The 50th Anniversary Year for The Australian Sociological Association seemed a most appropriate moment to begin to build a history site for TASA web. The idea behind the project was to offer information about the formation and institutionalisation of the discipline in Australia. For the Executive, and also for myself, this meant a particular focus on the role of the Association, and the many individuals and groups who have made the discipline what it is today through their past efforts and on-going commitment.

With TASA’s financial support, two very keen and capable Honours students (and brothers) – Simon and David Factor – were inducted into academe as research assistants to compile the content. Members may be aware that I have been collecting historical materials about TASA and sociology in Australia over the past few years. Simon and Dave dug through the many boxes and files with enthusiasm, and composed a set of brief histories about:

- important events and developments in Australian sociology;
- the formation of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand and its transformation into the separate associations of TASA and the Sociological Association of Aotearoa New Zealand;
- the past Presidents of the Association;
- the speciality fields or sections (now thematic groups);
- TASA’s journals and newsletters;
- biographies of prominent figures in the Association and/or sociology in Australia;
- where our previous conferences have been held; and
- the winners of TASA’s various prizes.

Some of these histories are already on the web and other resources and information will be added as time and resources permit. We now have much more archival information on our website, which should save members a trip to the library! For instance, some of the early membership books have been scanned (from 1970), and we now have a full set of Nexus newsletters (going back to 1972). Members will also find an initial set of biographies. The plan is to continue to add to this set – so please don’t be dismayed if yours is not

continued on p.5
The Australian Sociological Association’s Annual General Meeting

When: Tuesday November 26th, 2013  5:15 - 6:30pm
Where: Monash University, Caulfield (K 3.09)

Senior Sociologists’ Meeting

Chair: Jo Lindsay (jo.lindsay@monash.edu)

Presenting:
• Prof. Marian Simms, the Executive Director of Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences in the Australian Research Council (ARC)
• Prof. Steven Schwartz, the Director of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS)

When: Tuesday November 26th, 2013  12:30 - 1:30pm
Where: Monash University, Caulfield (H 116)

Thematic Group Conveners Annual Meeting

Chair: Grazyna Zajdow (grazyna.zajdow@deakin.edu.au)

When: Monday November 25th, 2013  5:00 - 6pm
Where: Monash University, Caulfield (A 1.34)

Please note: the Thematic Group triennial review deadline is December 13, 2013. Please email your interest in becoming a thematic group convener to the current convener/s of your group asap. More details are available on TASAweb at: http://www.tasa.org.au/thematic-groups/

www.tasa.org.au

TASA YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3WCzD4z9DiTLTtmpQrMUeg
Welcome to the final issue of Nexus for 2013, and our final issue as co-editors. As usual, this issue contains a great mix of articles and contributions by members. Given this is the final issue for TASA’s 50th birthday year our feature article is Fran Collyer and her colleagues’ report and reflections on the TASA history project. We also reprint a piece by Stephanie Short on the history of health sociology.

With end-of-semester looming as we put together this issue, another focus for this issue is on teaching. Kristin Natalier and Zulekya Zevallos both present thoughtful commentaries on education technology, while Justine Parer and health sociology colleagues present a fascinating discussion on the challenges and joys of teaching health sociology. And as promised last issue, we have also put together a piece on co-authorship between PhD students and supervisors, with useful insights from a number of contributors – some named, several anonymous – which provides interesting reading.

In other content, Peter Beilharz responds to the commentaries on the ERA in the last issue, urging us – rightly – to make sure that at least some of our writing is for love. And, as usual, there are fabulous TASA events to report on, including David Rowe’s public lecture on education technology, while Justine Parer and health sociology colleagues present a fascinating discussion on the challenges and joys of teaching health sociology. And as promised last issue, we have also put together a piece on co-authorship between PhD students and supervisors, with useful insights from a number of contributors – some named, several anonymous – which provides interesting reading.

As the deadlines for this issue started approaching, and Nick has been furiously busy juggling conference programs and emails, we have both been feeling a little sad about the necessity of finishing this Nexus editing gig, and had the idea of saying something about service. For various reasons, the best way to do this was via a rambling Skype-chat, the edited transcript of which is included – we hope you’ll excuse our self-indulgence!

Nonetheless, we’re pleased to be handing on the editorial baton to Sue Malta and Christopher Baker. We are confident they will do a great job. Kirsten will be doing her一条 news. We welcome you to the final issue of Nexus.

As usual, putting together Nexus is a team effort. We’re indebted to Sally Daly, Eileen Clark and Roger Wilkinson for their generous and skilful work towards this issue and over the past two (and more) years. And to finish – as we’ve said many times before – Nexus would be nothing without the contributions of members. We both want to acknowledge with a huge ‘thank you’ the many, many people who have contributed to Nexus over the last six issues, named here (apologies if we’ve left anyone out or mis-spelt your name!):
President’s letter

Jo Lindsay

Promoting Sociology is core TASA business and accordingly communication has been a focus for us this year. I am pleased to report lots of excellent activity in this domain. TASA is currently trialling new ways of presenting our organisation and communicating cutting edge sociological ideas through various media channels. Have you seen the TASA YouTube Channel? We are beginning to load up TASA sponsored thematic group presentations, training sessions, Vox Pop promos of our activities and Public Lectures. Some of these initiatives will work better than others, so we welcome your feedback and participation.

While some of us are on a steep learning curve with social media and new modes of content creation and mobilisation, other members are leading the way in suggesting and facilitating new ways of engaging with our key audiences and sharing ideas among ourselves. In August, a multimedia working group was convened, chaired by Nick Osbaldiston. We are grateful to Karen Farquharson, Andrew Jakubowicz, Deborah Lupton, Roger Wilkinson, Peta Cook, Nicholas Hookway, Brady Robards and Sally Daly for participating in the teleconference and sharing their ideas. One of the key initiatives from this meeting is to encourage you to get on to Twitter and tweet at #TASA2013 at the conference, so charge up your smart phones.

TASA is very keen to find ways to promote the research and media engagement of members. We have a publications page on our website and we encourage you to submit information on new books and abstracts of your best articles. We are also keen to find new modes of ‘content mobilisation’ so if there is material already out there featuring your work, such as an article in The Conversation or major newspaper please let Sally Daly, our Executive Officer, know on admin@tasa.org.au so we can ‘republish’ it for you. These are some of the terrific initiatives that came out of the meeting and we will keep you posted as more are rolled out over the next year.

We have continued building strategic connections with CHASS and the ARC over this year and I am delighted to let you know that Prof. Marian Simms, the Executive Director of Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences in the Australian Research Council (ARC) has agreed to give presentations and take questions at postgraduate day and the senior sociologists’ meeting at the Conference. We are also delighted that Prof. Steven Schwartz, the Director of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) will also present at the senior sociologists’ meeting at the TASA conference. We look forward to discussing strategies for promoting Sociology and the social sciences more broadly in our new political environment.

In signing off, Sociology at Monash is a hive of activity as we gear up for one of the largest TASA conferences ever. The conference convenors, Nick Osbaldiston, Helen Forbes-Mewett and Catherine Strong, are doing a terrific job of keeping it all under control.

Looking forward to seeing you at the conference.

Very best

Jo

Disclaimer

In no event shall TASA or any of its affiliates or content providers be liable for any damages whatsoever, including but limited to any direct, indirect, special, consequential, punitive or incidental damages, or damages for loss of use, profits, data or other intangibles arising out of or related to the use, inability to use, unauthorised use, performance or non-performance of this newsletter, even if TASA has been advised previously of the possibility of such damages and whether such damages arise in the contract, negligence, tort under statute, in equity, at law or otherwise.
there yet! Eventually the site will be filled with photographs and links to documents (e.g. the original Constitution, or early significant addresses to the membership). It is an on-going project, so if you have a precious memory or artefact that could be shared with your fellow sociologists, please contact the Association. And of course, if you have a problem with any of the content on the website, we’ll do our best to address your concerns. For my part, I would like to thank the Executive for their support of the history project, and publicly thank Dave and Simon for their hard work. It was an absolute delight to work with them, and I’m sure you’ll see them around at future conferences.

Dave Factor
Thinking back over our time working on the TASA History Project it is amazing that, prior to it, we rarely gave a thought to the origin of sociology in Australia. We knew, of course, the discipline emigrated from elsewhere, and that Australian scholars took inspiration from foreign authors, carrying their insights across Australian themes and field sites. But for the most part we took it for granted that sociology was a discipline alive and well in Australia—it was simply here, available for us to study and enjoy. Looking into the history of sociology of Australia and particularly its journey into TASA, however, makes you aware this was a result of a tremendous collective effort, with various stops and starts since the 1910s. Unlike other disciplines such as anthropology, political science or economics—each with far longer histories in Australia—sociology has only really been properly on the academic scene here for 50 years or so, with strong institutional support for far less. This was most surprising to us. It is nice to know that, looking back, Australian sociology has managed to carve out a space for itself—a space we hope will continue to grow through TASA, and there will be more room for further histories to be written in the future.

Simon Factor
It was a pleasure for us to work on this project looking at the history of sociology, and more specifically TASA, in Australia. While we often take the diversity of subject areas and topics in sociology for granted today, it was particularly interesting to explore how sociologists continually traversed new areas of research and debate—from health and education, to women and multiculturalism—making Australian sociology speak directly to important issues as they emerged. While this necessarily expanded the purview of sociology time and time again, and while this was certainly not without numerous battles fought along the way about the legitimacy of such areas of study, reading through these histories it seems that it is this very diversity which has made sociology in Australia what it is today. We can only hope this strength and passion—as well as the clear enjoyment observable in the work of Australian scholars—continues as it faces new challenges and horizons in the future.

Nexus production team

*Editors*  
Kirsten Harley & Nick Osbaldiston

*Proofreading*  
Eileen Clark

*Layout*  
Roger Wilkinson & Sally Daly
I am delighted to accept the invitation from Justine Parer and Nexus co-editor Kirsten Harley to contribute a short reflection on Australian Health Sociology for Nexus to coincide with the 50th Anniversary TASA Conference to be held in 2013. This is a welcome opportunity to introduce the rest of the discipline to the history, developments and ‘problems’ of our sub-discipline in our own country.

Given the reliance on public funding and support in a publicly funded university system, the history of health sociology in Australia is inextricably linked with the history of Australian universities as the institutional base for academic sociology, and with broader public policy developments. Generally, our university system was modelled on the British system and eminent sociologist, Raewyn Connell, has noted that the early decades of Australian Sociology, from the 1950s to the 1970s, were characterised by ‘intellectual dependence’ on Western European and North American traditions.

I see the fifty-year history in two main phases.

The Age of Aquarius, the 1960s to the late 1980s

The Aquarius Festival signified a turning point in Australian culture and society; it was a counter-cultural arts and music festival organised by the Australian Union of University Students in the rural New South Wales village of Nimbin in 1973; Australia’s answer to Woodstock in the USA and the Isle of Wight Festival in England. It is identified with the birth of the hippie movement in Australia, long associated with alternative culture, communal living and working arrangements, and the growing and consumption of marijuana and other mind-altering substances.

The so-called 1968 generation, the post-war baby boomers who grew up in a time of unparalleled peace and prosperity with the growth of the Welfare State, nurtured the counter-cultural social movements that provided the impetus for democratising changes in society and legislation. These included multiple occupancy dwellings, the softening of laws on marijuana possession, the women’s liberation movement, the community health movement, liberalisation of laws on homosexuality, and the modern environmental movement.

This ‘Age of Aquarius’ (to quote from the sound track of the rock musical ‘Hair’) came to a climax at the ballot box in 1972 with the election of the first social democratic government in Australia since World War 2, led by the charismatic E Gough Whitlam. This reformist period, 1972–1975, was a watershed in Australian public policy, economy and society. It saw the introduction of free university education, Australia withdrew all its troops from Vietnam, and Medibank, a publicly-funded universal system of health insurance, was introduced.

A survey conducted by the Australian Sociological Association (TASA) identified the ten most influential books in Australian Sociology over this period. The survey reveals a distinctive style in Australian Sociology; a particular style of critical sociology characterised by an emphasis on political analysis and engagement and links with structural concerns about social inequality, public policy analysis and reform. Typical of works influential during this period are books by Raewyn Connell, with four books in the top ten, on class, gender and hegemony, Michael Pusey’s work on ‘economic rationalism’, and Evan Willis’s book, Medical Dominance, on the importance of social class and gender in understanding the occupational division of labour in health care in Australia.

