

Letter from the Chair

Greetings!

As I write this message we have just welcomed a new first-year class of 10 graduate students. We have also welcomed two new faculty members to the department. Justin Denney joined us this summer as the William Julius Wilson Distinguished Professor, and Anna Zamora-Kapoor is coming on board this fall as an assistant research scientist in a shared position with the new Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine. Both were hired as part of a new initiative at WSU focused on advancing health equity, responding to two of the University's Grand Challenges commitments.



The *Sociology News* editors asked me to share my goals for my term as department chair, and these two hires are excellent examples of the first one: to facilitate collaborative partnerships between sociology and other departments at WSU to better serve our students and increase the impact of our research.

Sociology as a field is highly relevant to answering the big questions in science today, and we currently have research expertise in our faculty particularly well-poised to be collaborative partners in WSU's efforts to address them.

WSU's five "Grand Challenges" are one window into this (in abbreviated form they are: advancing opportunity and equity; sustaining health; sustainable resources; smart systems; and national security). Several of our faculty members were

instrumental in identifying, developing, and refining these areas of focus; and, more recently, we have worked as a whole department to articulate the place of sociology in each one. I aim to pass on the chair position in four years with sociology much more intertwined with other units on campus.

A couple of years ago we in the department revised our strategic plan. We were changing, the University was changing, the world was changing, and it was time. While this effort can certainly be filed under the category of obligatory bureaucratic work, it was actually pretty cool. With continually increasing demands on our time as faculty members, we don't always get enough time to stop and think about who we are and what we want to achieve. And considering how hard it can be to get academics to agree on things 😊, we did pretty well.

Now that we have a shared vision, the real work begins and we need to outline concrete steps to achieve them. We made quite a bit of progress this past academic year in thinking about undergraduate students' needs and how we can revise our structures and offerings to better meet them, but that is just a start. So, my goal is to help us clarify the map we follow in the next few years to achieve our goals.

Finally—and this has only been reinforced by my experience in the first two months on the job—I want to help the department improve its communication both within the University and with our external partners. Our faculty and students are making important contributions to the community, to education, and to advancing understanding in their research areas of expertise. I've always thought we had things we needed to “get out there.” In my position as chair, I now have so much more information to work with in thinking about how our work connects to state and University priorities, as well as better information on all the wonderful activities department members engage in.

On each of these three fronts, I see very positive recent developments in the department and I view my job as shepherding our collective efforts into full realization. I am also enjoying hearing from a number of you, including former students, faculty, and others connected to WSU Sociology. This has been a rewarding aspect of the position I hadn't really anticipated.

Warmly,

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