

Social Science Links

A McMASTER FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES NEWSLETTER

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Marauders running back Chris Pezzetta (1st year Social Sciences)

Photo by Rick Zazulak

Social Sciences and the Vanier Victory

When the McMaster Marauders raised the Vanier Cup in Vancouver last November, it was a perfect football moment – for the team, for the university, for alumni. The Marauders' thrilling 41-38 win over defending champions Laval University was immediately hailed as one of the greatest Canadian university football games ever played.

It was also a moment of intense pride for the Faculty of Social Sciences.

More than one-third of the winning team was made up of Social Sciences students. "It's by far the most-represented faculty in the locker room," said coach Stefan Ptaszek. "The Faculty gives you a world-class education and the skills to be successful in so many areas."

The team includes "aspiring educators, firefighters, lawyers," he said. "It's a Faculty that gives them so many options." At the same time, the Faculty "acknowledges the challenges of being a student athlete" and the need for timetable flexibility.

"It is difficult for student athletes to be elite athletes at the same time as getting an education," said Dean Charlotte Yates. "But they do it. We know that those students who are involved in extra-curricular activities, such as sports teams, are often the most successful of our students. Engaged students are successful students."

Coach Ptaszek sees the combination of academics and athletics as an unbeatable way to build skills and character. Discipline, time management, and teamwork are among the hallmarks of the student athlete's education, he said, and provide excellent preparation for the future.

After the game, which saw McMaster give up a comfortable lead, then press on doggedly through double overtime to win, he said: "We're

not here because we are perfect. We're not here because we haven't been knocked down – we're here because we've gotten up every single time."

The game was "a microcosm of life," he added.

Kyle Quinlan (3rd year

Economics) was named the game's top offensive player and Aram Eisho (1st year Social Sciences) the top defensive player. Campus, alumni and the city of Hamilton are "all so proud to be a part of this and to share in this experience," said Coach Ptaszek. "The impact has been off the charts."

In keeping with that focus on team and community, the coach gives players some extra tasks beyond their work in class and on the field. On road trips, as they represent McMaster in other communities, he expects them to "make a positive impression. Go out of your way ... pitch in and make a difference. This is noticeable if all 50 young men buy in."

More than one-third of the winning team was made up of Social Sciences students.

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



Dedicated to tomorrow

This year McMaster University is celebrating 125 years of educational excellence and research innovation. In the Faculty of Social Sciences, we are already planning for the next 125 years of excellence. We are seeking to answer the big educational questions of the century. How do we adjust our practices to take advantage of new technologies and our students' high-tech capabilities? How do we nurture our sense of community at a time when universities are growing and this threatens the connection between faculty and students? How do we make sure that students' education prepares them for the future?

Social Sciences is planning big changes to meet these challenges. The Faculty has renewed its commitment to offering 1st year students a small seminar experience and has designed a special course that helps them adjust to university life. Our new McMaster-Mohawk courses in business and leadership are allowing students to combine their university education with applied skills. Faculty are experimenting with clickers in the classroom, digital interactive assignments and simulations to get students to think critically and use new forms of social media in their learning. Our Office of Experiential Education has expanded internships and job placements. We are also helping students transition into employment with a Career Breakfast (March 23, 2012) for 4th year and MA students, and professional development opportunities for graduate students.

What are the signs of our success? Read through this newsletter and you will see. One of our faculty won a nationally prestigious teaching award, while another hosted a national conference for graduate students. Others lead the way in innovative research. Join us in celebrating and expanding our successes; hire an intern, donate to our scholarship fund, give back to the next generation of McMaster graduates.

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

Students' global research shines

FACULTY FOCUS



Eileen Schuller

A trio of recent PhD. graduates in Religious Studies has paid tribute to Prof. Eileen Schuller – in a special way – for her many contributions to her field.

For three years, Jeremy Penner, Cecilia Wassen and Ken Penner worked to produce a volume of essays celebrating Prof. Schuller's study of prayer and poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls. They invited international scholars to contribute to the volume and the Brill scholarly press published it as part of a major series of works on this area.

In the tradition of "festschrift" – in which a book focusing on an individual's scholarly work is prepared to mark an important occasion – they presented it to Prof. Schuller as part of a celebration of her 65th birthday last fall.

"I was really touched," said Prof. Schuller of the tribute. And she praised the volume itself: "This will make a real contribution to the study of this topic. There are very fine essays here."

"(We are) delighted to see one of our most distinguished faculty members honoured in this way," said Prof. James Benn, departmental Chair. Prof. Schuller "is not only a scholar of international stature; she is also an inspiration ... a true friend and mentor."

