California Connections: Newest Faculty Come from the Coast

By Colin E. Suchland

The University of Missouri Department of Sociology welcomed two new faculty members this academic year, assistant professors Rebecca Scott and Brian Colwell. Both earned their doctorates from California universities. The two new hires add to a growing contingent of department faculty who trekked from the Golden State to the Show-Me State. Associate professors Victoria Johnson and Clarence Lo, as well as assistant professors Eric Brown and Byung-Soo Kim, all hold degrees from California institutions.

Brian Colwell: Exploring the Bonds Beyond the Bars

History may be Brian Colwell’s first love, but the new MU sociology assistant professor makes a point of separating business and pleasure.

After attending a community college in Seattle, Colwell transferred to the University of Washington where his scholarly interests flowed to both sociology and history. In the end, the former developed into a professional interest, the latter remained more personal.

“Honestly, I think my enjoyment is rooted in the history,” Colwell explains. “So I decided I was going to save that for leisure.”

Rebecca Scott: Coal Miners’ Researcher

As Becky Scott knows, the path to one discipline often leads to another. In her undergraduate studies the new MU sociology assistant professor first was drawn to anthropology, and then she studied French literature with the intention of becoming a teacher. She went on to work for a non-profit agency in Washington, D.C., the Institute of International Education. Still, she hesitated before committing any further to that path.

“I realized that’s why I couldn’t fill out my grad(uate) school applications,” Scott says. “It just wasn’t me.”

Instead, Scott found her way to the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she studied under professor Herman Gray, among others.

Continues on Page 2
Brian Colwell, continued from Page 1

Sociology piqued Colwell’s interest. “I went into sociology because I clearly had a respect for it,” he says. “I like the idea of taking a step and generalizing. I want to understand patterns not just stories.”

Colwell’s course led south to Stanford where he first considered study in social psychology. He said his studies at Stanford were a real introduction to academic rigor. “It was at Stanford that he began his exploration of the way prisoners in the California penal system form bonds with one another. The project included 74 inmates at 16 prisons. The focus, Colwell says, was the forming of social bonds in a “high-risk environment.”

More generally, Colwell says he sees himself in the symbolic interactionist tradition, with an “overarching interest in social bonds.”

Asked about his decision to accept a position with MU sociology, Colwell says he liked the department and the larger Columbia community. “Columbia’s a big place that could easily fit in anywhere on the West Coast,” he says. “I have an entire county of relatives out here. I have two kids, so it was nice to have that community, too.”

The department, too, seems supportive, he continues. “They’re interested in your success. I feel like I’ve been given a lot of space here to do my work.”

At present, Colwell is working with former Stanford colleagues to test the hypothesis of his dissertation. He also is considering a project on childhood.

Rebecca Scott, continued from Page 1

asked what attracted her to the discipline, Scott says, “Sociology is just about looking critically at the things that become naturalized in everyday life.”

It was at Santa Cruz that she developed a research project concerning coal mining and mountaintop removal. “I feel that my stuff is pretty interdisciplinary,” Scott says. It’s about “the way people make sense of things that seem to not make sense.”

Incorporating both ethnography and media analysis, Scott’s project explores corporate framing around individualism and the anti-union effects of that framing. She’s currently revising her dissertation into a book.

Asked her impression of the department, Scott says she saw similarities between UC Santa Cruz and Mizzou. “It’s very collegial,” she says. “And there’s a real social justice focus. That’s something that you really can’t take for granted.”

In the future Scott would like to develop a graduate-level course in social psychology. Scott’s husband, Scott Garson, also joined the larger MU community as an instructor in the English department. The couple has a five-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son.

We’re Looking for You!

Sociology Alumni Listserv outreach under construction

As part of a larger effort to develop new outreach within our academic family, the MU sociology alumni relations committee is looking to track down a few of our own — you — to join a department listserv (e-mail group).

Signing on to the list will keep you up to date on department news and inform you of upcoming events of interest to alumni. Possible activities include a department alumni day, networking opportunities and lectures. In addition, the department is working to develop an alumni Web page through which members of the “family” can keep in touch, reacquaint themselves or meet for the first time.

Of course, the list also gives you the opportunity to share your successes with the department, as well as offer any suggestions you may have.

To sign on to the MU sociology listserv send your preferred e-mail address to the department chair, Jay Gubrium at gubrium@mizzou.edu.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Faculty Kudos

Barbara J. Bank organized and edited Gender and Education: An Encyclopedia, published by Praeger in 2007. The two-volume work contains reviews and critiques of theories, research, scholarship, curricula and policies concerning gender and all levels and types of education in the U.S. and internationally.

