

Social Science Links

A McMASTER FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES NEWSLETTER

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Cathy Wever Elementary School Pupils

Class of 2020?

Aim high. Have fun. Do both in your “backyard” at McMaster. Through a partnership between Dean Yates and Hamilton Public Health nurse Laura Laverty, 53 grade seven pupils from central Hamilton got that message on a three-day visit to campus. They visited the William J. McCollion Planetarium and radio station CFMU, watched a lacrosse game, hit the climbing wall at the Pulse, hiked ravine trails, and slept in residence rooms each night. Hopping on the Bee Line bus from their neighbourhood was the trip’s first activity.

Along the way, they came to see the world of post-secondary education — and their own possible futures — in a different light.

“Creating expectations” for the pupils of Cathy Wever Elementary School, in the Barton-Wentworth Sts. area, was Ms. Laverty’s mission. She and Dean Yates wanted to expose pupils to campus life early, long before they would be making choices about life after high school. Before last May’s trip, Ms. Laverty asked the students how many were considering attending university. Three said yes; following the trip, that number rose to 42.

On campus, Ms. Laverty learned more about the pupils she serves. Touring the planetarium, one impressed her with in-depth knowledge of astronomy. In residence, another asked: “Why is there a desk in this

room?” “People live and study here”, Ms. Laverty explained. “And,” she said, “it was great to see the students just being kids. I don’t always get to see that at school.”

In a video interview with McMaster Times, President Patrick Deane reflected that “for all that we think (universities) as open to the general public, they aren’t, from all points of view. So it’s very important that a student from another part of town should be able to come here and play around and have fun on campus. That way it will not seem like a remote or intimidating place.”

President Deane went on to say: “the province, the city and the nation are all strengthened by having the best ... the most apt students attend university and develop their capacities so they can contribute to society.”

Ms. Laverty expressed thanks to McMaster’s administration, faculty and staff, to students from the ALTITUDE leadership and teamwork program and Student Success Centre, and in particular to Jeff Watson, Rebecca Rewi, and Adam Kuhn. “Jeff and Rebecca have since come to the school a couple of times,” she noted, and joined an end-of-year celebration with the Cathy Wever pupils, “and Adam was a big help. They are wonderful role models.”

Hear President Deane talk about introducing youth to university education here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDUwcPURBw>

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MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



While hiking in Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland this summer, I was struck by two conversations. One with the concierge of our cottage as her nephew considered University offers, including one from McMaster University. The other with a young woman about her future plans; she only wanted to attend a really good University, “such as McMaster.” Beyond the immediate pride I felt at McMaster’s recognition across the country, these chance encounters made me consider what makes a University excellent and how do we build this excellence and our international reputation.

This is a subject with which I have wrestled over several months. Universities are unusual creatures: Our success is not measured in tons of steel or dollars of profit, but in the creation of ideas and information — ephemeral and not bound by physical space. Excellence in Social Sciences is our faculty engaging in cutting edge research, disseminating ideas and knowledge to colleagues and the broader public here and abroad. Excellence is our research shaping society and solutions to individual and public problems. Excellence is the translation of research and knowledge into teaching, so that students become the best in their fields and are driven to excellence once they leave the University. Excellence is optimizing the use of our resources.

But to be a truly great University, we must know how to cast our gaze outward to the national and international scene while never forgetting the importance of our own community. Hamilton and surrounding areas are rich and diverse communities from which the majority of our students are recruited and where many of them will work and raise families upon graduation. By recruiting students, offering internships, public lectures, easing student pathways into work and researching local issues, we build our reputation and fulfill our mandate. Please let me know your thoughts (at alumni@mcmaster.ca, subject line “Keeping in touch”) on what builds excellence and ways alumni can get involved.

Charlotte A.B. Yates
Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences



Jeffrey Denis

Some people build boundaries; others build bridges. Sociology Prof. Jeffrey Denis, newly recruited from Harvard University, examines why and how this happens between First Nations people and their neighbours.

On a personal visit to a small Northwestern Ontario town, Prof. Denis became curious about why racism afflicted a community with a long shared history in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people went to school together and often married each other. Social psychology's "contact hypothesis" suggests that such close interaction wears down prejudice. But instead he observed "near-daily racist comments about Aboriginal people from local community members."

Struck by the stubbornness of the phenomenon and by a "surprising" lack of recent sociological research into it, Prof. Denis began investigating the issues of identity and subtyping (classifying those who don't fit a stereotype as rare exceptions), the tendency of people to associate with those who share their assumptions, and how people avoid discussing the larger implications of their attitudes. On a larger scale, he is working with First Nations communities to reduce poverty, and probing the effects of the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission on non-Aboriginal Canadians by interviewing people who work in the reconciliation process.

