



Department of Sociology

Dear Alumni and Friends,

I again hope this newsletter finds you well during this very difficult time for so many of us.

So much has happened over the summer months. Not only have we had to confront the pandemic of COVID-19, and the racial and class inequalities tied to it, but we have simultaneously seen the killing of Black Americans at the hands of police and the racial justice movements that formed in response to these tragic deaths. All of this is a reminder that Black Lives Matter. The uncertainties that we are witnessing not only create challenges that we all must face, but they also underscore existing and persisting systemic racial and class inequities within the United States. All of this is happening alongside an upcoming Presidential election.

Faculty News

We are lucky to have a number of faculty and alumni who are publicly engaged during these difficult times. [Crystal Fleming](#), who researches anti-Black racism and racial injustices, is actively involved in educating and speaking out against injustices – whether it is through interviews on CBS Sunday Morning, PBS News, Opinion Editorials, or through teach-ins here on our SBU campus.

Meanwhile, [Jen Heerwig](#) was quoted in an article in [The Correspondent](#) that examined how elite political donors often control the elections in such a way that doesn't reflect the needs of the broader population. Jen Heerwig's contribution explores how the voucher system in Seattle opens up some opportunity to shift these patterns and increase contributions beyond the select few elites.

We are also happy to welcome a new colleague to our department, Yongjun (Josh) Zhang! He is holding a joint position with the Institute of Advanced Computational Science. We are excited to have him join our department!

Yongjun Zhang is a computational sociologist studying political sociology, organizations, and inequality. He earned his PhD in sociology in 2020 from the University of Arizona.

Yongjun's current work uses statistical, network, and computational methods with large-scale datasets to understand the causes, dynamics, and consequences of political and social changes in different settings. One line of his research focuses on how shareholder activism influences corporate political activities. Working with colleagues and graduate students, he is also using deep learning



methods with big data from Facebook and SafeGraph to predict social distancing behavior and to track corporate responses to COVID-19. He is also building several big datasets for public use on shareholder activism targeting American and Chinese public firms. He is co-editing a book on cohabitation in our global society.

Yongjun received the 2020 James Colman Best Article Award from the American Sociological Association's Sociology of Education Section for his work on racial segregation in the U.S. school system (also published in the American Journal of Sociology). Some of his other work has appeared in top sociological journals such as Demography and Journal of Marriage and Family.

Alumni News

A recent graduate from our graduate program, Kevin McElrath, got a job at the Census Bureau and published a blog on socioeconomic disparities in online education during the pandemic.



Upon graduating from Stony Brook in December 2019, Kevin started working for the United States Census Bureau as a survey statistician in the D.C. metro area. He works in the Education and Social Stratification branch in the broader Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division. His research at the Census Bureau centers on issues of demographic change in school enrollment and educational attainment.

Kevin recently published an [“America Counts” research blog](#) examining socioeconomic disparities in online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other projects Kevin is involved in include an examination of the geographic variation in early childhood education in the United States and a report on changes in educational attainment from 2005-2019. In addition to research, his work at the Census Bureau involves data production for the American Community Survey and the Island Area Census. Such work includes several tasks related to reviewing the quality of data and the tables that are produced before the annual release of data to the public.

Graduate Student News

While we are lucky to have colleagues very much engaged with the times, we have also worked to try and support our students through this process. Many of our current graduate students have had a difficult time conducting their research because of the need to shelter in place – and not place themselves at risk for COVID-19. Some of our students have also had to face tremendous difficulties – personally or via their families – in relation to both sickness and financial strain. This past summer, the faculty pulled together and donated funds to be redistributed among our graduate students to help support them over the summer. Although we would have liked to give more to support them financially and support their research, we were happy to be able to provide them even just a little.

Giving Day

On October 8, SBU is celebrating its second Giving Day, an exciting 24-hour online fundraising event. We hope you'll consider giving to our [Sociology Fund](#). Your generosity will help financially support our graduate students' summer research programs. With the high cost of living on Long Island, many of our students work second jobs, which often leads them to delay their research. More information on our participation in Giving Day will be provided via e-mail. We thank you in advance for donating – even if a small amount – to support the research of our graduate students. If you are interested in learning more, please feel free to contact Chris Scarpati, Director of Development, at 631.632.1202.

We have enjoyed hearing from you all. If there are any stories you would like us to share, please reach out to me so that I can do so.

Wishing you all the best,

Katy Fallon
Professor and Chair
Department of Sociology