The second phase in this brief history is marked by a turn towards neoliberal public policies and subsequent changes in Australian universities and sociology.

Economic Rationalism in Australia, the late 1980s to the current day

Michael Pusey’s seminal sociological analysis of the Australian state ‘changing its mind’ dates the neoliberal turn in Australian public policy to the late 1980s and the policies of the then Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Treasurer Paul Keating. This turn to the Right in public policy occurred in response to the international stock market slump of 1987, and the subsequent recession in Australia in 1991–2.
The Australian government introduced most significant changes to the economic system in this period, including deregulation of the banks, floating the Australian dollar and a more circumscribed role for trade unions.

The 1991 Wages and Incomes Accord between government and trade unions saw the introduction of enterprise bargaining at the level of the individual organisation, rather than on an industry-wide scale. The wide-scale introduction in 1993 of enterprise agreements saw the end of nearly a century of centralised wage fixing based on a federal industrial relations system in Australia. This localised system is in place today, with round six enterprise bargaining negotiations underway in 2013 in our universities. Each university undertakes bargaining every four years through negotiation between the university-level branch of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the university management. These negotiations are coordinated across Australia by the national office of the NTEU in Melbourne, referred to by university management as 'the Kremlin'.

This Age of Aquarius came to a definitive end in 1996 with the election of a conservative Liberal and National Coalition Government in Australia led by John Winston Howard. During the Howard years, 1996–2007, public policies turned even further to the Right, with increased support and public subsidies for private health insurance, tough policies on asylum seekers, military-style interventions in Indigenous communities in rural and remote Australia, and military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Economic rationalism was realised in the late 1980s in Australian universities with the so-called 'Dawkins Revolution' (named after the Minister for Education at the time, John Dawkins), with the passing of the Higher Education Funding Act of 1988 and establishment of a unified system of higher education. The twin aims of the revolution were to increase the efficiency and international competitiveness of Australia's universities. This created cultural upheaval and fast and significant growth in the university sector, because of the conversion of former Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology into universities or their merger with existing universities.

Whilst the Whitlam policy in the Age of Aquarius emphasised equity in access to higher education, this new Act placed emphasis on economic efficiency in university management (as distinct from administration), with new public sector management principles applied to 'the provision of educational services' and support for user-pays principles. This led to the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme for students and the effective end of 'free' university education in Australia.

This Dawkins revolution coincided with the transfer of nurse education from state government-funded hospitals to federally-funded universities. These public policy changes together led to most significant growth in health professional education in the higher education sector, and subsequent teaching opportunities and appointments in Health Sociology, as the allied health professions and nursing joined the more established health professions such as medicine and dentistry in the university system.

Australian universities have changed dramatically since the late 1980s, with the establishment and wide-scale reorganization of disciplines and schools, staff retrenchment and cost-cutting in terms of funding per student. Since 2003, Commonwealth funding to Universities has been differentiated according to 'financial clusters' which sees Medicine in 2012 attracting over A$21,000 per equivalent full-time student and Sociology attracting less than half that amount, with Nursing and Allied Health in between.

As in Britain, we have also seen an emphasis on government auditing strategies and the concomitant micro-management of academic behaviour, with an emphasis on short-term teaching and research inputs and outputs and heightened emphasis on budgetary considerations.

Fran Collyer’s recent ‘mapping’ of health sociology identifies a ‘cultural turn’ in this specialist field in Australia in the 1990s. Collyer associates this cultural turn with qualitative methods and analysis, and the influx of women into sociology. In the 1990s ‘… the discipline was radically and irrevocably re-oriented’ towards health sociology, feminism and qualitative methodologies (Collyer, 2012: 134).

I ground this ‘cultural turn’ in these twin reforms: the Dawkins revolution and the transfer of nursing education to universities in particular, just as the intellectual influence of the work of Michel Foucault, Bryan Turner, Deborah Lupton and other postmodern theorists was reaching its ascendancy in Australian Health Sociology.

**Health Sociology in the Contemporary Era**

In the contemporary era, Health Sociology is thriving. Sociology is taught in the vast majority of Australian Universities. ‘Health, Medicine and the Body’ is the second most common Sociology subject taught, after methodology, and the Health Section is the oldest and second most popular
Thematic Group in TASA, second only to the Feminism, Gender and Sexuality Section.

In 2013, only two Universities appear to have stand-alone Sociology Departments: the Australian National University and Macquarie University. Marshall and colleagues’ (2009) study of Sociology teaching in Australia found Sociology was most often combined with other disciplines. This trend was exacerbated by the Higher Education Reforms introduced in 2003 by the Howard government that saw student courses funded at different rates, as mentioned above. Marshall et al.’s report stated:

This project cannot fully map how ‘service’ sociology is taught in our universities. In part, this is because the funding model, in which disciplines are grouped into bands for funding, may disguise some sociology teaching. Subjects called ‘sociology’ are funded in one of the lowest bands, so, in health sciences, for example, they may be rebadged as ‘Public Health’ or ‘Social Determinants of Health’ in order to qualify for higher funding.

This is a double-edged sword. The economic rationalist higher education reforms outlined here have undermined the likelihood of Health Sociology being taught as a social science subject in a less well-funded Sociology Department. However, the reforms have opened up greater opportunities for Sociology to be taught as an applied discipline to students in the health professions, for example as ‘Sociology for Nurses’, or as an integrated part of an interdisciplinary subject offering, such as ‘Health Care Resources and Systems’.

Clearly, we have seen a fundamental ‘refashioning of Sociology’, to use Sharyn Roach Anleu’s phrase. In 1998, in a Presidential Address to TASA, Roach Anleu outlined a case for:

...flexibility and openness in a context marked by growing inter-disciplinarity and massive institutional reorganization.

In retrospect, these words were prescient indeed. Health Sociology, as a sub-discipline, is flourishing in quite a different way under the current zeitgeist.

Acknowledgments: I would like to acknowledge the Brocher Foundation in Geneva for the residential Fellowship that provided an ideal environment in which to write while on study leave from the University of Sydney: http://www.brocher.ch/en/

An earlier version of this paper appeared in the International Sociological Association Research Committee 15 Sociology of Health Newsletter. I acknowledge also some of the key sources for this article, including Fran Collyer’s (2012) book, Mapping the Sociology of Health and Medicine; the 2005 edited collection by John Germov and Tara McGee, Histories of Australian Sociology; Helen Marshall et al.’s 2009 report on teaching sociology for the ALTC; and Bryan S. Turner’s 2012 article on the History of Sociology in the USA and beyond in the Journal of Sociology. Full references are available from the author on request.

Table 1: Key Milestones in Health Sociology in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>First Australian Chair in Sociology appointed at the University of New South Wales, Sydney and the first Department of Sociology created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Formation of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand (SAANZ) (ISA RC15 on Sociology of Health also established in 1963).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Health Section of SAANZ established, the first specialty formed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) established after New Zealand sociologists formed an independent association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>TASA hosted the ISA XV World Congress of Sociology in Brisbane at the Queensland University of Technology (3,000 delegates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>TASA celebrates 50 years of Sociology in Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Postgraduate Completions

If you have completed your postgraduate qualification, why not celebrate it with Nexus? Please forward on your completion information to Karen Soldatic (k.soldatic@unsw.edu.au) for inclusion in our next issue! Our congratulations go to the following people on their achievements.

Dr Alexia Maddox
Sociology, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University

The Community Experience of The Herpetological Interest Network: a mixed-methods study of social ecology
February 2013
Supervisors: Dr Vince Marotta, Dr Kevin Brown, Dr Brad Warren

Summary: The thesis is a mixed-methods study of digital community that draws a line from the early Chicago School studies of community to a contemporary format of community that is embedded in a digital architecture rather than place. An analysis of contemporary literature on virtual communities, mediated sociability, digital research methods and networked individualism articulates the concept of a social ecology to describe contemporary, globalised community experience. The methodology of the thesis triangulates quantitative and qualitative methods to provide virtual and physical observations of the network. This combines insight from a quantitative online survey (1,593 participants from 47 countries) with interviews (90 participants from 14 countries) contextualized through three years of participant observation. Within this framework, I argue that the herpetological community adopts multimodal forms of social interaction that blur the distinction between the online/offline worlds. The conceptual and methodological approach of the research provides insight into the mediating culture of the network that is characterised by online connections, a macho culture and a paradox of low social trust with high levels of social exchange. The paradox of social interaction developing among Herpers is not only intriguing, but also important as a critical case study for thinking about social interaction more generally.

Gino Orticio
Division of Research and Commercialisation, Queensland University of Technology

Indigenous/Digital Heterogeneities: An Actor-Network Theory Approach
August 2013
Supervisor: Prof. Gavin Kendall, Associate Supervisor: Prof. Clive Bean

Summary: This thesis analysed the theoretical and ontological issues of previous scholarship concerning information technology and indigenous people. As an alternative, the thesis used the framework of actor-network theory, especially through historiographical and ethnographic techniques. The thesis revealed an assemblage of indigenous/digital enactments striving for relevance and avoiding obsolescence. It also recognised heterogeneities – including user-ambivalences, oscillations, noise, non-coherences and disruptions – as part of the milieu of the daily digital lives of indigenous people. By taking heterogeneities into account, the thesis ensured that the data ‘speaks for itself’ and that social inquiry is not overtaken by ideology and ontology.

Symposium: Emerging Priorities in the Sociology of Youth

Sociology of Youth Thematic Group

When: Friday 22nd November 2013, 9am-5pm
Where: Theatre 227, 234 Queensberry St, University of Melbourne, Parkville
Cost: $40
Organised by:
David Farrugia - Ballarat University
Julia Coffey - University of Melbourne
Paula Geldens - Swinburne University

TASA Executive Election

The next TASA Executive Election will be held in mid 2014. Look out for all the details in the March 2014 edition of Nexus.
The scholarship on learning and teaching as it relates to the use of flexible education technologies is breathtaking in its immensity, but within its ever-expanding universe, there are key themes. These include case studies on the implementation of specific technologies, with an emphasis on staff management or student use of the capabilities of the technology; the predictors of student engagement with learning; and, increasingly, the predictors of staff use of technologies. However, there is a surprisingly limited sub-field of critical interrogations of the institutional, sociocultural and ideological contexts informing our teaching. The use of flexible education technologies tends to be implicitly conceptualised as a set of individualised and de-contextualised practices and orientations, neither reflecting nor impacting upon broader relationships within – and beyond – higher education.

In contrast, the work of authors such as Connell (2013), Davies (2003), and Marginson (2006) reminds us that the industry and practices within it are fundamentally relational. They are shaped by national and global competition and resource flows, as well as managerialism, industrial relations and the tenor and practices of interaction between academics at the micro-level. Within neoliberalism, these relationships limit the possibility of encounter.

In this brief discussion, my use of the term ‘encounter’ is inspired by Connell’s (2013) conceptualisation of encounters as interactions of care, respect, reciprocity between equal and autonomous actors within educational situations. Connell frames the complex social labour of encounters with reference to the teacher–learner interactions necessary for inclusive and generative education. Here, I apply and extend the concept both to student–academic interactions and those between academics and their institutions, as a first step in thinking through the relationship between the possibility of encounter and academics’ use of flexible education technologies. Extending the application of this concept reflects my understanding of teacher–student interactions as one focal point of a network of relationships in education.

Some recent work I conducted with a UTAS colleague, Dr Robert Clarke, highlights the value of centring relationships in an analysis of how and why academics use technology in teaching. We ran a series of focus groups, attended by permanent and contract academic and professional staff across the humanities, social sciences, health sciences, business and education. All were actively engaged with teaching, teaching support or education development as a significant element of their jobs. There was a range of models of flexible education delivery and pedagogy, but all involved some use of an on-line learning management system (including discussion tools) and multiple forms of media to deliver content. Discussion focused around the experiences and perceived challenges and benefits of flexible education practices in the context of their organisational units, and UTAS more generally. Our analysis has focused on the thematic rather than interactive dimensions of the data.