His students, he notes, share his curiosity about "what motivates their own and others' behaviours ... how to work effectively in groups, how to deal with diversity, how to resolve conflict, and how to develop meaningful and fulfilling relationships ..."

"If we think about the practical implications of (such) research, it just might help us lead happier, more successful lives."

The Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities will share a new home!

Ground will break on the main McMaster campus in 2013 for the state-of-the-art, 104,000-square-foot Wilson Building for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences. "Smart spaces" for instruction, performance and research will encourage flexibility and collaboration in teaching and learning. This building will be used by more than half the student body who will regularly cross paths with a broad range of peers and faculty.

University to engage more students than ever, in new ways that blend emerging teaching technology with new and established teaching methods and approaches to research."

Chancellor Lynton (Red) Wilson kickstarted funding for the \$65-million project with a gift of \$10 million in 2007. In an announcement last June, Ontario's Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities John Milloy



The building will be transformative for the two Faculties in many ways, including:

- Deeper integration of Aboriginal and first-generation students and Crown wards
- Trailblazing "green" practices in a certified eco-friendly building
- Community involvement in research projects and use of computer and conference spaces
- Capacity for some 1,275 additional students on campus
- Intensive emphasis on leadership and experiential education.

"This new space will allow us to educate, study, and serve our community all at once as we grapple with such issues as poverty, aging, and inclusivity," said Dean Yates.

"The Social Sciences and Humanities are critical to the success of McMaster students, and this investment allows the

pledged \$45.5 million from the province. The McMaster Association of Part-Time Students donated \$1 million.

Students played a critical role in making the building happen. To gain the Ontario government's attention and convince them that liberal arts at McMaster is worth the investment, Joe Finkle, then-MSU VP Education, composed a letter addressed to John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, and handed out hundreds of copies around campus. Interested students could sign their name at the bottom of the letter and send it to Minister Milloy themselves. The impact was powerful — close to 300 letters were sent — and Minister Milloy sent a letter in return informing students their request would be taken into consideration. Sincere thanks to our students, Red Wilson, and the Ontario government.

Vanier Scholarship for Sandra Bortolin

Gay Straight Alliances are groups that seek to make people feel safe and welcome in a community whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity may be. Many Canadian high schoolers have formed such groups, hoping to create more friendly, accepting atmospheres in their schools. Sandra Bortolin, a PhD student in Sociology, is investigating whether these alliances fulfill their promise. With a prestigious Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship she is interviewing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual students aged 16 and older about their experiences of popularity and bullying, of feeling safe and feeling threatened. Do they hear fewer homophobic remarks in schools where there are alliances? If so, Sandra asks students, "What kinds of things do you hear now?" She hopes to uncover how the alliances may improve the experience of all students, and specifically of vulnerable youth.



Photo credits: Large – Peter Self; Inset – Craig Glover

PROFILE **Deng Marial**

Deng Marial is a graduate student in Work and Society, an elite athlete, and a new Canadian. He made his way to Canada a decade ago from the Republic of South Sudan and a series of refugee camps in Somalia, Uganda, and Kenya. Now he is researching what other new Canadians experience as they work their way through the country's "points" system, which evaluates and ranks potential immigrants. With a broad range of higher education, from a college diploma in police foundations and combined university degrees in political science and sociology, and criminology and human rights, Mr. Marial is now a student in Work and Society at McMaster. His academic work has given him multiple perspectives on both his country of origin and

his new home here, while talent as a middle-distance racer has made him a frequently-scouted and much sought-after runner. "Running in Sudan is like hockey in Canada," explained Mr. Marial, who has run for Canada in university track meets in Europe, Asia, and South America and was recently inducted into the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association Hall of Fame. Just as his fellow Canadians head for the rink on weekends, in Sudan "everyone (runs) even if they're not good at it." While winning as a scholar and athlete has meant working hard on his own talents, Mr. Marial also credits the encouragement he has received at McMaster: "Encouraging and supportive words are what make us work harder in order to better ourselves and eventually become champions."



Todd Alway

The Faculty of Social Sciences would like to congratulate Todd Alway on his recent appointment as a Teaching Professor in the Department of Political Science. Prof. Alway is a recent recipient of a 2010-2011 MSU Teaching Award — an award that recognizes all-round outstanding teaching performance. Here in the Faculty, Prof. Alway plays a key role in first-year Political Science, teaching over 600 students at a time. He keeps his students engaged through his enthusiasm and genuine interest in the material he teaches. Prof. Alway's pedagogy emphasizes problem-based learning and inquiry — both of which encourage self-directed learning on the part of students.

FACULTY FOCUS



Amanda Grenier

Old age is a time of transitions — both welcome and challenging. What does growing old feel like? What are the best ways we can cope, adapt and manage? Individuals, families, and society more broadly grapple with these questions.

