



TASA The Australian
Sociological Association

Greeting everyone.

We have passed the winter solstice which gave us the longest night of the year. The aurora australis has been seen as far north as Newcastle. Rain is reaching drought ravaged country and time will get out of sync with nature by a 'leap second' at a minute to midnight on Tuesday, 30th June. What have these events to do with sociology? They concern sociology because they can move from an event to an interpretation that affect people. People call the 21st June the shortest day, but really it is the longest night. The 21st and 22nd days are the same length. A social myth in Britain was that, when the aurora was visible as far south as London, war, was coming. That is the equivalent of seeing it in Newcastle. The fear or reality of drought is a constant on the Australian mind but the relieving rain can be just as damaging. A farmer I knew in a drought ravaged area, went to the local minister and asked him to pray for rain. The next day it started to rain. By the follow Saturday it was still raining and the farmer was banging on the minister's door, yelling "For goodness sake tell him to turn it off." Lastly what do we make of leap seconds? We have heard of leap years, but seconds??? A leap second will occur between 23.59hrs Tuesday, 30th June and 00.00hrs on the 1st July. Last year a committee to oversee the world's first public consultation about leap seconds was held. (For details see Wikipedia or New Scientist issue 3027). My point with all this is, the connection of people, with the workings of the universe. The massive events in the universe don't just happen out there. Some, at least, can impinge on our lives for good or ill, whether we like it or not or whether what we make of them is true or not. Some people have woven meaning for humanity into these events from their imagination rather than understanding the science. Sociology and science have not made good bedfellows. Some people are still arguing about whether sociology is scientific or not. What we must be prepared to do is to draw a line between what is fanciful imagination and what is real in our interaction with the universe.

I am pleased to say that quite a few of our members responded to my email about information that might help sociological job seekers at least find a place to look for work. One thing that became clear as we looked at your responses was the issue of whether going for a Ph.D. would get you a good job outside university. The clear answer seems to be that it won't. The Ph.D. is the requirement for getting a university job. The reaction in the commercial and NFP worlds seems to be that it is a liability. We have had reports that the ASA has advised its members that the U.S. Public Service will not employ Ph.D.'s. Later we heard that in Australia, Ph.D. applications to Public Service go straight to the no thank you pile without any consideration.

The issue in all this comes back to how and where do we train sociologists for a working life outside of Universities? There have been some warm if not heated discussions about this, but what is suggested by several people is that universities do not have the capacity to train sociologists for non-academic work. Universities instil sociological theory very well, as an academic subject, but are not equipped to train people for applied sociology. It seems we are starting a debate on where and how we should train applied Sociologists. If you would like to join the discussion please feel free to send your comment to me and I will collate to report the results in due course.

Alan Scott,

Continuing Education Officer & Acting Convenor