

# Alumni make impact in academia & beyond

By Don Dillman and Pierce Greenberg

Connections with alumni are an important feature of *Sociology News*, showing up in multiple ways in each issue.

A well-attended seminar on climate change by Dr. Kari Norgaard (MA 1994), the topic of a separate article in this issue, provided an opportunity to renew connections with her and to benefit from a discussion on her recent book, “Living in Denial.”

In addition, our section on faculty and graduate student accomplishments includes the names of many alumni who continue to collaborate with members of the department in research and writing.

In this section, we caught up with three alums who responded to our request to illuminate their career experiences and share memories of their time at WSU. We begin with Aaron McCright (2002), whose 2011 research on the politics of climate change was the eighth-most-cited sociology article from 2010 to 2014. McCright co-authored “The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public’s Views of Global Warming, 2001–2010” with Riley Dunlap, a former WSU professor. The article has now been cited more than 500 times.

We also heard from Dennis Rome (PhD, 1992) who, like several previous alums has become a college Dean—where he administers programs in many areas.

Also included in this issue are thoughts from Gerald Williams (PhD, 1976) whose long career with the U.S. Forest Service in various locations, resulted in his becoming known as the “history guy,” a focus he has maintained into retirement.

## Aaron McCright (PhD, 2002)

“I was a grad student in the department from 1996 to 2002, after which I completed a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Chicago. Since 2004, I’ve been on faculty at Michigan State University, where I am now a senior associate professor. I have enjoyed a rather productive and rewarding career to date. You can see what I’ve been up to by perusing my professional website.



Aaron McCright

I clearly remember the day I arrived in Pullman, the day I left Pullman, and the many positive experiences I had over my six years there. Hardly a week goes by when I don’t think and talk about some course I took, some project I worked on, or some conversation I had during grad school. WSU Sociology was certainly the best place for me. I loved almost everything about the department, and my life in Pullman was pretty fulfilling (even with the rather poor dating scene!). The small-town atmosphere and high level of collegiality in the department made for a rather vibrant departmental culture and cohesive grad student community. I especially enjoyed all of the shenanigans with my friends. You know who you are, and you know what I’m talking about!



Without a doubt, much of the success I have enjoyed in my career (and hope to continue to enjoy!) has been due to the great teaching, research, and mentoring experiences I had in WSU’s Department of Sociology. I couldn’t have asked for more effective mentoring and more supportive peers. Certainly, my main advisor, Riley Dunlap, has had the strongest positive impact on my scholarly development. He and I continue to collaborate to this day, having recently published our 20th article/chapter together. I also gained much through working with Gene Rosa before his passing. In 2014, he and I (and Ortwin Renn) finally finished our book that emerged from a course paper on Anthony Giddens that I wrote in spring 1997. And, of course, I learned much from the

Aaron McCright at WSU Sociology's Welcome Picnic, 1996.

multiple courses I took from (and the multiple conversations I had with) Lisa McIntyre, Mike Allen, Greg Hooks, and Peter Burke, among others.

While I am probably known most for my research, I am most passionate about my teaching. I have developed into a rather successful teacher in no small measure because of the many opportunities I got to teach at WSU after learning much from Lisa McIntyre as her TA and in her professional development course. Counting summer sessions, I taught social research methods nine times and Introduction to Sociology three times. These experiences were invaluable to me in strengthening my pedagogical skills, developing my teaching philosophy, and honing my classroom presence.

As what often happens over time, I have lost regular touch with many of my friends and colleagues from my days in Pullman. That speaks more to my being a loner with little sentimentality than it does to the value of those relationships. But, I'm happy to say that my overwhelmingly positive years at WSU in Pullman have helped me develop into the scholar and person I am now."

## Dennis Rome

My fondest memories of Washington State center on the outstanding faculty and graduate students in my cohort whom I had the pleasure of knowing, respecting, and ultimately befriending. One of my favorite seminars was a graduate seminar about criminological methodology taught by Professor Bob Meier whose seminars were very engaging and interesting. Of course, my favorite professor was Louis Gray who served as my dissertation committee chair. Professor Gray and I met often at the Cavern, a local pub, walking distance from campus. Louis and I eventually became friends and he and his wife, Robin, visited my wife and me in Indiana during one of the Thanksgiving holidays.



Dennis Rome

My fellow graduate students and I would meet on Thursday evenings at Rico's to debate course materials, politics...any and everything. Many of the graduate students in my cohort I befriended and remained in touch with long after graduation. It really saddens me to think of the passing of

Larry Salinger who had a heart as big as he was—Larry was a good friend.

