

SOCIONEWS

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A Biannual Newsletter from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at The College of New Jersey

How to Apply to Grad School

By Liz Kornbluth

1. The first step you have to take is probably the hardest one. Figuring out what graduate program you want to be in can take a lot of thought and research. Graduating with a liberal arts major leaves you with many options, and this has its advantages and disadvantages. Narrow down your interests and skills, decide on what degree you want and what specific field you wish to focus on.

2. Pick a geographic region where you want to attend graduate school. This will narrow down your options enormously.

3. Next, look at schools where your particular program is offered. There are many available reference guides for this part of the process. An extremely helpful and popular one is the *Graduate School Guide*, which you can pick up at most grad school fairs or access online at www.graduateguide.com.

4. By now you will probably only have about 5-10 schools you are interested in. Visit them. Attend open houses and information sessions. By seeing the school, meeting faculty, and interacting with current students, you will gain a lot more insight than by just reading about them or visiting their website.

5. When you've narrowed down your list of the graduate schools you are most interested in (and think you have a chance at getting accepted) start applying online. Get your applications in early! Most schools have made the application

process simple by setting up application programs through their websites.

6. Make sure you have a complete application. Take the standardized test you are required to (GREs, LSATs, etc), gather your transcripts from every undergraduate school you attended, write and proof-read your personal statement and resume, and ask professors from your area of academic interest that you trust and have a good rapport with to write a letter of recommendation for you.

Finally, the easy (or perhaps most stressful) part: waiting for those acceptance letters! Be hopeful they will come, but prepared they may not. Keep in mind that graduate school is not for everyone, and it is definitely not your only option. Good luck!

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you are interested in applying for a graduate degree in sociology, the American Sociological Association publishes a guide of graduate programs, which we keep in the department here at TCNJ.

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A Worthwhile Endeavor

By Karen Bocian

"To compile a short book containing helpful tips and advice to parents." To the average college student, this seems like a fairly straightforward and easy task for a semester's worth of work. But for the students in Dr. Regina Kenen's research class, this has been an ongoing project that has already seen its share of difficulties. The students taking part in this endeavor are helping to create a book for families with children who have Smith-Magenis Syndrome (SMS), a rare syndrome that occurs in one of about every 25,000 births. While new information about SMS is constantly being discovered, it is still a very underdiagnosed syndrome, leaving parents with these type of children searching for answers about how to raise their son or daughter. By reading through a year's worth of entries from a list-serve that gives parents the opportunity to communicate with each other about SMS, the students in this class are in the process of pulling out information that could prove useful to others and explaining it in the form of a "helpful hints" book.

This has been a challenging task. Taking data that was coded by a previous class of Dr. Kenen's, the students have used a computer program known as AtlasTi to help highlight and categorize tips they discovered throughout their reading of the list-serve entries. All technology has its glitches, so this has been a frustrating task at times! After meeting with a parent of an SMS child, however, the class has seen the dire need for a book such as this and has found ways to overcome problems that have arisen. They are well on their way to completing the book by the end of the semester and plan to share it at TCNJ's Celebration of Student Achievement. This book is simply a starting point, as the students are working closely with the discoverer of Smith-Magenis Syndrome to create a worthwhile book of tips that is within the realm of their knowledge and understanding of the syndrome. Even if parents come

away with only a few "helpful hints" by scanning this book, it might give them an extra hour of sleep every night or a few more moments of peace during the day, which just might be enough for this book to prove priceless. Dr. Kenen and her class can only hope for such an impact!

What a difference a Class Makes

By Shari-Ann Harris

As an African-American Studies minor, I have been able to apply facets of those studies to my major in Sociology. However, I've noticed some discrepancies within Sociology's curriculum in terms of what class a student could take. The Sociology Department needs to take major steps in advancing its studies on race/ethnicity. The few classes don't do the subject enough justice. I've had sociology classes that aim to deal with racism, power, or privilege, but find that these classes lack strong theoretical bases. Also, these classes are usually in the low division as if these classes don't deserve the value of a 300 or 400 level class.