In the discussion that follows, I present some initial thoughts on encounters between academic staff and the institution, and academic staff and students. I am highlighting the challenges of flexible education technologies, but this is not to claim that these are intrinsically counter-productive to encounters. Rather, I tentatively suggest that ambivalence about these technologies expresses dissatisfaction with the relationships that shape and are facilitated by their use.

Our study was conducted during a period of rolling institutional restructuring, on-going casualisation of teaching staff, and an implicit discursive de-valuing of teaching. These were matched by an increase in the intensity of managerialism, most pressingly experienced in the imposition of quantified research outputs. In short, participants were working within the local permutation of national and global neoliberal processes – in essential characteristics, UTAS is no different from other Australian universities. This was the context that informed accounts that emphasised both the institution’s misrecognition of the nature and demands of academics’ flexible education work, and its mistrust of academics’ accounts of that work.
as defining elements of institution–staff relationships. Specifically, participants reported pressure to maximise the perceived efficiencies of flexible education technologies, in contexts where flexible education was valued largely because it was understood as cheap, quick and a tool to limit investment in teaching. These expectations aligned with a lack of acknowledgement of flexible education demands in the formal calculation of workloads. Staff interpreted these policies and expectations as indications of an absence of respect, reciprocity of ideas, and as limiting their autonomy in their interactions with both the institution and their students.

The relationship between staff and the institution contributed to how staff understood the intersection of flexible education technologies, students and themselves. Best practice case studies can have only limited applicability in contexts where ‘inefficient’ teaching is discouraged through the institutional logic of resources and reward distribution. For those who taught cohorts without any, or only minimal, face-to-face contact, their defining relationship in flexible education was with ‘ghost students’, present as institutional entities but absent from reciprocal communication. Both those who operated solely online and those who conducted at least some teaching face-to-face described surveillance, through learning analytics, assessing competencies and accessing discussions boards, site and download statistics, as a key way in which they ‘knew’ their students. These ways of knowing centre on managing student access to content and assessment tasks in the teaching relationship. Additionally, staff experienced the majority of students’ requests for content or unit information as consumer demands, articulating expectations about staff use of time more so than seeking to engage with a learning experience or community. These readings of the interactions reflected less any intrinsically alienating elements of technology, and more the relationships between staff and institution that structured how staff could meaningfully use technology in their teaching. Many staff feared they often failed to interact in ways that enacted care, and meaningfully connect and relate to students as people – and students failed to connect in similar ways to lecturers. They saw, as a result, an erosion of trust and goodwill on the part of both lecturer and students, that is, the erosion of potential encounters.

I am aware, reading this over, of the rather glass half empty tone to the piece. I don’t aim to discount the effectiveness, impact and fun of using flexible technologies in teaching, nor their potential as tools for facilitating remote or socially and economically marginalised students’ access to higher education, nor their usefulness as a response to the priorities and life rhythms of a diversifying student body. My thinking here is informed by a desire to push back against the dominant and de-contextualised approaches to using flexible education, applying a sociological imagination to teaching practices (Halasz and Kaufman 2008). In this, I am probably preaching to the choir. More specifically, I am advocating a re-orientation in our critique and our enthusiastic use of flexible education. This approach requires an evaluation of technologies, policies and practices not (only) on the basis of efficiency, student need or demand, or industrial relations – although these are all important elements structuring the work of both teaching and learning. Rather, we locate these technologies within the relationships that constitute higher education, and advocate for those that support the potential for the encounter.

References are available from the editors or author.

The Sociology of Religion and Law: legal pluralism, anti-discrimination laws and religious diversity in late modernity

Sociology of Religion Thematic Group

This one-day symposium, funded by TASA and UWS, will be hosted by the Religion and Society Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney.

Convener(s): Douglas Ezzy (UTAS) and Anna Halafoff (Deakin)
Post-Graduate Committee: Ruth Fitzpatrick (UWS) and Mohammad Salehin (USyd)
Event organiser: Adam Possamai (UWS)
As reported in the previous issue of Nexus, TASA’s Health Day in July included presentations by Fran Collyer on the history of TASA and health sociology in Australia and New Zealand, and by Evan Willis on future directions for health sociology. This prompted me to reflect on and discuss some of the challenges we face in teaching health sociology. I am relatively new to teaching health sociology, which I do as a casual at a regional university. All my health sociology is service teaching, taught into health science degrees. For me, health sociology is juicy like few other domains, yet my students struggle to see the relevance and are challenged by sociological approaches. Increasingly, sociology is being dropped from health sciences courses. I found myself curious about what others thought of the state of health sociology – and I was also keen for free teaching tips!

To gather the views of other health sociology teachers, I prepared a list of questions with Kirsten Harley, and thematic group convenors Fran Collyer and Peta Cook emailed these to the TASA Health Sociology and Teaching Sociology thematic groups. A total of nine people (all women) responded to the questionnaire and Hans Baer sent a short reflection focused on disciplinarity and theory, which follows this article. A selection of responses, sometimes edited, are included below, with identifiers “Health” and “SS” indicating if the person works in some form of health context (health sciences, nursing, etc) or a sociology or general social science context respectively.

Our teaching contexts

Three respondents taught Sociology primarily to Arts students, and two of those were based at G8 institutions. One commented that her students, “are generally very capable (above 85 school leaving scores), very articulate, very socially aware students. They have done, or are doing, sociological theory in their other units, so the unit can be highly theoretical and conceptual” (SS A). Other respondents from G8 universities taught in Health Science faculties.

Two respondents teach exclusively into vocational courses at vocationally-oriented institutions. From this context it was stated that, “When we are ask students to apply sociological theory to cases in health, a lot of students are intimidated” (Health C) and “Sociology competes with subjects teaching a medical model based on scientific research which presents information in terms of certainty. Sociological thought unnerves those students who are more comfortable with rote learning and memorising.” (Health A).

Challenges

Respondents broadly identified a range of challenges for the teaching of health sociology. First, some of the challenges facing teaching health sociology are the same that face teaching sociology in general – the splitting of the discipline across the university, where the significance and relevance of sociology as a discipline in its own right can become lost. For health sociology, this can be amplified through the location in service or accreditation degree courses, where people from outside of the discipline believe they have the know-how and expertise to teach it. (SS B)

The support of the host School of Nursing to the inclusion of health sociology within the curriculum is a strongly related factor that can be a continuous challenge and opportunity. (Health B)

Health sociology has been dropped from at least three vocational health courses at the institution where I work. It seems reasonable to assert that the professional and vocational courses will be under increasing pressure to rationalise their courses, and this will mean that luxuries such as social sciences will be in an even more precarious position. There is already a social gradient in who gets to do sociology. If health sociology is dropped further from vocational courses, the gap in exposure to critical thinking will widen despite more young adults from ‘first in family’ backgrounds coming to university. (Health C)
The second challenge respondents identified was the students’ backgrounds:

Teaching sociology to students directly from school can be compromised by lack of a worldly experience and under-developed critical thinking skills. (Health A)

This challenge is also shaped by the characteristics of these undergraduate students – their diversity in culture, learning competence and styles, age, aspirations and motivation. (Health B)

Third, because health sociology is often taught into vocational health degrees, a key teaching challenge is, in a word, "Relevance". (Health D). Indeed,

One of the main challenges for the teaching of health sociology to undergraduate nursing students surrounds the establishing of relevance to health, health care and the nursing profession and its practice. (Health B)

If the relevance of the subject is clearly established, then its position in health degrees is easier to defend, and the discipline gains credibility. Apparent relevance also makes students more open to the sociological approach to health, as:

In a recent evaluation one student stated ‘I don’t believe in sociology’, and this was at the end of the subject. This may have been the same student who claimed she was, ‘a nutritionist not a sociologist’. This indicates that the connections between theory and practice are not always evident. (Health A)

Most students appear to have difficulty in shifting from a mindset that conceives biological and psychological influences to be the phenomena that explain disparate outcomes in health and illness. (Health E)

One strategy that service teachers and teachers based in health/science faculties seem to take is to link health sociology to health practice. Teaching health sociology can involve:

Presentation of material in a way that resonates and connects with the professional identities the students are so motivated to adopt and their future clinical practice. At tutorials in the first two or three weeks in semester, I include some examples of ‘cases’ they might encounter one day. (Health C)

Those of us who teach health sociology primarily or exclusively into Arts courses are challenged with "relevance" to the same extent as those teaching into health courses. Nonetheless, there was agreement from those teaching in an Arts context that increasing the profile of sociology in "Health" is important:

We need to have public campaigns to get the word out about sociology and the social sciences if we are to improve our position within the university system... It is always difficult for sociologists teaching within health/medical faculties to obtain the autonomy and resources they need. (SS A)

Opportunities

Health sociology, like all sociology, emphasises critical thinking skills:

I am in the business of educating students and building their capacity to think critically. Teaching health sociology is about teaching sociology. It is a way of showing students that you can think sociologically about any area of social life. (SS A)

Health sociology provides the perfect opportunity for demonstrating the power of the social in shaping people's behaviours and life chances. (Health E)

Application of the sociological approach is directly relevant to health practice. Broadly:

The opportunities for the teaching of health sociology are based within the possibilities of influencing and shaping the thoughts and practices of nursing students as they are prepared for professional practice. (Health B)

More specifically, respondents noted particular issues in the provision and organisation of healthcare that health sociology can address. For example, individualistic approaches to health promotion in the context of risk discourses are a critical issue requiring a sociological lens:

Health science and vocational courses tend to offer a combination of the biomedical model and/or the individualistic 'lifestyle' model. Both of these overlook social experience, and in particular, class issues. They are pre-occupied with the 'information deficit' model whereby they are convinced that if only people know more they would behave differently. The consequence of this is that if people are told and still do not comply, they are recalcitrant.

This is a social justice issue; it is also an economic issue as the system is clogged up with chronic conditions that could be treated in primary care clinics and need to be addressed in a different way. The major issue – obesity – is a class issue. The middle class is not obese, yet we persist with the middle class discourse around 'discipline' and moderate serves, etc, wasting millions. It is not resonating with the target group (see Rodriguez, 2012). (SS C)

I believe it is crucial that sociologists teaching health sociology have a strong understanding of research methods in order that are able to encourage students to consider the strengths and limitations of health-related evidence. The current obsession with ‘risk’ in mainstream health
discourse also needs to be critiqued as a means of alerting students to the ways in which this risk focus shapes people’s thinking in today’s society. The risk obsession encourages the stigmatisation of all sorts of groups by virtue of their health-related behaviours and it is also arguably undermining people’s quality of life by heightening their anxiety about everything they do (or do not do). The emphasis on risk also produces unrealistic expectations by suggesting that the individual has some level of control over whether or not they develop certain conditions – a flawed proposition given the wide range of etiological factors involved in the development of disease over which the individual has little or no control. (Health E)

Sociology brings critical understandings of the position of nurses in the health workforce:

Health Sociology within nursing curriculums… challenges medical dominance and the biomedical model, and encourages nursing career development in primary health, public health and social health settings. (Health B)

The role of theory in teaching health sociology

Short and Sharman (1992) noted that theory plays a different role in the three different approaches they identify for teaching health sociology to nurses – ‘basic’ or ‘mainstream’, where nursing students attend mainstream sociology courses; ‘applied’, where discrete sociology subjects are taught specifically to nursing students; and ‘integrated’ approaches, where sociology is incorporated into behavioural science subjects. We asked contributors to comment on their views about the role of theory in teaching health sociology in their different contexts.

One pointed out that:

Theory seems to me to be less prominent in health sociology textbooks than in (for instance) generic introductory sociology textbooks – students undertaking a sociology major would typically encounter a range of social theories in other courses and might be more expected to engage with theories in understanding the experiences, constructions and institutions related to health and illness. In my (limited and possibly unrepresentative) experience, vocational health sociology teaching focuses more on concepts (inequality, the sickness role, discourses, stigma) than on theory for disciplinary introduction, broad theoretical systems for understanding the social world, or notions of building theory from evidence (although there is some of this in my qualitative research methods teaching). (Health F)

This view that health sociology emphasises theoretical concepts might be corroborated by what respondents viewed as most important that they wanted their students to take away from the subject. For instance, respondents noted the importance of concepts such as the inverse care law, stigma, and victim blaming.