Jeremy Penner recalled that the project "received an overwhelmingly positive response" from Prof. Schuller's colleagues. It proved to be "a tremendous amount of work" for the trio – but a very pleasant task, he added. The three students, Prof. Benn noted, have continued into distinguished careers in research and teaching at the University of Leuven, Belgium, the University of Uppsala, Sweden, and St. Francis Xavier University, respectively.

Prof. Schuller teaches Biblical studies to undergraduate students, showing them how deeply Biblical references are woven into Western thought. Discussing a passage about "turning swords into ploughshares," for instance, can show why peace movements use the phrase. Giving context to religious material "is a very important thing that a department like ours can contribute to the University," she said.

In a conference that was the first of its kind at McMaster, graduate students in Political Science, Globalization, and Global Health Policy gathered in January to discuss their research and network with peers from around the world.

Political Science Prof. Stephen McBride and an interdisciplinary student committee designed and organized the two-day event. Entitled "Mapping the Global Dimensions of Policy: Investigating Theory, Practice and Challenges," the conference showed students "what needs to be done to take (their research) to the next level," said Prof. McBride, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Public Policy and Globalization.

Response from the over 70 students who participated, as well as Faculty members, was overwhelmingly positive, he added. Students received valuable critical feedback on their papers, many of which were chapters from their MA or PhD. theses. Publishing a selection

of those papers was another component of the project; they will appear in a journal for graduate students published by the Institute for Globalization and the Human Condition.

The success of the event means that it will be repeated – "we're laying the groundwork for next year's conference," said one of the organizers, Scott Smith, a PhD. candidate in comparative public policy.

"It is geared toward graduate students at any stage of the research process," Mr. Smith explained.

"Much of our effort went into soliciting well-known keynote speakers from universities across Canada ... and to

retaining quality discussants from within Social Sciences here at McMaster. We devoted a lot of time and energy to just getting our message out" to other students around the continent and further afield, he said. "We got replies from students as far away as New Zealand and Hong Kong."

First of its kind
at McMaster



A family gift of books

Through an innovative book prize that links top Hamilton secondary school students with the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Cruickshanks and Johnstone families are celebrating the deep, four-generation bond they share with McMaster.

"This could solidify a student's interest in coming to McMaster," Sandra Cruickshanks (Religious Studies '79) explained. "It's a way to say to a student, 'You could be part of this – or of something like it.'"

The Cruickshanks and Johnstone Family Social Sciences Book Awards are given each fall to the Grade 11 student with best performance in Social Sciences courses in each of the Hamilton area's 25 secondary schools. The prizes are gift certificates for McMaster's Titles Book Store. Dean Charlotte Yates and Faculty Executive Officer Susan Todd present the awards to students in ceremonies at their schools,

highlighting to students and their families the value of excellence in Social Sciences. Students are also invited to explore program opportunities at the University's Fall Open House.



Robert and Kathleen
Cruickshanks

"Our family has also been very active in education through Hamilton schools," Ms. Cruickshanks said. At least nine family members have attended or worked at McMaster over many years, several of them graduating in the Social Sciences.

Sponsoring the book prize has given the family a way to express its own history and values – and to mark the recent 55th wedding

anniversary of her parents, Robert and Kathleen Cruickshanks, for whom the prize is named. "This is so appropriate because it connects to McMaster on a community level," she said, adding that she thanks family and friends who have helped with the sponsorship. "It's a good fit – and it's such a cool thing to do."