Dr. Amanda Grenier, the new Gilbrea Chair in Aging and Health, Director of the Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging, and faculty member in Health, Aging and Society, researches people's perceptions, professional practices, and public policy in this area. "There is a good deal of (related) work being conducted across the university," she noted. "The focus of the Chair and the Centre provides an excellent opportunity for colleagues to come together and see how we can develop complementary and interdisciplinary perspectives" and solutions.

Her own work delves into her subjects' personal understanding of how their lives are changing and how they make sense of those changes, including age-related impairment. In frank, detailed interviews older people from a variety of backgrounds have described their perceptions of when they began to feel frail. They shared with Dr. Grenier how positive or negative they feel, what they feel they can take in stride, and their worries about the implications of their state of health. On a larger scale, she explores the social dimensions of frailty, homecare, and critical/social gerontology.

Research and knowledge-sharing are priorities in her new position, to which she comes after an earlier post at McGill University's School of Social Work. Dr. Grenier aims to partner with local and provincial health and social organizations and to be involved in debates in her field at a national and international level.

World Bank photo credit: flickr World Bank Photo Collection

Departments, Schools & Programs

Department of Anthropology
www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/anthro

Department of Economics
www.mcmaster.ca/economics

School of Geography & Earth Sciences
www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo

Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition
<http://globalization.mcmaster.ca/>

Department of Health, Aging and Society
www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/has-dept

School of Labour Studies
<http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/labourstudies/>

Department of Political Science
www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/polisci

Department of Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour
www.science.mcmaster.ca/psychology

Honours in Social Psychology
<http://www.socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/honours-in-social-psychology>

Department of Religious Studies
www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/relstud

School of Social Work
www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/socwork

Department of Sociology
www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/sociology

Leadership Through Experiential Learning

Leadership Through Experiential Learning is a brand-new course open to Social Sciences students in Levels III and IV, that will be piloted in the Winter term (2012). "Many of our graduates were going on to be active participants in leadership roles in the workplace and in their communities," explained Prof. Sandra Preston, Director of Experiential Education. "Through the experiential learning model," which emphasizes learning by doing, "students will have the opportunity to gain practical experience in the course along with the theory behind leadership" — something students and future employers are looking for.

Topics will include: diversity, power, collaboration, groups and teams,

organizational change and constraints, and what makes dynamic organizations. Role-playing and other hands-on activities, guest speakers from community organizations, and fieldwork opportunities will give students a variety of learning experiences.

"This 'active' approach will see students applying their education in practical settings," noted Stephanie Howells, who facilitates the course this term. "The small class size and interactive nature of the class (will give) students ample interaction with one another and the instructor."

For more information on SOC SCI 3EL3:
<http://www.socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/new-courses-2011-12>



Social Sciences App

The Faculty of Social Sciences is excited to announce our new student-centered application optimized for three Apple devices: the iPod Touch, the iPhone, and the iPad. This "app" facilitates access to several central University resources but focuses specifically on raising the profile of Social Sciences resources, opportunities, activities, news, social media, video, and important events as they may pertain to a student studying in our Faculty. The application is available in the Apple "App Store." To find it, search for key words "MacSocSci" or "McMaster Social Sciences." Let us know what you think via the feedback form in the app!

Congratulations to:

Bridget O'Shaughnessy who was awarded a 2 year HEQCO grant for "Collaborative Learning versus Traditional Tutorials in Large Classes."

Chris Sinding and **Michelle Dion** who were each awarded SSHRC Aid to Research Workshop grants.

Daniel Machiela for receiving a Norman E. Wagner Technology Award for innovative use of technology relating to Biblical scholarship.

Growing and Changing

The Departments in Social Sciences are growing and changing. Change and innovation require skilled leadership. In 2011, five departments welcome new Chairs and Directors. They are: **James Benn**, Religious Studies; **James Gillett**, Health, Aging and Society; **Jerry Hurley**, Economics; **Wayne Warry**, Anthropology; and acting Director **Robert Storey**, Labour Studies. Thanks to outgoing Chairs for a job well done: **Aubrey Cannon**, Anthropology; **Travis Kroeker**, Religious Studies; **Gavin Andrews**, Health, Aging and Society; and **Bill Scarth**, Economics.

Faculty of Social Sciences

McMaster University
 Kenneth Taylor Hall 129
 1280 Main Street West
 Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4M4

PHONE: 905-525-9140 ext. 23772

FAX: 905-525-0844

EMAIL: socscfac@mcmaster.ca

Prefer to keep in touch by email?

Send your email to alumni@mcmaster.ca
 Please include "Social Sciences Alumni"
 in the subject line.