There are electives, yes, but these classes don't delve into the study deep enough. The classes should have a professor that, for one, specializes in the subject. The classes should also endeavor to discuss various kinds of historical race/ethnicity and present-day issues. Many classes deal with race as if it's an American issue, and it's only between blacks and whites. The point must be driven that it occurs between minorities, in different places, etc. I've only had one class that dealt with these issues properly, but have not seen it offered since. Perhaps, these classes aren't popular enough with most Sociology students, because many don't think of race/ethnicity in this day and age. Still, these classes, with an able professor, are necessary for Sociology's students to have a vast understanding of the social

world beyond theories and statistics.

Relegating these studies to lower-level classes and occasionally-offered electives, does not give the subject the attention it deserves. I have high hopes that The Sociology Department will consider these options in the future. College is the time for broadening horizons, and the Department of Sociology could do more of it.

Macro Social Work at Practice

By Beth Hurley

The culmination of my social work classes has led me to my senior internship, SOW 499. In deciding a placement for my internship I was able to utilize lessons learned in my tutorial about social work and about myself. While all of my peers in the class have chosen direct practice social work positions, often acting as caseworkers or the like, I decided to explore the area of macro-level social work. To do so I selected to work with a consulting group, Bratton Consulting Services (BCS), whose major client is the youth tobacco prevention unit within the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

Although a pre-social work major, this internship is allowing me to further my academic interests in policy and public health. My position largely involves being the liaison between college staff and professional staff during planning of the annual state-wide REBEL (Reaching Everyone By Exposing Lies) conference, NJ's own youth-led anti-tobacco movement. My time with BCS is giving me the opportunity to educate NJ's youth about the dangers of tobacco use and the manipulations tobacco companies use to attract new smokers. Building on this experience, I look forward to continuing my education by pursuing a master's degree in public health.

Meet Our New Presidents

By Laura Dirscherl

This semester AKD elected two new presidents, due to the graduation of Dave Harker, the current president and Chrissy Minerva, the current vice-president. Beth Hurley and Florencia Hirsch stood up to the challenge and were elected co-presidents.

Florencia is a junior Sociology major with a focus in social work. She originally was to enter the school as a Psychology major. After discussing this choice with advisors at the college she decided that Sociology would be a better fit for her future goal to be a private counselor. This decision seems to have been the right one as Florencia is planning on getting her masters in social work and may even be looking into law school in the future.

Florencia is very involved in the major. Florencia puts her interests in race and ethnicity studies into practice while at her job in an immigration law firm. While there, she aids the firm using her knowledge of Spanish to interpret and translate documents. Now with the new presidency, Florencia does even more to impress us.

Beth Hurley is also a junior Sociology major with a focus in social work. She, like Florencia, did not enter the college as a Sociology major. Beth entered as a Communications major, and then changed to Sociology and Elementary Education, finally deciding on Sociology with a focus in social work.

Beth plans to continue her education by obtaining a master's degree in public health. She is particularly interested in dealing with the tobacco prevention movement, as shown by her involvement for the past 3 years in REBEL, New Jersey's youth-led anti-tobacco movement (see article at right). Beth is even planning to facilitate a state-wide conference for over 1000 NJ high school students for the movement.

Beth also participates in many other activities. She is a member of the varsity swim team and she is also a member of the ResLife staff, working as an HA. Beth has also made time to work with the Trenton Youth Community-based Research Corp. Working with this group Beth mentors, tutors and assesses Liberian refugees.

Both of these women have demonstrated that they are interested in and dedicated to the field of Sociology through the large number of activities and jobs that they are involved with. It is clear that AKD has made a good decision in electing these two students as their presidents.