I am sure the role of theory varies from faculty to faculty. Where I teach, sociological theory is expected to be an integral and fundamental part of the unit. I would imagine it to be much more difficult to teach in faculties/universities where the students are less capable of abstract thought, or where they are oriented only to vocational/applied study. (SS A)

Indeed, as another respondent explains:

I have found it necessary to emphasise at the beginning of semester that theory would play a key role in the unit content so that students are confronted with alternative explanations of human behaviour to biological and psychological ones, and that they fully grasp the importance of the social in shaping people’s life experiences and life chances. I drew heavily on the works of Durkheim and Marx, for example, to demonstrate that society can be understood just as easily as a human system based on consensus or as one characterised by conflict and competing interests.

None of the students I taught were sociology majors. The expansion of health science/vocational courses (and shrinking of courses involving majors) makes a core focus on social theory an essential part of an undergraduate degree given that these types of courses tend to be designed to develop profession-specific skills – even though all students (and their future clientele) will be affected by similar social processes and structural forces operating at a societal level. In each of the three years I taught health sociology, a number of students raised objections about the time spent on theory at the start of the semester. Invariably, however, this resistance to theory all but disappeared, through a gradual realisation of the relevance of social theories to everyday life and experience. (Health E)

And:

Most health science students are unfamiliar with the procedures used in Arts Faculty tutorials (such as debate and discussion), and many seem to be alarmed by the wide scope of the lectures and reading materials, which probably reflects their lack of experience in critical thinking. They feel ill at ease with theory (‘too vague’), and being asked to think without knowing when they have the answer right. Health science students do not apply theory or theoretical concepts to cases in their other subjects, so they cannot synthesise from concurrent topics as an Arts student does. (Health C)

From a teaching point of view, this means that while:

The role of theory is central in all programs (professional, vocational, discipline-based). […] the teaching of theory must be carefully introduced. Sociology majors can incorporate theory and
research, and subdisciplines in a sustained educational pathway. (Health B)

For those health students who might be resistant to theory, care must be taken to avoid students throwing out the sociological baby with the theoretical bathwater. For instance:

One concern is that assignments on Indigenous health must be carefully structured at introductory levels to avoid fostering resistance by students to Indigenous health needs. (Health A)

**How do we work with teachers/academics from other disciplines in teaching topics such as class, gender, ethnicity, disability, mental health? If service teaching, how do you balance the expectations of other faculties?**

One response is that the juxtaposition of disciplines is productive:

Sociology is enhanced through contrast and comparison with cognate disciplines including political science, epidemiology and economics. (See Palmer & Short, 2010) (Health D)

A background in health sociology might be seen as beneficial for other disciplines:

In my particular circumstances, other teachers/academics were only too pleased to have their students being taught about class, gender, ethnicity, disability, and mental health in the units I taught because they were responsible for teaching vocation-oriented units. They were relieved that ‘someone’ was going to focus on these areas because they did not have either the expertise or time to do so and were keenly aware of the need for students to understand these topic areas... The main reason that different disciplines required students to study Health, Culture and Society was because a number of professional bodies had requested that this be the case. (Health E)

If health sociology is taught early within a degree program, then it can be presented as foundation study to all further study. It is a challenge to engage colleagues to recognise this foundation study as the ‘precursor’ or ‘prelude’ to their later units of study. Perhaps it is easier to emphasise this ‘development through curriculum’ model with the students we are teaching. (Health B)

And, conversely, students’ insights from other disciplines can be engaged in teaching sociology:

Health science students have an excellent comprehension of interaction (in the statistical sense) if they have already done pharmacology. You can discuss interaction between class and gender, or ethnicity and employment, and they get it immediately. (Health C)

They might also be challenged:

Hopefully we offer a different, more experiential, tutorial focus. There are opportunities to challenge other models. In general terms, sociology allows us to explain to students how what seems like a ‘private problem’ (e.g. depression due to long term unemployment) is a ‘public issue’ (high unemployment rates regionally). Also to challenge stereotypes … (SS C)

**Communication and exchange are important:**

The challenge is to have the skills and knowledges of sociologists in divergent areas being recognised, and then sought after. We also cannot be arrogant and believe we are the only discipline that can provide insight into these areas. (SS B)

It helps to get acquainted with staff from other faculties and to have a little bit of familiarity with what they teach. (Health C)

**What is distinctive about health sociology?**

A question about what is distinctive about health sociology, for instance in comparison to ‘social determinants of health’ approaches, elicited a number of passionate responses about the centrality of sociology in health sociology:

The major difference would be that health sociology is more theoretical and conceptual, more sociological, and certainly more analytically critical than the social determinants approach. For the latter, ‘the social’ is merely one more variable to take into account in assessing an individual’s well-being or their treatment outcomes. In health sociology in contrast, ‘the social’ is at the centre of the analysis, and we can investigate the very foundation of assumptions about medicine, health, well-being, medical knowledges and practices, and the social structuring of the healthcare system. Hence, the social determinants approach is only a very small part of the sociology of health, and is the more politically palatable approach to studying health, because it does not fundamentally challenge the status quo. (SS A)

Encourages critical thinking, offers students an international perspective on health and well-being; critical analysis on impacts on social inequality especially as it relates to health; offers opportunities for engaging with classical theorists such as Foucault, Parsons, Marx and Weber that form part of intellectual discourse in other spheres. (Health A)

Sociological concepts, theoretical perspectives, methodology and empirical evidence. (Health D)

While health sociology can address and examine the social determinants of health, it is a much broader perspective. Health sociology – or the sociology of health and illness – is now being used to cover interrogations of medical technologies, debates over knowledge (for example, when there are competing diagnoses), and health/illness/wellbeing experiences in general. This is much more diverse than how the discipline is sometimes conceptualised. (SS B)
Health Sociology is a scholarly discipline that has core theory/theorists and concepts – other subjects (like Social Determinants, Public Health, Primary Health) are derivative from social theory, and are sometimes taught without recognition of these theoretical bases. It is important for students of the health professions to engage in scholarship and theoretical inquiry, as a cornerstone of their completed tertiary education. Their understandings of the social determinants framework, and the principles and practices of public health and primary health care, are strengthened when informed by social theory and historical awareness. (Health A)

The great strength of health sociology is that it questions taken-for-granted assumptions about health and illness. My experience in tutoring in other academics’ units where social determinants were discussed left me feeling that attention on these lacked depth, because of an absence of theory and because diagnosis of disease was viewed as unproblematic. There seems little point in talking to students about social determinants, if students have no grounding in theories that identify the mechanisms involved in the social patterning of health and illness. It would seem essential also, that students in health science disciplines be challenged to consider the problematic nature of diagnosis itself and the power differential in the clinician/hospital–patient relationship. (Health B)

Can health sociology be successfully embedded in professional curricula, and if so, how?

(Note here that ‘professional’ may be used broadly, although as Health D points out, the accreditation process involved for those ‘professions’ governed under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009 shapes and constrains if, whether and how health sociology is taught; there is more flexibility and institutional autonomy with other vocational courses.)

Respondents typically saw this as a desirable possibility:

- It can be, and should be. It is important that it be embedded as a discrete disciplinary contribution to the profession, so that its core theory and concepts are upheld. It requires continuing representation by sociologists within TASA, and strong networking amongst us, and participation in professional contexts to maintain the ‘voice’ of health sociology. (Health B)

- Recognition that sociologists are best-placed to teach sociology is clearly an issue here:
  - Other knowledge areas know about health inequalities, social processes, and culture; but for sociologists those things are front and centre. The main thing is that sociological topics are ideally taught by sociologists. (Health C)

- A commitment by other subjects to sociology and that sociology is best taught by lecturers in sociology. In some subjects it is said there is no room in curriculum for sociology of health, for example, because the curriculum is too crowded. However, it is difficult to imagine how one can learn a health care subject without a compulsory sociology component. Some courses are now choosing to teach their own ‘sociology’ and this increases the silo effect that is already a problem. The best teachers of a subject are experts who have undergone research and study in that field. (Health A)

One contributor suggested this might be a modest ask:

- We do not need a HUGE amount of time/access to students. If it is well taught they will ‘get it’: 12 hrs a semester can work. (SS C)

Regardless, support from the professions and university involved is likely to make a difference:

- This was done successfully through the units I taught. The university in which I worked was committed to ensuring that students working in health disciplines gained an understanding of the importance of society and culture as determinants of health outcomes. This is why the Health, Culture and Society unit was mandatory for student studying paramedics, nutrition and dietetics, and public health. Education, podiatry, and nursing students were offered the unit as an elective, and many took up this option. (Health E)

This depends on how the profession at the macro and meso levels views sociology. If the profession is supportive of sociology, this then needs to translate to the university or Faculty levels. If the Dean/Head of (relevant) School sees sociology as something they cannot teach but they can draw upon that expertise from elsewhere in the institution, then it is more likely this knowledge will be sought. However, if the Dean/Head believes this is something within their realm and has the desire to retain EFTSU, then it is likely they will keep the sociology in-house (in whatever form, which may or may not be dubious).

Ultimately, I see the issue is whether the profession seeks to embed sociology as something that is required to practice in that area and to achieve accreditation. Therefore, influence needs to occur at the macro level before we can influence the meso (university/Faculty/School) level.

At my previous institution, the nursing staff believed they could teach philosophy, ethics and sociology because they believed these were inherent to their practice and the discipline. They did not have anyone on staff who was specifically skilled in any of these areas as we would recognise it. However, the nursing staff at my current institution do not see themselves as the harbourers of such knowledge, and want outside assistance to teach these.

Another element to consider is the grab for cash – are there tensions over enrolment figures and...
how to allocate EFTSU? By teaching the nursing unit – and having it coded as our unit – we effectively generate income from this teaching for our own School. However, if this was coded as nursing unit, then nursing would keep these funds. (SS B)

There is another element to funding:

The funding system that values ‘health’ subjects above ‘social science’ subjects means that they may not be named as sociological, which can make it more difficult to build/keep staff and research/teaching strengths in health contexts. (Health F)

What should be done to get health sociology on the agenda at professional accreditation bodies’ meetings? How important are threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) and generic graduate attributes (GGAs)?

Promoting sociology to professional accreditation bodies is clearly a challenge:

Getting sociology on the agenda of professional accreditation bodies’ meetings sounds like a difficult challenge. How do you influence the professional accreditations of another discipline, while not seeming to be arrogant or pushy? What is needed are people on these accreditation boards who have a more diverse knowledge and experience than their own disciplinary bubble. (SS B)

There were some suggestions about ways forward:

I think health sociology can be promoted as a quick and dirty way for course directors to tick boxes connected to students’ social engagement and awareness. (Health C)

EVIDENCE! We need research from students who have had sociological input and are now in the workforce. Anecdotal evidence repeatedly suggests they didn’t appreciate it at the time but now realise they would have benefited from more.

Again EVIDENCE is needed, particularly for young doctors, that the majority of people they will be treating will be presenting in the chronic range of illnesses that can be mapped most specifically to socioeconomic and class variables.

EVIDENCE from health economists that this is the way forward (see Page et al. 2007, etc). Two-thirds of hospital admissions are avoidable ... etc. (SS C)

Threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) is the term given to the minimum discipline-specific knowledge, skills and competencies students are supposed to acquire by the end of their degrees. TASA has produced TLOs for sociology in Australia. It was stipulated that those TLOs should only apply to students who majored in the discipline, but a ‘Health sociology’ subject is taken by thousands of other students every year. According to a higher education publishing company, a very rough estimate of the whole market for health sociology in Australia annually would be near to 10,000 students. The ‘vagueness’ (SS C) of GGAs was seen as limiting, with TLOs a more likely basis for discussion.

I believe that GGAs are irrelevant. They are too broad and generic to mean anything. Their function is for accountability purposes to external stakeholders and authorities, not for any real internal purposes.

The sociology TLOs have the potential to be a way we can communicate and ‘sell’ sociology to other areas. They can help us to indicate why sociology might be important to them, and how we can contribute to their disciplinary learnings and expertise. However, in order to do this, we need to have awareness of their TLOs, and how our TLOs might speak to them.