David L. Brunsma edited (with David Overfelt and Steven Picoul) the book The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe, published in 2007 by Rowman and Littlefield. His and Overfelt’s article “Sociology as Documenting Dystopia: Imagining a Sociology Without Borders, a Critical Dialogue” was published in Societies Without Borders. Brunsma wrote the chapter “School Clothing and School Uniforms” in Mathison and Ross’s (eds.) Battleground Schools. He contributed a book review to Contemporary Sociology of Navigating Intercultural Borderlands: Black-White Couples and Their Social Worlds by Erica Chito Childs. Brunsma contributed invited talks at Columbia University Center for the Study of Human Rights in New York on Aug. 15, at the MU Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative on Nov. 1 and for MU Residential Life in April. He presented at the following conferences: the annual meeting of the Association of Black Sociologists in New York, the 40th Anniversary Loving Conference in Chicago and the annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society in Atlanta. Brunsma was nominated for chair-elect of the section on racial and ethnic minorities of the ASA; he continued to serve SSS as chair of the Program Submission Review Committee; he became member of the editorial boards of two journals; and he was appointed a member of the international advisory board for Sociolog Sin Fronteras-Internationale. He also continued to serve as editor of the race and ethnicity section of Sociology Compass.

Jay Gubrium edited (with J. Holstein) and contributed two chapters to the Handbook of Constructionist Research, published by Guilford Press in 2008. He also published “Urban Ethnography of the 1920s Working Girl” in Gender, Work and Organization; “Metaphors Shifts in Stroke Recovery” (with C. Boylstein, M. Rittman, and R. Hinojosal in Health Communication; and “Rejoinder to Charles Briggs’s 2007 article ‘Anthropology, Interviewing, and Communicability’” in Current Anthropology. Gubrium presented invited lectures at the Department of Sociology at Lund University, Sweden, in October and at the Department of Social Welfare at Gothenburg University, Sweden, in May.

Victoria Johnson’s paper “Changing Repertoires of Collective Action: American General Strikes 1877–1946” has been accepted for publication in Research in Policy and Society, Volume 17, on politics and public policy.

Tola Pearce has been invited to give a presentation in March at Scripps College in California on aspects of Yoruba motherhood under globalization. She also recently completed a study in Nigeria.

Graduate Student Spotlight

McElmurry receives Louisville Fellowship

Almost three years into his “congregation study,” MU sociology scholar Kevin McElmurry has reason to rejoice himself.

The doctoral student is one of eight researchers internationally to receive the $18,000 award aimed at helping researchers finish their doctoral studies. “It’s a tremendous thing to receive,” McElmurry says.

Before joining the department in Missouri, McElmurry completed his master’s degree at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., studying with now-retired Professor Joe Tamney. Here at MU, McElmurry continued his studies in the sociology of religion with professor Mary Jo Neitz.

“It’s a great site to look at some of these core theories of the discipline,” McElmurry says of his studies.

Kevin McElmurry studies the sociology of religion.
2007 Colloquium Series Draws Scholars from Near and Far

Photos and text by Colin E. Suchland

The MU Sociology Fall 2007 Colloquium Series included presentations from the department's own as well as guest lectures from near and far.

New additions to the department last year, professors Amit and Srirupa Prasad opened the series Sept. 14 with a talk about an ongoing line of research in their native India. In a piece titled "Citizenship, Identity, and Power Within Neo-liberal Globalization: Drug Testing and Medical Transcription in India," the duo presented findings that showed how job creation from off-shore interests affected the lives of both middle-class and poorer workers.

On Sept. 28, MU history Professor Carol Anderson presented "When the Levees Broke: New Orleans and the History of Uncivil Rights in America." Her research explored how events such as Hurricane Katrina are not isolated but are linked to a history of oppression and inequality that disproportionately affects blacks (and other nonwhites).

Visiting from Loyola University of Chicago, Professor David Embrick led his audience through a study in visual sociology and ethnography titled "Dog Days, Cat Days, and Wearing Flip-flops to Work: Just What Does Diversity Mean in Post-Civil Rights Corporate America?" The Oct. 12 presentation was a study of the deployment of diversity in the cultures of several large American corporations.

Professor David Konisky, a faculty member at MU's Truman School of Public Policy, led an Oct. 26 presentation called "Environmental Justice in Government Performance? Testing for Inequalities in Enforcement." The study considered if the enforcement of environmental policy differed by location and population.

Candace Korasick, an MU sociology doctoral student, brought the fall series to its conclusion on Nov. 9 with "Being Without or Just Being? Childlessness as a Non-Identity." The presentation — before a packed house of friends, students and peers — centered on Korasick's interviews with women regarding their status as "childless." She found that the label frequently was not central to her subjects' senses of self.