Presently, I serve as dean of the College of Letters and Sciences at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. In my role as dean, I lead and manage the college (120 full-time faculty), which includes 10 academic departments with six graduate programs and three academic centers.

I also serve as director of the Honors Program for the American Sociological Association, where I work with the director of Minority and Student Affairs to provide undergraduate students with a rich introduction to the profession and intellectual life of the discipline. Exceptional students from sociology departments in the U.S. and other countries come together to experience the profession during the ASA Annual Meeting.

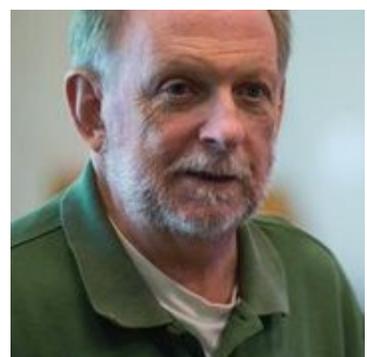
I have also been the Principal Investigator for several grants including institutional grants totaling over \$1.5 million. While serving in faculty positions at Wright State University, Indiana University, and University of Wisconsin–Parkside, I received several prestigious awards and honors, including being a Carnegie Scholar and receiving a Fulbright Award. I am also the recipient of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) Award.

Community engagement is very important to me and while in Wisconsin, I served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Boys and Girls Club of Kenosha. Presently, I volunteer for the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Chattahoochee Valley.

I am also the author and co-editor of several books, and I have written numerous research articles and research briefs. I have made over 50 formal paper presentations in the United States and other countries, including St. Petersburg, Russia; Kazan, Russia; Kurashiki, Japan; Utrecht, the Netherlands; Paris, France; Berlin, Germany; and Montreal, Canada.

## Gerald W. Williams

I received my PhD from WSU's Sociology Department in 1976. After teaching for two years at Indiana State University and working in Eugene, Oregon, for a year, I was employed by the Forest Service in Umpqua National Forest in 1979. My work there revolved around social/policy analysis, long-range planning, and social impact analysis/socioeconomic assessment at all levels of the



agency.

Gerald Williams

When I arrived on the Umpqua, I was looking for ways in which I could contribute, as a sociologist, to the forest management. What I found was that many areas of the social/people aspect were already covered—recreation, landscape architecture, archaeology, public involvement, etc. The niche I worked up, and for which I had been hired, was dealing with the social and economic aspects of the area in and around the Umpqua.

One of the things that I started doing on the Umpqua was writing background papers about a variety of subjects. Some of these were presented around the country at various professional meetings. Hardly ever, during the last almost 30 years, have I presented at a professional meeting without having a paper copy of the presentation available at the same time. This came from my days at WSU when I would attend great meetings and hear insightful papers but had to rely solely on my notes.

As for grad school and Pullman, I'll always remember many beer-filled nights at the Down Under. Faculty that influenced me the most were Mel DeFleur, Milton Rokeach, and Don Dillman. After grad school, I used my sociology training when I designed two large-scale surveys in Eugene, replicated my dissertation at Indiana State, and then organized the public responses to two different land management plans covering about two million acres of national forest land. Also in the USFS, I was part of several training groups: my function was to relate the social components to foresters and engineers who had little or no experience in any of the social sciences. Several times I was referred to as the "conscience" of the groups.

At one conference, I overheard two, very tall, Bureau of Land Management timber-types discussing the upcoming panel that I was part of. They looked at the brochure with the agenda and saw who was on the next panel. One of them said, somewhat arrogantly, as I recall, "What does a sociologist have to say to us?" They didn't realize that I was standing next to them.

I quietly left, went inside the meeting room and quickly worked up a new strategy. I started my discussion with two rhetorical questions: When was the last time an old-growth tree came knocking at your door saying: "You have to cut me down since I am over-mature, have root rot, disease, and need to be replaced by a new, healthy stand of trees"? Then the second question: When was the last time a deer came knocking at your door saying: "I have too many members in my family. You have to kill off the excess or we will all die from not enough food"? I told the audience it is not the trees nor the animals that tell us what "needs to be done." It is the people in

that room, the foresters and wildlife managers who believe they know what is best for the ecosystem. Environmental Management is a human choice, it is the “management” part of EM.

I was appointed the U.S. Forest Service historian in 1998 and published “USDA Forest Service–The First Century” in 2000. The book was updated and reprinted for the Forest Service centennial in 2005. In retirement, I continue to make presentations about forest service history. This past July, I presented a talk titled “The U.S. Army, Labor Unions, and WWI in the Pacific Northwest” for about 100 people at McMenamins Old Church and Pub in Wilsonville, Oregon.