As much as universities and external stakeholders talk about cross-disciplinary teaching and research, there is very little support for this. Most cross-disciplinary activities are not cross-disciplinary at all; staying within traditional and similar areas (for example, collaborations across the laboratory sciences, collaborations between social sciences and humanities, etc.). (SS B)

There might be a role for TASA here:

This could be an ongoing project for us. A review of achievements and aspirations could be held annually? (TASA?). TLOs and GGAs certainly give a consensus to work from. (Health B)

The potential benefits of teaching health sociology should be flagged at these meetings and it would therefore seem essential that professional bodies like TASA promote these benefits to health professional associations. TLOs and GGAs have the potential to be very useful, but they will only be so if the people who design coursework are committed to ensuring that the content of a unit that teaches health sociology is, in fact, taught by a sociologist, and that the content of the unit/assessment actually gives students the opportunity to meet the TLOs and GGAs that are set. (Health E)

Finally

To finish, we asked our respondents what is the most important thing they want students to take away from their health sociology subject. The answers speak for themselves and speak to what health sociology can offer our students:

I try to challenge them to think about the biomedical approach to illness, and see that it is only one way of understanding, defining, explaining any health condition or practice. At first they find this very hard, defining everything in medical terms (e.g. cancer is a problem with the cells of
the body). By the end of the unit, about 80% will pause and say ‘oh, yes, there is a sociological way of defining what it is’, and they will try to think about health and illness in a different way. I feel I have made some real headway when I hear this. (SS A)

The inverse care law and sociological explanations for it. (Health D).

I want my students to have an appreciation that health and illness are not solely determined by biology, and that ill-health and disease is a social perception and construction. (SS B)

Not to be judgmental regarding gender/ethnicity/income/other behaviours. (SS C)

Openness to understanding those they will interact with as social beings, an appreciation of qualitative research, and some skills in questioning, developing arguments and writing. (Health F)

A sociological imagination, applied to health, illness, health care and social life. (Health B)

To conceptualise health broadly through a number of perspectives, not solely a biomedical one. To wonder about who is not receiving services and why. To understand concepts such as gender, ageing, race and how these social concepts overlay on access to health and wellbeing. To appreciate concepts such as victim blaming that emerge in popular discourse and have the skills to counter this with sound sociological arguments. (Health A).

Not to blame people they encounter for their situations. I want the decency they already possess to be infused with a critical understanding of social inequality. (Health C)

To be self-reflective about their own preconceived ideas, prejudices and judgements of others, and to think critically about the health evidence they encounter. Both of these aspects are needed to prepare students for their profession and personal lives. (Health E)

References are available from the first author.

Congratulations to Lachlan Denning, recipient of TASA Prize for Sociology at Murdoch University

Lachlan Denning has won the TASA Prize for Sociology at Murdoch University for two years running. A trust account to support the prize was established by TASA in 1992. It was initially awarded for the best Honours thesis in Sociology or in a related course, on a topic demonstrating a solid sociological perspective, but early in 2012 TASA agreed to Murdoch’s request to change the prize conditions to: best academic achievement by a graduating student in the BA Sociology or Honours Sociology. It is now awarded to the student in BA Sociology or Honours Sociology with the highest GPA.

Lachlan wrote to thank TASA for the prize and has agreed to his letter being reproduced in Nexus:

I would like to thank you for donating The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) Prize in Sociology at Murdoch University, something which is a great honour to receive. I have just completed my Honours course in Sociology at Murdoch University and I am excited to receive the TASA prize in recognition of the amount of time and effort that was required to be successful. It was a long and difficult year, particularly in the few months leading up to the submission of my thesis, and receiving this prize helps reinforce to me that I have achieved something significant and that it was a valuable learning experience.

Like many social sciences, sociology is an academic discipline that has been having difficulty in keeping its place within many universities in Australia and in maintaining a consistent flow of students. Murdoch University and its friends clearly recognise the benefits sociology and other social sciences have to offer, and awards such as the TASA Prize help to remind students that this is a worthwhile and important discipline.

Thank you for your support of myself and of future students of Murdoch University.
Although I did a post-doctoral fellowship in Medical Anthropology at Michigan State University, my teaching career in terms of teaching medical social science was launched by teaching a course on ‘The Sociology of Health and Illness’ at St John’s University in Queens, New York. Later, I taught an upper-division course that was listed as both Medical Anthropology and Medical Sociology at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Although I have taught various ‘straight’ medical anthropology courses as a visiting professor at Berkeley, Arizona State University, and ANU, at the University of Melbourne, since my arrival there in 2006, I have taught Culture, Health, and Illness in the Centre of Health and Society and Health and Development in the Development Studies Program. Despite the fact that I have a PhD in Anthropology, I often joke that I double as a sociologist and have come more and more to regard myself as a historical social scientist in terms of both my teaching and research. For me, theoretical perspectives are more important than disciplinary boundaries because they cross-cut disciplinary boundaries. While I certainly expose my students to various theoretical perspectives, my own preference is for a historical materialist/world systems/political ecological approach both in teaching about and interpreting the world. In 1982, Merrill Singer and I coined the term critical medical anthropology, and with Ida Susser, we authored a textbook which has gone through three editions (Baer, Singer, and Susser 2013). CMA draws upon the work of sociologists such as Howard Waitzkin, Ray Elling, Lesley Doyal, and Immanuel Wallerstein.

In my Health and Development subject at Melbourne, I emphasize a political economy of health perspective more than what has become referred to in public health and global health programs as the social determinants of health, an approach that tends to focus on how factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, occupation, neighbourhood, nutrition, and lifestyle impact upon health without looking further upstream and viewing them as manifestations of the capitalist world system. I include a unit on the impact of climate change on health which draws upon various perspectives, including eco-Marxism. My unit on comparative national health care systems probably draws more upon the work of sociologists and others than anthropologists. Conversely, my unit on medical pluralism and development draws more heavily upon the work of anthropologists than sociologists. The unit on health, gender, and development draws more or less equally upon the work of anthropologists and sociologists. Thus over the years, whether I have been teaching a medical anthropology, health sociology, or a health and development subject, I have sought to convey to my students the need to grapple with the complexities of globalization, including assessing the role of multinational corporations, the role of governments and multi-lateral institutions such as the WHO and World Bank, in influencing its directions, its impacts on the health of global populations, and popular movements of resistance and response. Both critical medical anthropologists and critical health sociologists, along with other progressive scholars, work as health activists for women’s health collectives, free clinics, ethnic community health centres, environmental groups, AIDS patient advocacy efforts, national health care reform groups, and NGOs. These socially active critical medical social scientists view access to a healthy environment and comprehensive and holistic health care as a human right, not a privilege or commodity accessible to only a privileged few. In terms of creating a healthy world, I try to convey to my student the need to transcend global capitalism with an alternative world system based upon social justice or equity, democratic processes, and environmental sustainability, one that might be termed democratic eco-socialism. Needless to say, not all of my students agree with this vision but laying it out makes for interesting and provocative pedagogy.
A new sociological study finds that students who study online perceive that they have learned less in comparison with students who attend face-to-face lectures. The researchers, Kelly Bergstrand and Scott Savage, find that online students also feel they have been treated with less respect by their lecturers, and they generally rate their courses more negatively. Is there an issue with the way sociology is taught specifically that does not translate well to an online environment, or is there something broader at play? Today’s post examines the skills and resources that sociology demands of students, and questions whether the training and delivery of these skills are being adequately supported by the higher education system. I also discuss the influence of larger online courses that are offered “free” to the public and how this relates to funding cuts and a push for online learning in the tertiary sector.

The findings: Dissatisfaction amongst online students

Bergstrand and Savage studied 118 sociology courses, including data drawn from 400 student evaluations. Other studies cited in this research have found that students who perceive a course to be either too difficult or too easy will tend to rate a course negatively. Similarly, the personality and “likeability” of teachers can also influence student evaluations. This suggests that students may be rating individual qualities rather than the course materials and information per se. The researchers controlled for both by comparing evaluations of the same instructors across online and face-to-face courses.

Bergstrand and Savage note that face-to-face and online courses may present different opportunities for lecturers to excel, depending on their class delivery method. It is feasible to presume that teachers who may not be as entertaining face-to-face may do better teaching online if they have strong writing skills; and vice versa for gregarious instructors whose mannerisms work a treat face-to-face but may not translate well into a virtual environment. Their findings generated some support but with little insight about why this might be the case. There was evidence that teachers who were rated poorly by students face-to-face had better results when they taught online; however, all online courses had poor ratings.

Online courses and the exploitation of graduate student teachers

Bergstrand and Savage note that their sample only included graduate student instructors; that is, the lecturers were postgraduate students who were also completing their Masters or PhDs. This may mean that these teachers are less experienced and might not have developed the reflexivity required to adapt their face-to-face methods to an online forum. The researchers note, however, that other studies find that teaching evaluations for teachers do not change much over time.

The greatest limitation of this study is one that the researchers signal early on: they do not have data comparing learning outcomes of students with their evaluations. Speaking from my experience teaching at two Australian universities, student evaluations are generally undertaken in the final week of the course, after the students have handed in their final assignments but not necessarily before they have received their final mark for that last piece of work, and generally not before their final exams and overall course grade. Students who feel they have not learned anything may (or may not) be expressing frustration that they have not received enough feedback to gauge their progress at other points in the semester, or perhaps they are disheartened by the level of work leading up to the final essays, assignments and exams.

Nevertheless, subjective perception of course satisfaction has real world outcomes. As the researchers note, these evaluations directly impact on whether or not instructors are promoted or given the opportunity to obtain a tenure position. The authors caution that students may not be getting the same quality teaching in online courses, so they argue that the higher education sector needs to examine this critically.

Students who leave a course dissatisfied should be heard and universities should respond. The question is: how? With the higher education sector under pressure in many nations around the world, Australia included, universities are moving increasingly towards online delivery. The majority
of undergraduate classes are taught by graduate students. More experienced academics are able to buy out their teaching, or they are concentrated in postgraduate or specialist courses. This means that it is early career researchers who are suffering most from the demands of online teaching.

In comparison to senior lecturers, graduate teachers represent a source of cheap labour. The exploitation of younger academics has been a point of contention for some time, demonstrated most loudly in the University of Sydney’s long-standing industrial dispute. (You can read Raewyn Connell’s erudite summary of the issues in her public lecture. The precarious working conditions faced by early-career teachers is a central feature.)

Under the current system, the training, resources and skills available to early career academics may well be inadequate. Bergstrand and Savage argue that even when graduate teaching instructors receive some formal teaching training, this is not specifically tailored to online environments.

MOOCs
Interestingly, two high profile Australian academics have recently come out to critique Massive Open Online Courses or “MOOCs”. Sandra Peter, lecturer at the University of Sydney Business School, was somewhat neutral, arguing that large, free online courses are redefining the meaning of what constitutes a “good education.” Peter sees that MOOCs potentially challenge what we mean by “learning.” This is partly because MOOCs are not always accredited (although some big universities and corporations are involved). More problematic is the fact that most MOOCs do not demand very much from students to demonstrate their newfound knowledge or skills.

Professor Gilly Salmon, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning Transformations) at Swinburne University (my alma mater) likens MOOCs to vending machines. Salmon argues MOOCs treat students like consumers and that they are unconcerned with the quality of education and learning.

Some of the traditional universities are adapting to MOOCs; others may be overly critical because they see MOOCs threaten the higher education system (though Salmon says they are not real competition for universities). Yet more universities have readily adopted online courses. Both Sydney University and Swinburne and most other Australian universities I can think of have either created new online courses or transitioned old courses into an online environment. Not coincidentally, other face-to-face courses are being cut. Swinburne shut down an entire campus just this year, with a second campus scheduled for closure next year.

With the threat of MOOCs, and with ever-looming funding cuts, online courses seem a cheaper alternative to face-to-face courses. Universities can enrol more students without the barrier of distance and perhaps, it seems, with less accountability for student satisfaction and learning.

What’s the problem with sociology and online learning?
How might the findings differ in other disciplines? Could there be something unique about sociology that is better suited to face-to-face learning? After all, it is a discipline centrally concerned with social interaction, culture and dialogue. Sociology is probably not alone in the issues arising in online classrooms, but we need empirical data to test the differences.

While online environments require different modes of communication, it is still a sophisticated social environment. At the same time, the way in which sociology is currently taught may not be suited to online environments as they currently stand – under resourced and with learning outcomes poorly understood. Sociology requires a high degree of reading, writing but also critical debate. Sociology tutorials are typically structured around group work and oral debates. Again, these teaching methods are not unique to sociology or the social sciences. So is the problem a poor fit between sociology and online learning; poor training on offer to educators; or is the issue online delivery in general?