How Home Life Can Affect a Child's School Life By: Michelle Uffer

Parents can be the most influential forces in a child's life. They imbed in their children from the time they are very young how to behave and what to value. One of the important values parents pass down to their children is how to view education.

For nearly two months, I have had the opportunity to observe children in their natural school environment and gain valuable insight into how parental involvement in education can affect their lives in school. This article will examine the roles two sets of parents play in the educational lives of their children.

On one particular morning, a 7-year-old girl who had been absent for two consecutive days in one week did not show up for school for the third day in a row. After her second day of absence, her sister had come for her homework and said the student was feeling better and would be in school the next day. On the third morning, her sister returned again, handing in the girl's homework and saying her sister was all better, but she did not know if she would be in school since it was her birthday.

The student above had already missed two full days of school, and was allowed by her mother to miss another day despite a clean bill of health. This student had also arrived late to school 5 days in that same month. She sometimes does not have her homework completed, and scores lower grades than some of her classmates on tests. She has said that her parents are sometimes too busy to help her study, and rarely check her homework. Her parents may subsequently be teaching her that her education is not as important as everything else in life.

There is also a 7-year-old boy in the same class who always arrives on time, always completes his homework, and always scores well on his tests. He has said that his mother checks over his homework every day, and that one of his parents will always help him study for his tests. His parents also reward him for good report card grades.

This student has parents at home who are teaching him to value education. They make sure he completes his homework before he is allowed to watch television or play video games, and they are teaching him that it pays to get good grades in school. They appear to be setting him up for a positive view of education.

While these may be just two examples out of

many possible situations, and though there may be other factors that affect a child's attitude toward education, they do raise a very important point. Parents have the ability to affect their child's education by teaching them how important their education is. It is up to them to use that power wisely to ensure that their children are able to reach their highest educational potentials.

Children learn first about what to value from their parents. The younger a child is, the more important parental messages are. It is therefore important for parents to show interest and concern from the very beginning for what their children are doing in school so that eventually their children will grow up interested and concerned in their own educations.

Student Social Survey: Learning By Doing by Sociology 402: Tutorial: Survey Research Methods

In Fall 2004, sixteen sociology majors and double majors took part in the first TCNJ Student Social Survey, sponsored by the Sociology Department and directed by Dr. Diane Bates. The students designed the survey to be an omnibus survey of TCNJ students, although four general topics of interest were investigated: students' backgrounds, students' culture, students' activities, and students' attitudes. In the end, 674 surveys were completed, representing over 11 percent of TCNJ's undergraduate student population. Respondents were randomly selected from lists of juniors and first-year students registered in Fall 2004. Unfortunately, two rounds of random sampling resulted in low response rates (about 30 percent). To increase sample size, sociology students then supplemented the random sample with a convenience sample. The survey also suffered when, due to time constraints, we had to abandon the more reliable face-to-face survey method. Because we were not able to obtain informed consent forms from some students, only 646 surveys are included in analysis of this data. Although findings should be considered in light of the methodological limitations indicated above, the large sample size gives us some confidence of our ability to generalize to the TCNJ student populations. Here are some of our preliminary results:

Family Background: The biological parents of TCNJ students are generally married (78%) and from New Jersey or neighboring states: 75% of mothers and 76% of fathers were born in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, or New York. TCNJ parents are well educated: 52% of mothers and 66% of fathers had a college degree. Parents also worked: 65% of mothers and 85% of fathers worked full time. Mothers tended to hold "pink collar" occupations: 26% of working mothers were in education, 16% worked in healthcare, and 13% in administrative and office support positions. Fathers' occupations were more varied, but the most frequent categories were all white collar: 14% worked in management, 14% in business or finance, and over 9% worked in architecture or engineering.

Religion: Over 57% of students reported themselves as Roman Catholic; Protestants of all denominations represent only 28% of students surveyed. Smaller religious traditions included: Judaism (6%), Hinduism (1%), Buddhism (½%) and Islam (½%). Two thirds of students (66%) say that the strength of their faith has not changed since attending TCNJ. Most TCNJ students "disagreed" that religion influences what they read (79%), what they watch on TV (82%), or how they vote (72%).