Mapping a medieval mystery

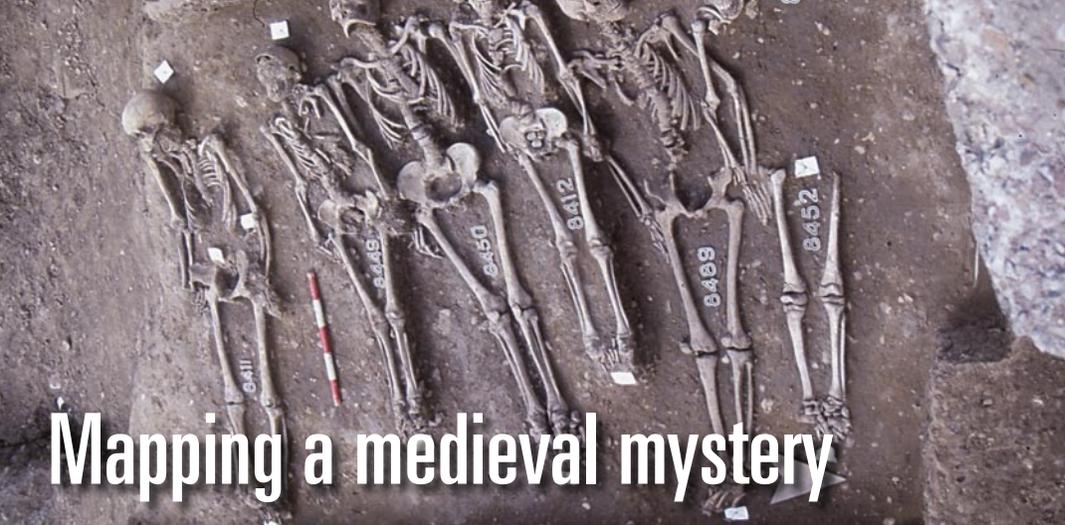


Photo by Museum of London

The ferocious epidemic known as the Black Death has been a scientific mystery for some 650 years, since it killed close to half the population of Western Europe. Anthropology Prof. Hendrik Poinar has recently mapped the genome of the disease using cutting-edge research methods on the ancient remains of victims buried together in a hastily-dug “plague pit.”

In a landmark discovery that has drawn worldwide attention, Prof. Poinar and a team of researchers reconstructed the complete genome of the pathogen that caused the Black Death. Their achievement, announced last fall, is the first reconstruction of any ancient pathogen.

Prof. Poinar, along with graduate student Kirsten Bos, and colleagues from the University of Tübingen in Germany, determined that the disease is an ancient form of plague, which has broken out in India, Africa, and the southwestern United States in recent years. It affects about 2,000 people annually and is now usually treated successfully with antibiotics.

The team used a breakthrough method to “lift” the microbe from the teeth of victims buried in east London, England at the height of the epidemic, and built their blueprint in a state-of-the-art Anthropology laboratory, McMaster’s Ancient DNA Centre.

“We are trying to understand how (the pathogen) changed over time and how we changed over time in response to the disease,” Prof. Poinar explained. “There’s always an interaction between humans and the conditions they live in and a disease.”

Why the plague of the mid-1300s was so virulent, killing its victims in just a few days and laying waste to much of a continent in just a four-year period, is a further question for researchers. The pathogen might have changed over time, or the population it struck might have been terribly vulnerable. London, for instance, was particularly cold and wet in the years preceding the Black Death and its mostly malnourished citizens lived in crowded, unsanitary conditions.

“The evolution and origins of infectious diseases are fascinating for many people,” explained Prof. Poinar. “Students are fascinated by these hidden molecules being sequestered in the teeth of people who have been buried for so long.”

He added that studying this ancient scourge “could allow us to predict, possibly, future re-emerging diseases.”

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Tina Fetner

Teaching the sociology of sexuality, Prof. Tina Fetner finds that she and her students are watching the subject evolve at a remarkable pace.

“From a sociological perspective, nothing changes as fast as this has changed,” she said. “Quite often I’m pulling something from the daily newspapers and bringing it to class.”

“People’s attitudes have shifted dramatically” on issues such as same-sex marriage in Canada, she noted, “but at the same time, this does not feel like rapid change to people who have been subject to discrimination. For them a few years can seem like a lifetime.”

In her class students examine how sexuality defines people and their communities, how it divides them, and how it is used to mark moral boundaries. They use examples both specific – the wedding ritual – and universal, such as family, to understand how what “may seem to be a personal, private, intimate topic” actually connects to every aspect of our roles in society.

“They are very astute and quick to see the effects that policy, race and gender have on their sexuality and how they live their lives,” she said. “Students are definitely not blank slates.”

As a researcher, Prof. Fetner investigates another timely issue, which she defines as “more relevant than ever”: how increasing economic inequality can foster prejudice. Building on earlier work showing that homophobia is more prevalent in societies with pronounced economic gaps, she is probing “the attitudinal effects of inequality” by exploring views on immigration, gender roles, and poverty.

“If choices we are making as a citizenry are increasing economic inequality in Canada and if it has negative social effects, we need to know that,” she said.

Her research often involves comparing developments in Canada with other countries. Growing up American, she explained, “I became a Canadaphile. I play recreational hockey – and you learn about Canada when you watch and play the national sport.”

Health economists highly ranked

Using experimental economics, an interdisciplinary team of researchers led by Economics Chair Jeremiah Hurley is examining the fairness and efficiency of alternative methods for financing and funding health care.

Through their CIHR-funded research program, the team is looking at the impact of mixed public and private financing on different groups’ access to health care. They are also asking what Canadians judge to be a fair way of allocating health care resources amongst those in need, and how the way they are asked for their views might affect their answers.

Their work can be used to design ways to consult the public on the development of health policy.

Hurley is one of several outstanding health economists at McMaster, which was recently ranked 22nd among the world’s top 100 institutions in health economics.

The research team also includes Economics Professors Katherine Cuff, Stuart Mestelman and Andy Muller, Prof. Mita Giacomini of the Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, and York University Economics Prof. Neil Buckley.



Wounds of war

Understanding the circumstances of a hundred-year-old battle is no easy task.