While there is diversity in the content and course structure of face-to-face sociology courses, the delivery and broad teaching aims are more or less similar. Sociology teaches students to participate in informed debate about societies. It demands strong oral and written communication skills as well as demonstration of critical thinking. These skills are in high demand in many industries. As technologies change, these skills will have to keep adapting. The issue is that there seems to be a disconnect between sociology, online learning and student satisfaction. This puts sociology students at a double disadvantage. First, they leave university feeling like they received a poor education. Second, they did not receive adequate support to help them learn and apply sociological thinking through technology.

Moving forward
Online courses are a new and developing phenomena, but the methods seem to adhere more to asynchronous communication of the early Internet years. This may include handing out large volumes

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Publish and Perish?

PETER BEILHARZ

La Trobe University

Looking back on my writing, coming to the end of my institutional career, my line of vision is obstructed by piles of books and essays. Marx is known to have lamented that he was a machine condemned to devour books; as for me, maybe it’s rather that I have been condemned to write. Anyways, this is Sisypheus rather than Prometheus. There have been 24 books, 170 papers, 270 reviews and commentaries, 118 issues of Thesis Eleven (the latter, of course, a collective achievement). In any case, too many words.

If it weren’t enough that I, now, am no longer entirely sure what this was for, then it gets even more hilarious when I discover from the women in my life that notwithstanding this molehill, I have now, at last, finally really made it: quoted in Vogue Australia, the Love Issue, me and Sofia Coppola.

Good to start with a joke, as I then turn to Nexus to discover that ECR=ERA. The two seem to be identified, as though the life’s project of a formative sociologist is to be strategically circumscribed by the institutional imperatives of ERA. More specifically, I discover that the parameters of the ECR are largely, if not exclusively strategic. Why do we write? Here, it seems, primarily to satisfy our supervisors, seeking to secure or maintain jobs in those ‘greedy’ institutions called universities.

The question of publishing begs the question of writing, which in turn begs the question of addressee. Where are our audiences, and what is their durée? We have all seen those figures which make it clear that vast swathes of published papers are never read, and that the volume of publications increases exponentially.

So we now need to write to satisfy performance requirements, or to try to get a foot in the door. But there is at least one other addressee: our peers and others, beyond sociology and beyond the university. We have these other responsibilities, too, and these other cultures to cultivate. So, in terms of pragmatics, we need a dual strategy, writing, so to speak most days for money, but also on some fewer days for love. And at some point, I suggest, we need also to contemplate the possibility that we in addition write for ourselves. We should write because we have a need to write, to think through and with words on the page, not just in our heads. We should write because of the pleasure of the text, and because in writing we learn how to do it better, like art or craft.

Yet the institutional imperatives loom large. Is there a risk, in all this, that we will become not much more than institutional creatures, academics in the career sense rather than intellectuals? If we need a ‘history of sociology’, we also need a ‘sociology of sociology’: not new ideas. Even something as old fashioned as the sociology of professions, or of institutions a la Coser, might come in handy here. For if we look at other fields or disciplines, it is apparent that there is an overproduction of blog quality writing. As Mark Western observed in the previous Nexus, we need non-institutional norms and values to orient our research; or, as the earlier MW had it, we need to choose our gods, and we also need to apply the highest standards of scrutiny to what it is that we do ourselves.

We need a longer sense of our own historicity, and of the Weberian legacy encapsulated in the idea of unintended consequences, or that of the irrationality of rationality.

There is a raft of categories that we now apply gladly to everybody apart from ourselves – words like neoliberalism, individualisation, images of speed or accelerated modernity. The first two we already drill our students through: we also need to identify their presence in the university cultures that we inhabit. The third, speed, is also now receiving the attention it deserves, elsewhere in the work of Hartmut Rosa in Social Acceleration – A New Theory of Modernity, locally in the recent edited collection by Nick Osbaldiston, Culture of the Slow. Impulses like standardization and informationalisation are phenomena that we can readily identify outside the universities; why are we having so much trouble connecting up the dots between critical sociology and the transformation of the universities? How is it that we have come to know so much about McDonaldisation, and so little about our own universities?

We need, I think, to make some steps towards establishing something like a sociology of the universities. This would have to be a mobile project, for its objects, our institutions, are also moving. Maybe TASA could sponsor some senior and retired folks to do some groundwork on this. Maybe a collaborative ARC grant could employ some doctoral students on projects that could feed into these processes, and help to give critical sociology a shot in the arm at the same time.

What will we leave behind? It’s a question of some urgency, along with slower perennials like why do we write. We write, after some fashion or another, to change the world, or at least to bring influence to bear on how our audiences see it. The debate in these pages compels us, again, to revisit that nexus.
Introduction: Birth of the Sporting Nation

The media have turned sport events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup into global phenomena, but they have done so through the pivotal mobilisation of competitive nationalism. Before it became international sport had to become national, and national public and commercial media, in tandem with emergent sport governing bodies, played a key role in turning folk play into nationally organised competitive sport. Although major contemporary sports have a clearly global reach, they retain deep roots within individual nations. In short, what we today call sport – regular, rationalised physical play – is a social institution that is the product of modernity and of interaction with other major institutions of modernity, especially the capitalist economic apparatus, organized media and the nation state itself. The national context addressed in this paper is Australia – a country widely held to have a special affinity with sport and promoted as such by its own national government.

Sport and the ‘Nationing’ of Australia

It is not difficult to find official declarations of the elevated place of sport in Australian national culture, with one of the most explicit official articulations of sport to ‘Australianness’ to be found in Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond, the official information booklet for the citizenship test, which opens its section on ‘Australia’s identity’ with ‘Sport and recreation’, stating that:

Many Australians love sport and many have achieved impressive results at an international level.

We are proud of our reputation as a nation of ‘good sports’. Australian sportsmen and women are admired as ambassadors for the values of hard work, fair play and teamwork.

Although ascriptions of such universal affinity with sport in Australia can be challenged in various ways, not least by closer examination of actual sport participation, levels of obesity, and paid attendance at sports events, there can be little questioning its symbolic significance. Sporting mythologies are particularly potent because they vividly capture the nation both in motion and in contest, giving shape to its often formless abstraction; invite connotatively heroic war metaphors without, in usual circumstances, people actually dying; temporarily paper over the cracks of internal social division in the case of international sport, and stage manage many of those divisions as relatively harmless suburb, city, state and regional rivalries united by affiliation to a sporting code. This is, no doubt, a rather functionalist account of sport’s role in Australian society, but stressing its social solidaristic role simultaneously invokes its place in the dynamics of hegemonic power and conflict. What happens, we might ask, when the cosy routines of sport begin to unravel? If sport is indeed integral to national identity, does it then follow that a crisis of sport in Australia is also a crisis of Australian national identity?

Crisis and the Scandalous Sporting Nation

Crises of major institutions are generally difficult to contain because they are caught up in a web of relations with other institutions, so that a crisis in one institutional sphere is quickly transferred to another, which in turn affects other institutions. Then, through a series of feedback loops, problems originating in one domain mutually modify the conditions and practices in another. This interconnectedness explains the language of infection that pervades crisis talk, which is also prone to invest the discourse of institutional malaise with the frisson of scandal.

These major media moments draw in diverse audiences through the process of what Whannel calls “vortextuality” and may involve little more than the voyeurism and prurience of media spectacle. But their affective resonance is greater where there is a close or at least potential identification with them. As noted, sport is a readily available vehicle for identification with a national “way of
incidents, St Kilda player Clinton Jones set fire to so-called ‘dwarf entertainer’ Blake Johnston’s clothes during a Mad Monday celebration. The perpetrators of sport scandals are overwhelmingly men, just as they dominate the signification of nation, thereby demanding an analysis of the relationships between sport, gender and nation.

**Sport, the Masculinist Nation and Demographic Change**

The most prominent sports in Australia receiving most media coverage (and rights fees) are the male football codes and men’s cricket, enabling celebrated manifestations of masculinity to embody, literally, the nation. Thus, the image of nation that is produced and reproduced through sport is a predominantly masculinist one. Sport, especially male contact sport, can readily symbolise a masculinised nation by means of its compulsive resort to war metaphor. Apart from such hegemonically masculine alignments of sport and military combat, with its implied transference of responsibility for national defence from the soldier to the sportsman, sport’s commercial iconography is saturated with images of active sportsmen and of other men engaged in mundane sport-related activities, such as the group consumption of sponsored beer brands in heavily gendered advertisements.

Thus, here the nation as sovereign territory to be marked out, defended and celebrated, and as favoured way of life, is given a distinctly masculine flavour through its close association with sport. But this entanglement of sport, nation and masculinity becomes problematic when sport is felt to be in crisis. If the proposition is accepted that a crisis of sport is to some degree a crisis of national culture, and that both sport and nation are dominated by men, then it follows that sport scandals, especially when they involve transgressions such as violence against women, are also in part a crisis of masculinity.

But scandal is not the only pressure point regarding sport’s privileged place in Australian cultural life. Change to the demographic composition of Australia, and especially an increase in the numbers of people from Asia, challenges received notions of sport-based national identity. The position of Indigenous people and sport in relation to a ‘White Nation’ has long been a point of tension, and in a more culturally diverse Australia characterised by higher levels of Asian immigration, sport may not figure as prominently in the cultural landscape as it does, for example, among those of Anglo-Celtic or southern European backgrounds. There is a longstanding practice of using national sporting affiliation to demand loyalty to the Australian flag as a “test” of committed citizenship. The assumption in official proclamations that “Australians love sport” is not always benignly integrative. This official sanctioning of sport can also be a tool of exclusion, a subtle way of rendering “un-Australian” those who do not acquire the approved national cultural taste. Regarding the place of sport in Australian culture, it is apparent that the sport–nation nexus remains potent in the midst of social transformation – indeed, perhaps because of it.

**Conclusion: Public Sport Sociology**

In the 2013 Federal Election a new political force – the Australian Sports Party (motto ‘Supporting Australia’s sporting culture’) – appeared on the political stage. Its vision is “For every Australian who do not acquire the approved national cultural taste. Change to the demographic composition of Australia, and especially an increase in the numbers of people from Asia, challenges received notions of sport-based national identity. The position of Indigenous people and sport in relation to a ‘White Nation’ has long been a point of tension, and in a more culturally diverse Australia characterised by higher levels of Asian immigration, sport may not figure as prominently in the cultural landscape as it does, for example, among those of Anglo-Celtic or southern European backgrounds. There is a longstanding practice of using national sporting affiliation to demand loyalty to the Australian flag as a “test” of committed citizenship. The assumption in official proclamations that “Australians love sport” is not always benignly integrative. This official sanctioning of sport can also be a tool of exclusion, a subtle way of rendering “un-Australian” those who do not acquire the approved national cultural taste. Regarding the place of sport in Australian culture, it is apparent that the sport–nation nexus remains potent in the midst of social transformation – indeed, perhaps because of it.

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New Prime Minister Tony Abbott subsequently declared in a morning current affairs interview, “happy the country which is more interested in sport than in politics”. Once again, sport’s place in Australian national life has been affirmed. Although subjected to the forces of globalisation and transnationalism, sport remains resolutely wedded to nation – and with particular enthusiasm in Australia.
Sport and the nation have in common a cleavage between noble mythology and often-ignoble practice, with sport in much need of gender equity reform, and to come to terms with the changing nature of the nation that it is monotonously depicted as embodying. There are many topics I have not been able to discuss satisfactorily here: social class, femininity, sexuality, textuality, ability, mobility, political economy and so on. These all offer rich avenues for exploration. I have attempted to stimulate sociologically informed public debate on one of Australia’s most cherished and flawed social institutions, not to bury it as irredeemably oppressive or compromised. Given that we all have, willingly or otherwise, a stake in sport and nation, debating sport might be regarded as a civic duty. This is one game that we can all play with some knowledge and skill – and without recourse to metaphors of war.

There are major problems with online education, but there is room for improvement. What are your thoughts on Bergstrand and Savage’s findings? What are your observations of online learning versus face-to-face classes? Are there other factors at play that may influence online learning satisfaction? How might applied sociology improve online learning to better support the education and work outcomes of students?