Student Economics: Although 62% of students are currently working, a large proportion of students rely on their parents alone to pay for their education (32%), car (41%), car insurance (55%), cell phone (63%), and computer (60%). So what do students pay for by themselves?: credit cards—48% are solely responsible for their credit card debts. As for who else is paying for TCNJ education: 22% reported it was their parents and loans/scholarships; 14% reported themselves, parents, and loans/scholarship; and 14% reported loans/scholarships alone. Only 5% of students reported that they alone are responsible for paying for their own education.

Media Consumption: Students prefer electronic to printed media: only 40% currently have a subscription to a magazine and 27% report reading a newspaper on a daily basis. In contrast, nearly 80% reported watching at least one hour of TV on a daily basis and 97% reported spending at least an hour every day on the Internet for personal use. The most frequent type of programming that students watch are sitcoms and news, while talk shows and soap operas are the least popular types of television shows. Nearly 80% had seen a movie in a theatre in the previous month. About two thirds (65%) reported downloading music and 25% reported downloading movies. We did not measure if this downloading was authorized or not.

Social activities: Students spend their social time in a variety of ways. Less than half (44%) reported that they had a significant other. More than a third of TCNJ students are involved in volunteer organizations (34%), while more than a quarter are involved in honor societies (28%). One fifth (21%) are involved in a religious organization, while only 10% are involved in political organizations. Less than 20% of students are involved in varsity, club, intramural, or other organized sports, but 67% reported that they run or jog for exercise and 44% reported that they lift weights. Only about a third of students (33%) plays a musical instrument.

Cosmopolitanism: On average, TCNJ students have been two other countries—most likely in Canada (35%), the Caribbean (29%), Western Europe (29%), or Mexico and Central America (20%). Fifteen percent of students are "completely fluent" in a language other than English, while 69% report "some fluency" in another language. Students reported complete fluency in 32 different languages and some fluency in 29 languages. The most common second language was Spanish—53% of students said they had complete or some fluency in this language.

Student Attitudes: TCNJ students are political moderates, with 66% indicating that they were "somewhat liberal," "somewhat conservative," or in a middle category between these. Sixteen percent indicated that they were "very liberal," while 5% were "very conservative" and 9% were "not political". Students were evenly split in their support of capital punishment, although a substantial proportion (25%) were unsure of where they stood on this issue. Although an overwhelming majority students (87%) indicated that legal abortion should be available to women who have been raped or whose own health was threatened, only 38% indicated that they supported a woman's right to have an abortion "for any reason". Students were largely in favor of gay rights—two thirds (66%) think that consensual homosexual relations are "not wrong at all" while only 13% think that homosexuality is "always wrong". The majority of students agreed that homosexual couples should have the right to marry (66%), form civil unions (84%), and adopt (72%).

Additional results can be found at the TCNJ Department of Sociology Website under "Student Research:"
<http://sociology.department.tcnj.edu/StudentResearch/StudentResearch.htm>

Student authors of survey (in alphabetical order): Victoria Barrett, Peter Danese, Diane Erd, Julie Ann Glaz, Marisa Godleski, Vanessa Greenwald, Maura Hackett, Elizabeth Kombluth, Kristen LePage, Laura Munice, Vincent Perrotta, Kelly Sheperd, Teresa Socha, Kristin Tirella, Jamie Weaver, and Danielle Wyckoff. Faculty advisor to survey: Diane C. Bates

SOCIONEWS Spring 2005 Contributors: Liz Kornbluth, Shari-Ann Harris, Dr. Bates's Sociology 402: Tutorial: Survey Research Methods Students, Michelle Uffer, Karen Bocian, Beth Hurley, Laura Dirscherl

Editor: Florencia Hirsch

Faculty Advisor: Diane C. Bates