Loyola professor David Embrick (above) presents research on the meaning and reality of diversity in corporate America. (left) Professor Clarence La and graduate students Jim Polk, Jesse VanGerven and Steve Barnard listen to Embrick's Oct. 12 lecture.

Professor Amit Prasad (above) listens to history Professor Carol Anderson. (left) Anderson presents "When the Levees Broke on Sept. 28.

Professor David Konisky (above) of MU's Truman School of Public Affairs, presents on environmental justice. (right) Sociology professors Amit and Srirupa Prasad present recent findings related to job creation in India as interconnected with globalization.
Graduate Student Accomplishments

Jennifer Beggs’ paper “Coping with Food Vulnerability: The Role of Social Networks in the Lives of Missouri Food Pantry Clients” was awarded first prize in the student paper competition held by the Sociology and Social Welfare Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

Priya Dua’s paper “Feminist Mentoring and Female Graduate Success: Challenges and Gender Inequality in Higher Education” was accepted for publication by Sociology Compass in August 2007.

Maksim Kukushkin presented “Standing Point Theory is Dead, Long Live Standing Point Theory” at the Feminist Thought Session and “New Institutionality and New Alternatives to Normative Positivism” at the 102nd ASA annual meeting in New York. He was an invited discussant at Norbert Elias’s Impact on Organization Studies by Ad van IJzendoorn during the Sociology Classics and the Future of Organizational Studies Conference, in August at the Wharton School in Philadelphia. Kukushkin gave an invited presentation called “Translating between Theoretical Desires and Actual Developments” at the Global Supplicative Grant Spring Conference of the Open Society Foundation in New York.

Amy Lane presented her paper “From Mercy to Activism: Translating Social Justice into Religious Practice and Religious Practice into Social Justice” at the 2007 annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion in New York. This paper is based on Lane’s dissertation research exploring how religious practice comes to encompass social justice activism. She focused on an ethnographic study of Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City.

Veronica Medina’s chapter “Shifting Populations and Migrants’ Career Development: Personal and Contextual Influences” was presented at the Migrant’s Career Development: Personal and Contextual Influences Conference in Kansas City, Mo., in 2007.

Lisa Y. Flores and several doctoral students at the 2007 Medina Belt: Race, Labor and Politics in the Changing Sunbelt (edited by Charles Gallagher and Cameron Lippard, University of Georgia Press), this spring. The chapter was co-written with fellow MU sociology graduate students Olivia Hettlzer and David Overfelt. Medina presented updated findings of “Work Perspectives Among Mexican Immigrants,” a paper co-written with Lisa Y. Flores and included in the MU’s 2007 Cambio de Colores Conference in Kansas City, Mo., in a session titled “Mexican Americans’ and Mexican Immigrants’ Career Development: Personal and Contextual Predictors.”

Jeff McCully presented on the rhetorical strategies in anti-drug public service announcements at the Midwest Sociological Society’s Chicago annual meeting in April 2007.

Kevin McElmurry was awarded a 2007 dissertation fellowship from the Louisville Institute to support the final year of his project “Feeling Jesus in the Backbeat: Gender, Media, and Emotion in a Post-modern Church.” Details of the fellowship are online at: www.louisville-institute.org/secondary/DFdetail.asp. He is revising an article for publication in Sociology of Religion titled “Alone/Together: Gendered Worship in the Seeker Church.” McElmurry has an article under review at Social Forces titled “Bringing Emotion Back into the Sociology of Religion.” This piece is co-written with Mary Jo Nantz (women’s and gender studies at MU) and Karen Bradley (sociology at Central Missouri State University).

In 2007, he presented papers at the MSS meetings in Chicago, the Association for the Sociology of Religion in New York and the ASA in New York. He traveled to Indiana University Northeast to give an invited lecture in the anthropology department. He also gave a paper at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in November 2007. McElmurry serves as the graduate representative to the Association for the Sociology of Religion.

Jennifer A. Schlosser won first place in the 2007 American Correctional Association graduate student paper competition for her paper “The Department of Punishments and the Divergence of Identity: Institutional Rhetoric vs. Inmates Attributes.” The text also is under review at the journal Punishment and Society. Another article, “Issues in Interviewing Inmates: Navigating and Methodological Realities of Inmates’ Voices,” has been accepted by Qualitative Inquiry (expected volume and issue 15:3). She was awarded a fellowship from the 2007 102nd ASA annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion in New York, the ASA in New York. He traveled to Indiana University Northeast to give an invited lecture in the anthropology department. He also gave a paper at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in November 2007. McElmurry serves as the graduate representative to the Association for the Sociology of Religion.