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of course materials, pre-recording lectures and maybe hosting Q&A over email forums. These methods offer limited social engagement.

Traditional universities prefer to set up their own online learning systems. Perhaps this technology is also impeding student learning and satisfaction. Innovative teachers may use social media to manage student interaction, but this does not seem to be a standardised process. I see benefits of using Google Hangouts to improve online learning, but time will tell whether this technology and others like it will be integrated into online learning. Meanwhile, the methods for online teaching are having real-time impact on student learning – and judging by this study’s negative evaluations, this is not good.

Distinguished Service to Australian Sociology Award

Two TASA members will be presented with this Award at the conference dinner on Wednesday November 27th, 2013.

Outstanding Service to The Australian Sociological Association

One TASA member will be presented with this Award at the conference dinner on Wednesday November 27th, 2013.
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here are good reasons for sociologists, including postgraduates, to publish our research. Publishing is a way of making our research available to scholarly and public audiences and adding to the knowledge base in our fields. It enables us to acknowledge the public funding that supports university research and is, perhaps, a prerequisite to our work making any difference. As the ‘publish or perish’ catch phrase suggests, publishing is also an obligation for those seeking or in ongoing academic work (as discussed in some of our recent Nexus conversations).

Co-authorship with supervisors might be seen as an attractive option for a novice postgraduate. Is it the best or only option for postgraduates? If deciding to go down the co-authorship route, how should authoring decisions be made? Are there any dangers that postgraduates should be aware of? Many institutions have formal policies (and sometimes informal expectations) around authorship, but to what extent do these inform actual decisions and practices? For instance, the 2007 Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (section 5) states that being named as author requires that ‘a researcher must have made a substantial scholarly contribution to the work’ – specified as a combination of ‘conception and design of the project’, ‘analysis and interpretation of research data’ and ‘drafting significant parts of the work or critically revising it so as to contribute to the interpretation’ – and ‘be able to take responsibility for at least that part of the work they contributed’. (It also includes guidance and requirements on processes and responsibilities).

While solo-authored papers remain the ‘norm’ in sociology, the trend towards multiple authorship is evident. In their analysis of the Journal of Sociology papers through the decades presented at the 2010 TASA conference, John Germov and Tara Renae McGee (2010) found that 86 per cent of papers had single authors in the 1960s, down to 62 per cent in the 2000s. At the TASA health day in July 2013 (reported in Nexus 25:2), Evan Willis’s paper noted the trend towards multi-author papers in health sociology and raised the matter of co-authorship between supervisors and postgraduate students. There was lively discussion, including calls for guidelines, and various stories and views on co-authorship between supervisors and postgrads.

To foster discussion about experiences and views around postgraduate authorship and co-authorship in sociology, we invited TASA members to respond to any of a series of questions that were of relevance for this article. To encourage frank disclosure, answers have been de-identified. We are grateful to Alex Broom, Ashlin Lee, Dina Bowman, Gary Wickham, Kathryn Daley and our other anonymous respondents. In addition, some members elected to write short pieces about their experiences, which follow the responses below.

What is your experience of authoring, alone or with others, as a postgraduate student?
When I started my PhD I was very keen to publish, as being a postgraduate student for me was an active attempt to move from the Public Service to academia. As someone who came to academia with almost 20 years of professional experience, I found the unwritten rules about co-authorship confusing and complex. There appeared to be so many unspoken conventions surrounding the process and lots of conflicting advice. My enthusiasm and ambition in many ways made me vulnerable to exploitative practices, so much so, that now I only write papers with people that I deeply trust or are on the same level as I am – early career researcher or lecturer/senior lecturer.

As a postgraduate student, I was not encouraged nor invited to write papers with my supervisors. They appeared to be particularly focused on getting me to the end within the required time because of the funding surrounding outcome payments for completions. However, I did approach them on several occasions about publishing because it is critical for gaining full-time employment. On each of these occasions, I had automatically assumed that they would be co-authors, and I have to admit that this was probably my biggest mistake. In a number of instances, they provided little feedback and yet expected to be listed as an author. Initially I didn't have a problem with this but after a while I felt that this was exploitative. Primarily, I found that they had little understanding of my theoretical area and therefore were not forthcoming in contributing to the ideas.

The biggest learning curve for me has been my ability to distinguish between (1) someone who provides support and mentorship, (2) someone who...
has actively contributed to the development of the publication, and (3) someone who has provided brief and minimal comments. I now understand that it is really only the second category that should be listed as a co-author. In recent months, I have been fortunate to be mentored by a staff member in using the guidelines so that I can identify the difference. (early career sociologist A)

I published two articles as a postgrad – I did receive some mentoring from a senior academic who was not my supervisor and this was much appreciated. My supervisor showed no interest in co-authoring. (senior sociologist A)

My first article came from the findings of my Honours research and it was my supervisor who encouraged me to do this. I certainly would not have ever had the confidence to consider such a thing! We co-authored the paper and I found this process immensely helpful. To see that a very successful and well-published professor still drafts their papers over and over and ‘ums and ah’s about semi-colons made me see that good writing really is hard work. I know that everyone says that, but when you are starting out you are sure that you’re far less competent than even the most incompetent; so to see him labour over the nuances of a paper that he was only second author on liberated me to write imperfectly. At the end of the process, he said to me, ‘From now on, you do it on your own’, and I felt terrified. ‘How could I POSSIBLY ever do this on my own!!’ But then, I did. And then I did again. His apprenticeship model was a wonderful learning curve that gave me the skills, and probably more importantly, the confidence, to go it alone. (early career sociologist B)

I had started publishing before I commenced my PhD so went into it expecting to publish along the way. I do remember being devastated when the first solo journal article I submitted, based on my Honours work, was rejected. I thought at the time it must be unpublishable, but have since learned that papers which receive much harsher reviews sometimes go on to be published with work and the right journal fit. During my PhD, both my supervisors encouraged and supported me to publish and I think I took it for granted that I would be sole author and that my supervisors would be happy to provide advice and support (with which they were very generous). (early career sociologist C)

My first ever publication happened during my second year as a PhD student, in 1983. My supervisor, Lesley Johnson, was very supportive, but was not involved in researching or writing the piece. For reasons that I can only guess at 30 years later, I’d become convinced that it would be a good idea to send some of the work I was doing on Foucault and power to *Economy and Society*. Lo and behold it was accepted and published. I was, of course, extremely thrilled by this, though I had no idea that *E&S* was such a prestigious journal (to me it was an attractive journal because it was so interested in Foucault and in power, but I didn’t understand things like rankings, impact, etc., which in those days were matters of reputation alone, not formal measures). I also had no idea that my article would go on to be one of my most cited articles (with 83 citations the last time I looked); some people tell me it’s been downhill ever since; it’s hard to argue with them.

It’s clear to me now that I always had a commitment to the idea that postgraduate students are independent scholars pursuing their own projects (in 1983 this ‘commitment’ probably manifested itself as bloody mindedness on my part). I’ve never changed my mind on this issue. (senior sociologist B)

I had an extremely negative experience in my PhD candidacy in the realm of publications. There was no encouragement or invitation to publish at all throughout. I was not made aware of the value of publications to a PhD student who is trying to build a career in academia. Indeed, I was not encouraged or supported in any way to attend conferences. It was only through my membership in a postgraduate student group that I was encouraged to give a presentation. I think this may have been due to different motivations: not surprisingly, my supervisor prioritised satisfying the requirements of the research project (timing, outputs, etc.), while my own development was of secondary importance.

After completing the supervision relationship and the project dimension of the ARC, I later discovered (from a member of the organisation on which the study was based) that a published report was being circulated. When I got access to this report, I realised that I was not cited as either a co-author or contributor to the research despite the findings being based entirely on my empirical work. I imagine this constitutes academic misconduct, but by the time I was notified of the report my PhD was with examiners and I feared ‘making any waves’. I felt this way throughout my entire journey as a PhD student. (early career sociologist D)

**For supervisors, what is your experience of your postgraduate students authoring, alone or with you?**

I have co-authored one article with a student. We had a clear arrangement. I came up with the idea – she did most of the work and then I commented on the drafts and together we refined it. We agreed upfront what the roles would be and that her name would go first and I stuck to that agreement. (senior sociologist A)

I work in a context where supervisors co-authoring with their students is the norm. One of my postgrads routinely includes me and the other
supervisor on PhD-related papers – we have some role in shaping the papers, editing, etc, but in other contexts this might be simply acknowledged. I encourage this student also to publish alone and with others where appropriate. (early career sociologist C)

I have published two articles co-authored with one of my former PhD students, one article co-authored with another, I will be publishing a book with a third early next year, and I’ve had an article with a fourth knocked back (we may well return to it at some stage).

The fact that I’ve done no publishing with my postgrads while they are postgrads is not a matter of principle. Yes, I hold strongly to the idea that my postgrads are independent scholars working on their own projects, but this does not preclude me co-authoring with any current postgrad in the future should a mutually attractive joint project come along, etc. (the timing of co-authoring with them is the same as the timing with any other independent scholars – it’s a matter of both parties thinking it a good idea, both parties having the time and energy, and a number of other like variables, including happenstance; if these things lined up with someone who was my postgrad at the time I’d have no objection to giving it a whirl, but that hadn’t happened so far).

All this means that my experience of co-authoring with my postgrads has been overwhelmingly positive, just as it has been with my other co-authors (I should add that I’ve never co-authored in teams of more than two; me and one other person; approx 75% of my publications have been solo efforts, the other 25% with one other author).

As far as I recall, only one of my postgrads published by themselves while they were postgrads, but quite a lot of them were trying to publish pieces while they were finishing their theses and succeeded in their efforts soon after finishing.

In treating all my postgrads as independent scholars with their own projects I have always encouraged them to think of themselves as potentially published authors and I have mentored them in exactly the same way I mentor any colleague who seeks my advice about publishing. Again, I have only positive experiences in this area. (senior sociologist B)

**What (if any) do you consider the advantages of postgraduate students co-authoring with their supervisor(s)?**

In my experience, the biggest advantage is the additional feedback provided through the review process. The detailed comments were invaluable and enriched my PhD overall. I would definitely encourage postgraduates to try solo authorship. (early career sociologist A)

I think it is an excellent learning opportunity and forces the postgrad to articulate their arguments clearly and concisely. It also provides a bit of exposure and track record. (senior sociologist A)

Publish or perish. Well, so everyone keeps telling me … (early career sociologist B)

For many postgrads, part of the joy of a thesis is developing your own original project, research and thinking, in which case solo-authored publications can be a logical option. I think having some good solo-authored publications on a CV can also be helpful both in presenting the thesis to examiners and in presenting oneself as an independent scholar capable of undertaking research. (early career sociologist C)

To my way of thinking all good quality publishing is worthwhile, for both supervisors and postgrads, but because I regard them all as independent scholars pursuing their own projects I don’t see any special advantages for them in their capacity as supervisors or postgrads, nor do I see any special advantages to them to publishing jointly or solo; it’s the publishing that matters most. (senior sociologist B)

The support that a good supervisor can bring, guiding the student through the experience. (senior sociologist A)

The mentorship is invaluable – well, in my case. I have certainly heard of co-authorship not working as well and this is often due to IP (is the supervisor piggy-backing on the student’s research, or are they a legitimate contributor?) or due to communication breakdown. There needs to be really clear understanding and discussion as to who is doing what. (early career sociologist B)

At its best, co-authoring can be a genuine opportunity for research and intellectual partnership and synergistically produce a stronger piece of work. Supervisors with experience in publishing can also provide useful guidance about the process and how to write for journals and help develop the article to a point where it is publishable (and worthwhile) – in some cases an established co-author might also enhance the impact of the article. In employment or research contexts where teamwork is encouraged, having co-authored publications might be helpful. (early career sociologist C)

The same as publishing solo (see above). (senior sociologist B)

Are there any dangers to watch out for?