Anthropology Prof. Megan Brickley has built replica “legs” and employed reproduction weapons in order to gain insight into how the War of 1812 was waged.

“A number of accounts suggest (the Battle of Stoney Creek) was fought in quite close quarters and was fairly brutal,” Prof. Brickley said. She studies the bone fragments that are buried on the battle site. One in particular is a lower leg bone that bears a distinct cut mark on its side.

Prof. Brickley wanted to determine what happened to that individual’s leg – was the wound from a “major swipe with a sword” or a deep bayonet blow? With graduate student Laura Lockau, she planned an experiment under the most authentic conditions she could find. Examining the bone collection at the Archaeology Lab, the pair determined that they could combine deer and lamb leg bones to make human-like limbs.

“We used foam earplugs to get the spacing right between the two bones, and tied them with string,” she said. “We initially tried tightly-wound elastic bands but this allowed too much movement between the bones. We considered using bacon to replicate the thin soft tissue on the lower leg, but in the end left it off.”

For weapons – and muscle power – they enlisted staff at Fort George, the reconstructed historic headquarters of the British army at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Staffers there attacked the “legs” with swords and a bayonet to test the two scenarios. One sword blow appears to have made a mark very like the one in the original bone fragment and Prof. Brickley will now compare the two under a digital microscope.

“We will be able to provide very specific examples and really clear information,” she said. “This helps us build up a picture of what it was like on that battlefield.”

Top image courtesy of Archives of Ontario

3M teaching award

Prof. Marshall Beier, an Associate Professor of Political Science, has won Canada’s highest teaching award.

Being named a 3M Teaching Fellow is a “tremendous honour,” said Prof. Beier.

“Good teaching is not just about imparting knowledge,” he noted. “It’s about involving students in knowledge, making them feel (they have) a stake in it and bringing them into knowledge production.”

Prof. Beier gives his undergraduate students a taste of graduate work by involving them in original research as they learn about international politics and arms control. While mentoring each other students frame research questions, analyze data and publish the results, creating new resources for future students.



Students also participate in a vast arms-control simulation Prof. Beier has designed in order to give them “a real sense of just what the challenges are.” Acting as “nations,” they identify priorities, create strategy, and engage in negotiations with their peers.

Their questions “often move me to see things from new directions,” Prof. Beier said.

The 3M National Teaching Fellowship recognizes excellence in teaching at the undergraduate level and commitment to improving university teaching. This is the fifth major teaching award for Prof. Beier. He has also received the Canadian Political Science Association’s Teaching Excellence Prize, the Petro-Canada Young Innovator Award, the Ontario Leadership in Faculty Teaching Award and the McMaster Student Union’s Faculty Teaching Award.

Dr. Susan Vajoczki, Director of the Centre for Leadership in Learning at McMaster, has also been named a 3M National Teaching Fellow this year.

On giving

We would like to thank all donors to the Social Sciences whose donations make our scholarships and awards possible. This year we invite you to donate to our bursary program as we are raising money for students in need to come to university. If you are interested in learning more about opportunities to support Social Sciences, please contact Karen McQuigge at mcquigge@mcmaster.ca or donate through our website at givetomcmaster.ca.

Announcements

CONGRATULATIONS TO:

Siobhan Stewart, a 4th year Anthropology student, who recently won the election for 2012 MSU president.

The Arkells, the Hamilton-based band that includes four Social Sciences graduates – **Max Kerman**, **Mike DeAngelis**, **Nick Dika** and **Dan Griffin** – on their Juno Award nominations. The band, formed at McMaster, is nominated in the Group of the Year and Rock Album of the Year categories and previously (2010) won as Best New Group.

Gail Elliot on her retirement as Assistant Director of the Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging, after 17 years of outstanding service.

Megan Brickley and **Tracy Prowse** for securing the \$270,000 CFI funding for the Centre for Integrated Bioarchaeological Research in Human Health, Diet, Disease and Migration.

Jeremiah Hurley for his \$168,291 CIHR grant for studying Judgements of Equity in Health Care Resource Allocation.

THANKS TO:

Roger Schmid (Class of ’76), who established the Schmid Family Travel Fund in support of travel to conferences or for field work for graduate students in the field of Anthropology.

The **Cruickshanks** and **Johnstone** families for their support of the Faculty of Social Sciences Book Award.

Hiring an intern

Would you like to give a Social Sciences student the opportunity to work and learn about your business or organization? The Experiential Education office in the Faculty of Social Sciences can help you find the right candidate for your 4-18 month paid internship. We are also there to support you and the student.

If you are interested please contact Leahann Renaud at ext. 21207 or visit our website www.experiential-ed.mcmaster.ca.

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Please include “Social Sciences Alumni” in the subject line.