Jennifer A. Schlosser presented “‘In the Shadocombination at the MSS meetings in Chicago in August 2007. Her paper “‘In the Shade of Agent Orange: The Impact of the Times Beach Legacy’” in April 2007 at the MSS annual meeting in Chicago. Martino Taylor was interviewed in a German documentary, Auslandsreporter, regarding chemical weapons and the Monsanto Company. The documentary aired on German Public Television in July 2007. She was featured in a West NewsMagazine article in January 2008 discussing a hazardous waste site located in Wildwood, Mo. Her latest manuscript, “The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex and a New Social Autopsy,” was accepted for publication in the Journal of Political and Military Sociology.

Colin Wark had his master’s thesis research on Emory Bogardus and the origins of the social distance scale accepted for publication by The American Sociologist.

Parade of Books


Constructionism has become one of the most popular research approaches in the social sciences. But until now, little attention has been given to the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of the constructionist stance and the remarkable diversity in the field. This cutting-edge handbook brings together a dazzling array of scholars to review the foundations of constructionist research, how it is put into practice in multiple disciplines and where it may be headed in the future.

The volume critically examines the analytic frameworks, strategies of inquiry and methodological choices that together form the mosaic of contemporary constructionism, making it an authoritative reference for anyone interested in conducting research in a constructionist vein.

David Brunsma, David Overfelt and Steven Picou (eds.). The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.

This book brings together the nation’s top sociological researchers in an effort to catalogue the modern catastrophe that is Hurricane Katrina. The chapters in this volume discuss sociopolitical perspectives of disaster literature, provide alternative views and analyses of early post-storm data collection efforts, and examine emerging social questions that have surfaced in the aftermath of Katrina.

Graduate Student Accomplishments, continued

Politics? A Study of Social Isolation.” That same paper also was presented at ASA in 2007. Tang’s paper “From Philosophy of History to Political Philosophy: An Ideological Investigation of Globalization” was accepted by International Review of Sociology and will be published in the second issue in 2008.

Lisa Martino Taylor presented her paper “In the Shadow of Agent Orange: The Impact of the Times Beach Legacy” in April 2007 at the MSS annual meeting in Chicago. Martino Taylor was interviewed in a German documentary, Auslandsreporter, regarding chemical weapons and the Monsanto Company. The documentary aired on German Public Television in July 2007. She was featured in a West NewsMagazine article in January 2008 discussing a hazardous waste site located in Wildwood, Mo. Her latest manuscript, “The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex and a New Social Autopsy,” was accepted for publication in the Journal of Political and Military Sociology.

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In this two-volume set, explorers intersect the gender and education. Their entries deal with educational theories, research, curricula, practices, personnel and policies, but also with variations in the gendering of education across historical and cultural contexts. The various contributors discuss gender as a social construct. The latest research on boys and masculinities, as well as girls and feminism, is included. The entries in this work cover the breadth of topics related to gender and education. They provide reference information on the history and condition of gender and education from elementary to high school. Entries cover such topics as alternative schools, historically black colleges and universities in the United States, military colleges and academies, private and public single-sex and co-educational schools, literacy, mathematics achievement, women’s centers, teacher interactions with girls and boys, affirmative action in U.S. higher education and sororities and fraternities. The book also covers educator sexual misconduct, expectations of teachers for boys and girls, heterosexism and homophobia, bullying, harassment, violence among students, salaries of male and female educators, school choice and gender equity, disabled students and gender equity, Title IX and school sports, black feminism, womanism, and queer theory.
NSF Backs Prasad in Study of Techno-scientific Globalization

Amit Prasad’s research into the processes by which technology and scientific knowledge flow among nations has found a patron in the National Science Foundation (NSF).

In his second year with Mizzou sociology, Prasad is the recipient of a seven-month NSF grant of $73,550, which will aid him in completing a project revolving around multinational research in Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) technology. The project considers MRI research and innovation and technological transfer in and among the United States, United Kingdom and his native India.

“Once techno-scientific developments have taken place they diffuse within particular nations as well as internationally,” Prasad says. “My research shows how trans-national flow is a crucial factor in techno-scientific innovation.”

The NSF funding will allow Prasad to collect data from the U.K. as well as from the University of California, San Francisco. The components will complement the data Prasad already has gathered in India. His data set includes interviews, as well as analysis of scientific papers and historical documents.

“I am studying how MRI research and innovation in the U.S., India, and the U.K. has occurred and analyzing the role of transnational flows in the process,” Prasad explains.

The project expands on Prasad’s doctoral work, which considered MRI research in the U.S. and India. He plans to combine the two manuscripts into a book. Prasad says his project paints a picture of the transnational flow of knowledge and technology, rather than the Western/non-Western divide largely presumed in other research.

“My study offers a very different approach in understanding how techno-scientific innovations take place,” Prasad says. “It also maps how ideological constructs and institutional networks play crucial roles in the innovation process.”