MU sociology graduate student James Michael Thomas) during the annual meeting of the Association of Black Sociologists in Montréal; “Identity, Context, and Multiracials’ Development: A Life Course Model” (with Annamaria Csiszmadia and Teresa Cooney) during the annual meetings of the National Council on Family Relations. Brunsma also became the race and ethnicity section editor for the new peer-reviewed online journal, *Sociology Compass* (Blackwell Publishers).

Jaber F. Gubrium was named a Hallman Distinguished Professor at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. He lectured on “Aging, Life Stories, and Social Context” and presented research colloquia on the institutional meanings of health and well-being in later life. He also was reappointed MU sociology department chair for another five-year term, starting in 2007. Gubrium is putting the finishing touches on a comprehensive, internationally focused handbook of constructionist research, which will be published by Guilford in 2008, and is completing papers on the narrative environments of life stories.

Joan Hermsen received a 2006 University of Missouri–Columbia Excellence in Education award.

Victoria Johnson received an honorable mention for a 2006 University of Missouri–Columbia Excellence in Education award. She was selected as a 2006 Difficult Dialogues Fellow as part of the MU Difficult Dialogues Initiative Workshop. The MU College of Arts and Science Promotion and Tenure Committee unanimously recommended her for promotion to associate professor with tenure. The *Peace Studies Review* published Johnson’s article titled “Assessing Media Coverage on the Necessity of Going to War.” This summer, the University of Washington Press will publish her “*How Many Machine Guns Will It Take to Cook One Meal?*” *The Seattle and San Francisco General Strikes* (see Parade of Books).

Jackie Litt, associate professor and director of MU’s Women’s and Gender Studies Program, was awarded a $500,000 National Science Foundation PAID ADVANCE grant to conduct research on and create new institutional practices that support gender equity for female faculty in the sciences. Litt is the principal investigator, and the project began January 1. She also co-wrote *Global Dimensions of Gender and Carework* (see Parade of Books) published in 2006 by Stanford University Press.

Ibitola Pearce was promoted to professor of sociology in June 2006 and also obtained Women’s and Gender Studies-grant funding to travel to England in May–June 2006, working with the British Archives at Oxford University, the London School of Economics and the National Archives in Kew while researching a project titled “Gender Relations among the Yoruba in South-west Nigeria: Pre-colonial and Colonial Perspectives.” She completed a year-long McNair Project, serving as mentor, with journalism student Victoria Okoye. Pearce presented papers at two conferences: Midwest Sociological Society in Omaha, and the Gender and Development conference in Kansas City, Mo. She also has been awarded a research leave for the full 2007–08 academic year.

Takeshi Wada received a 2006 University of Missouri Research Board grant for research on “Predicting Political Violence using Global Event Data.” Takeshi also received a 2006 Summer Research Fellowship & Grant for research on “Developing a Real-Time Early Warning System for Violent Conflict Using Wire Reports from a Cuban News Agency.”
Graduate Student Accomplishments

**David Elliott** presented “Using Peirce’s Theory of Signs as a Framework for Drawing Out the Semiotic Theories of Dewey and Mead” in the New Developments in Symbolic Interactionist Theory session at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction last August in Montréal. He is scheduled to present “History as Experience: The Strengths and Continuing Relevance of Pragmatist Historiography” in the Pragmatism and Sociology session at the annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society in April in Chicago.

**Lindy Hern** presented two papers at the Midwest Sociological Society’s annual meeting in Omaha: “The Gender Wage Gap in the Income of Physicians: Does Increased Involvement in Managed Care Decrease Inequality in Wages?” and “The Role of Gender in a Grassroots Progressive Movement: Is Missourians for Single Payer a Feminist Organization?” She was asked to organize a session for the Society for the Study of Social Problems on New Scholar Activism and did so successfully in Montréal. She also is organizing a session for this year’s meeting in New York City. Hern also had a successful first year of teaching and was even asked to be an “honorary coach” for a student this semester.

**Olivia Hetzler** co-wrote (with Veronica Medina and David Overfelt) pieces titled “Gentrification, Displacement, and New Urbanism: The Next Racial Project” and “Race, Immigration, and Economic Restructuring: New Orleans as a Case Study;“ both were published in *Sociation Today, the Official Online Journal of the North Carolina Sociological Association*. The trio also presented “Free Market Racism: The Racial Politics of New Urbanism and the World-City,” at the 36th Annual Conference of the Association of Black Sociologists last August in Montréal where she also co-wrote a presentation with Hetzler and Overfelt titled “Free Market Racism: The Racial Politics of New Urbanism and the World-City.” Medina, with Monique Mendoza (an MU doctoral student in educational, school and counseling psychology), presented a paper titled “Culturally Competent Recruitment: Ensuring Participation by Latino Immigrants” at the 2006 annual meeting of the National Latina/o Psychological Association in Milwaukee. Additionally, Medina co-wrote “Perspectives of Work Among Mexican Immigrants” with Associate Professor Lisa Y. Flores and graduate students Rocio Rosales, Lizette Ojeda, Monique Mendoza, Julie Wagner, Yuhong He and Shiloh Jordan from educational, school and counseling psychology. It was presented at the 2006 American Psychological Association Convention in New Orleans.

**Maksim Kokushkin** presented a paper titled “The Employee-Management Power Relationships in Employee-Owned Companies” during the annual American Sociological Association conference in Montréal. The piece considers the effect of misbalance in employee—management power relations on an organization’s health.

**Amy Lane** presented “Moral Crisis in a General Motors Town: An Examination of Church Response to the Flint, Michigan, Sit-Down Strike, 1936–37” to the Association for the Study of Religion in summer 2006 in Montréal. She also presented “Tearing Down the Workplace–Community Divide” at the Society for the Study of Social Problems annual meeting, in summer 2006 in Montréal. Lane was funded to attend a week-long seminar on Canadian studies sponsored by the Government of Canada; the Canadian Studies Program; University of Vermont and the Center for the Study of Canada, Plattsburgh State University of New York. The program is designed to promote the growth and institutionalization of Canadian Studies in the United States.

**Veronica Medina** co-wrote (with Olivia Hetzler and David Overfelt) an article titled “Gentrification, Displacement, and New Urbanism: The Next Racial Project,” which was published in *Sociation Today, the Official Online Journal of the North Carolina Sociological Association*. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2006 Southern Sociological Society annual meeting and an updated version was presented in November at the Race, Ethnicity and Place Conference in San Marcos, Texas. The trio also wrote a second piece for *Sociation Today, the Official Online Journal of the North Carolina Sociological Association* titled “Race, Immigration, and Economic Restructuring: New Orleans as a Case Study;” which appeared in January. Medina presented “Static Ethnicities: The Constrained Ethnic Identity of Two ‘American Girls’” at the 36th Annual Conference of the Association of Black Sociologists last August in Montréal.


**James Michael Thomas** presented (with Professor David Brunsma) “Bringing Down the House: Reparations, Universal Morality, and an Epistemology of Social Justice” during the annual meeting of the Association of Black Sociologists in Montréal.
Asked what drew her to the University of Missouri–Columbia, Swedish post-doctoral scholar Katarina Jacobsson had a simple answer.

“Jay (Gubrium). I would never have thought about Missouri otherwise,” Jacobsson says. “I didn’t know where it was.”

Jacobsson met the chair of MU sociology in Sweden and, partly at his suggestion, pursued and received grant funding to spend six months abroad, with her husband and children in tow.

“I think what has been most educating here has been the daily life — getting the kids to school, arranging your schedule,” Jacobsson says. “I have only good things to say.

“It’s been a wonderful opportunity to be here. I thought it would be good to come to a place that is not too big, not too small.”

Jacobsson completed her graduate studies at Lund University School of Social Work, and though her doctoral dissertation focused on issues concerning the deaf in Sweden. She also has studied cases of bribery convictions and battered women. In fact, the latter two studies inspired the work she completed while visiting Mizzou before her return home last December.

“What struck me in both projects was how the prosecutors talked about their work,” Jacobsson explains.

But the variety of her own research interests isn’t all that surprising, considering Jacobsson’s attitude toward her work.

“You can’t really tell beforehand where the good sociology is,” she says. “You can find it in the most boring sites.”

Katarina Jacobsson completed her research in December 2006.

Parade of Books
Publishers’ notes on recent books by department faculty members


This book offers a provocative examination of globalization, examining the lives of the women at the center of these new global dynamics. Arguing that society is facing multiple crises of care, the authors developed a new framework for understanding the interplay of globalization, gender and carework. In four original essays, they discussed gender, race and class inequality; migration, citizenship and the politics of social control; the evolving meanings of motherhood and new social definitions of carework and the personal transformation of careworkers. Excerpts from the classic literature in the field as well as recent cutting-edge research studies support the consideration of each of these growing global crises.


Does participation in general strikes mean that American labor was class conscious in the European manner? What conditions elicited American general strikes, and how did their participants justify using this tactic? What can general strikes tell us about the American exceptionalism debate? Johnson answers these questions through a historical and comparative analysis of general strikes in Seattle in 1919 and San Francisco in 1934. The author identifies the economic and political developments that shaped the emergence, dynamics and outcomes of these great strikes, as well as the interpretive frameworks drawn upon by activists to mobilize American workers to engage in the most insurrectionary tactic short of revolt.
New MU sociology faculty member Eric Brown received an Abe Fellowship through the Social Science Research Council to support follow-up research on his “minority middle class formation” project comparing blacks in the U.S. and the Japanese Buraku-min (communities descended from outcast groups of the feudal era). The fellowship is designed to encourage multidisciplinary research on topics of pressing international concern. Rather than seeking to promote greater understanding of a single country, the Abe program advances research on the experiences and future challenges of the U.S. and Japan from a global perspective.