Universities’ constant push for publications makes postgraduate students very vulnerable to highly exploitative practices. I think that this becomes more intensified once you add into the mix the fact that most postgraduates now need at least five
publications either to secure some type of academic position or to have a chance at a DECA. Given this highly competitive environment, I would encourage most postgraduates to experiment with publications on their own, explore potential writing collaborations with other postgrads working in their area and, most importantly, to have confidence in your own ability to write. (early career sociologist A)

Very important to agree terms upfront: who is doing what; the time frames and processes and most important to agree authorship order. (senior sociologist A)

I would recommend doing it early in the candidature to test the waters. If it does lead to a breakdown in the student/supervisor relationship, you don’t want this to happen at the end. (early career sociologist B)

Situations where authorship (or for that matter non-authorship) is taken for granted, rather than based on contribution, can be problematic and exploitative. (early career sociologist C)

I have to admit to being very worried about the new trend by which universities seem to be seeking to have their humanities and social science supervisors and postgrads follow the model long followed by the sciences and psychology, whereby the projects of postgrads are regarded as the projects of their supervisors and both sides to the arrangement are encouraged (forced?) to jointly publish as much of their projects as possible.

If it works for them, fine, that’s their business. But it’s not a model like for the humanities and social sciences. Obviously, from what I’ve said above, I think individual scholarship is at the heart of the humanities and social sciences. I have no objection to genuine voluntary co-authoring arrangements between supervisors and postgrads (or between any academics), but I very much dislike the idea of making such arrangements mandatory. It may well increase each university’s published output dramatically, but for me it would be Taylorising the humanities and social sciences, and in doing so diminishing them. (senior sociologist B)

Aside from conflicting agendas, I guess most dangers would relate to a breakdown in communication. This is probably a key source of upset and dispute. I do feel that having an ‘active’ co-supervisor is crucial, but this needs to be someone who does not have a conflict of interest. If it is a colleague who already works closely with the main supervisor this could be problematic.

It is hard to offer recommendations. By the time I needed support from more ‘objective’ parties such as the Student Union or an internal mediator, the situation had reached crisis point. If I had to do it differently, perhaps I would have been diligent with recording discussions and emails, and ensuring everything was captured in writing. This is challenging when, traditionally, the relationship between a supervisor and PhD student is not so formal (which has its advantages and disadvantages). It would help if the university set out and insisted on the implementation of more rigorous documentation practices, which would encourage greater accountability and transparency. (early career sociologist D)

**In your view/experience does it make a difference if a PhD candidate is working on an ARC-funded (or similar) project where the supervisor is a Chief Investigator? If so, what are the important considerations, e.g. around ownership of data, publication (during and beyond the grant), authorship and order?**

Yes, it matters. I have found the ARC process fraught with difficulties and the ownership of data is highly problematic. Recently I witnessed what I suspect was bullying by a senior professor. The lead CI believed that they owned the project, had total control to decide what data could be used and how. One of the postgrads on the project received an external invitation to participate in a similar project that would have led to employment but was forced to decline the offer as the lead CI suggested that it would amount to ‘stealing intellectual property’. I felt that this was extremely unfair, particularly given that the postgraduate student had undertaken extensive research on the project, providing the proposal’s background and key research questions for the successful proposal, much of which came from their previous professional work. Further, they had undertaken this work with little pay, working far beyond anything that they were paid. (early career sociologist A)

Not really – these discussions still need to be had. (senior sociologist A)

I think this is where things could get very blurred. It could also go very well, but one ought to err on the side of caution. Open communication is essential; however, the reality is that there is a very significant power imbalance between student and supervisor, which can limit this. (early career sociologist B)

Never having had any ARC funding I can’t comment on this one. (senior sociologist B)

**Are there any guidelines or processes you make use of in deciding about co-authorship?**

It’s based on an assessment of who does the most work and makes the greatest intellectual contribution. Should be alphabetical unless this would mask the contribution of authors. (senior sociologist A)

I would only ever co-author with someone I was very, very, VERY, comfortable in communicating honestly with. (early career sociologist B)
As I said above, I think the only guidelines are those that would apply to any co-authoring arrangements between independent scholars. (senior sociologist B)

**Any other comments or advice?**

Make sure the agreements are in writing! – an email is all that is needed. (senior sociologist A)

It can be a very rewarding experience, but be thoughtful. (early career sociologist B)

**Ashlin Lee, PhD candidate, University of Tasmania**

I am pleased, and very grateful, to find that my experiences of co-authorship have been overwhelmingly positive, and reflect many aspects of completing a PhD generally in my opinion. Although as PhD students we often bring a general sense of what needs to be done with a prospective article, the process of refining this into a legible (and purposeful) piece of academic writing is intellectually challenging, and personally uncertain. Questions of authenticity, ability, and direction are already in play before a single word has been typed! Having a supportive supervisor provides a means of addressing the many uncertainties and difficulties that come from being a first-time author. My experience of co-authorship reflects how this process can be professionally and personally rewarding, developing important skills for PhD candidates that benefit us in doctoral journeys.

This positive, mentored experience of writing would not be possible without strong and trusting relationships with our supervisors. As students, we are to a certain extent unaware of the topography of writing and publishing; I was very surprised at the quasi-political manoeuvrings relating to the selection of a journal, impact factor, and what publishing in certain journals might mean for any possible career. This understandable lack of awareness leaves us vulnerable to becoming lost or even misguided, without even the recognition that we are in such a position. It saddens me to hear of negative and possibly exploitive writing relationships between PhD candidates and supervisors or senior co-authors, as this speaks to an overwhelming breach of trust. If you cannot trust your supervisory team to help you in your journey, then it begs the question as to what positive aspects you are seeking from a PhD, because so much of working on a PhD relies on your own ability being mentored and developed. The many unspoken yet defining aspects of the PhD experience, such as networking, rely heavily on a supervisor's support. So we place a great deal of trust in our supervisor to steer us in the right direction. Trust provides the foundation for frank and open discussion on authorship (i.e. who is first author), the workload, the roles, and overall the shaping of the prospective article.

It does not mean, however, a blind acceptance of your co-author's advice within the writing process. An important element of writing, especially in the co-authored environment, is making judgements on the article itself. I was first author in my article and although I accepted nearly all of the advice of my supervisor, I was required to make decisions based on my intentions with the article. This can be a somewhat conflicting experience, especially if it involves disagreement with a co-author. The positive resolution of such a scenario again relies on trust. Avoiding conflict for fear of sanction by your supervisor does not help develop your abilities, or the article as a whole, and you need to trust in the quality of the writing (and, overall) relationship.

In summation, I am thus blessed, and eternally grateful, for the unwavering support of my supervisory team, in particular my primary supervisor, Dr Peta Cook. Not only has the writing process been uniformly positive, it has also provided me with an opportunity to develop my own writing skills, and the courage to attempt to tackle sole-authored articles (as I am now doing). Co-authorship then has been a good experience, founded on a supervisory relationship that features a great degree of trust. Without this trust in my mentorship, I cannot imagine that my experience of co-authorship would be as positive.

**Alex Broom, Associate Professor of Sociology and ARC Future Fellow, UQ**

Co-authoring with postgraduate students can be a rather controversial issue in sociology while in many other disciplines it is viewed as everyday practice. Medicine is a prime example. Recently I heard an academic in the social sciences joke that everyone including “the cleaner” gets authorship on medical publications. The insinuation is that authorship is thrown around without due process. I disagree with this perspective. Multiple authorship reflects the requirements of the field, including the importance of the team and the range of roles required to do a project from start to finish. However, I’m not writing in defence of medicine here; rather, this comment is interesting to me because it reflects a broader and persistent stigmatisation that exists within certain facets of the humanities and social sciences regarding joint publication – particularly, joint authorship between supervisor and student. Why is this the case and does it reflect a legitimate or a spurious concern? I suspect the latter and I have a few thoughts on why.

It remains the case that many of our senior academics came of age (academically) in a context where ‘publishing pressure’ was not as acute as it is today. Furthermore, it was a context where you could emerge as a PhD student with a doctorate and get a job, then publish. Well, those were the days. But they are gone now and unfortunately some
overflow of good intentions has occurred. One such principle is that the fewer authors the better; moreover, that the true illustration of scholarly worth is doing something as a sole author. While one can merely ignore differences when they are between academics, such mythologies of purity/quality are now impinging on doctoral work. Universities are now offering theses by publication across all disciplines and we are beginning to see students in sociology opt for this genre of thesis writing. Thesis publications may be sole-authored or co-authored with a supervisor (most universities have a formal policy requiring at the very least a combination). This raises questions, according to some in the scholarly community, about the validity of a doctoral student’s original contribution, as well as the piggybacking of academics on their RHD students, particularly in an era of pressure for publication output. While the reality is more like a marathon relay (often with a lot of dropping the baton on both sides) than piggybacking, the rhetoric of ‘worth’ and ‘exploitation’ has interesting and sometimes destructive effects.

I have a mix of doctoral students, with the majority doing traditional theses and a minority doing theses by publication. The reality is that there are benefits and limitations of both approaches, and in fact, theses by publication are on balance probably more work for students and for supervisors. Despite what is sometimes suggested – and usually by those who have never supervised in this genre – supporting the process of a thesis by publication is a challenging and time-consuming process (albeit a valuable one). It would be much easier simply to publish one’s own data and ideas. Yes, there are academics who have poor supervision practices and lean inappropriately on their students, but that is a professional and staffing problem, not an issue with the thesis genre. Further, it’s irrelevant to the value and potential of co-publishing and the thesis-by-publication format. The point is to teach an important process that can be a valuable outcome of doctoral training and potentially assist the student in years to come. A thesis is still produced – the notion of four papers bound together and a shortcut to a PhD and multiple publications for the supervisor is a myth. What is incredibly useful is (a) external reviewers giving feedback on chapters as the thesis is written; (b) the confidence that getting published can provide within the PhD process, and (c) development of a track record that can lead to employment.

In sum, one should, in my view, strongly encourage independent writing, thinking and publication, but also assist where useful and needed. I think one of the reasons some academics within the humanities and social sciences are not comfortable with co-authoring is that it dilutes the idea of the ‘brilliant individual thinker’ and inserts the notion of a team. While a PhD student needs to learn the trade, and emerge as a scholar in his or her own right, take a look at how many grants are given to ‘brilliant individual thinkers’ these days by the ARC. As they say, there is no I in team, and as we know, there are no jobs without publications.

The TASA Best Paper Award for the Journal of Sociology (JoS) is a biennial process that uses academic peer review to select papers of outstanding quality published in JoS. The prize is awarded to the paper judged by the panel to be the best published in the previous two years of the Journal of Sociology. Symposia or parts of symposia, replies or rejoinders, notes and book reviews (but not review essays) are excluded from consideration. Eligible papers for the 2014 JoS Best Paper Award will include those appearing in the eight issues of JoS (including special editions) published during 2012 and 2013.

The 2014 recipient will be announced at the 2014 Conference Dinner.
We are colleagues from our postgraduate days at Swinburne University and, most importantly, we share similar views and work well together. (Our only point of difference is in our choice of AFL teams!) We have wide-ranging networks, both within and outside sociological circles and academe, which we feel will be of benefit in our role as Co-Editors of Nexus. In addition, we both have editorial experience and an appreciation of the needs and complexities of what it takes to produce a quality newsletter. We are also passionate about Australian Sociology and the work of TASA (we are current financial members, have presented at TASA conferences and are members of thematic groups).

Our vision is to maintain and enhance the high standard of Nexus. To this end, Kirsten Harley will retain a role as transitional editor, which we are grateful for. It is also our intention to continue the work done by Nick and Kirsten to develop conversations around issues of importance to the sociological community in Australia. This includes interviews with high-profile sociologists and high impact low-profile sociologists. In addition, because we both work in areas of sociology that are not mainstream, our vision is to highlight the diversity of sociological endeavour in Australia, both within and beyond academe, thus providing a unique viewpoint and one which is becoming increasingly relevant within sociology today.

To this end, our first edition next year will feature articles by Dr Peter Robinson and Dr Wendy Scaife. Peter is a lecturer, sociologist and author, whose research interests include ageing, sexuality and social justice. Peter’s second book, Gay Men’s Relationships across the Life Course was published in June 2013 (Palgrave Macmillan). Wendy is a senior research fellow and formerly state CEO of a major health non-profit organisation and its national Deputy CEO. Her recent work includes a look at print media portrayals of giving (with Katie McDonald) and the philanthropic capacity to support Indigenous causes (with Susan Smyllie). Wendy’s research interests include motivations and barriers to high net worth giving, culture of giving and best practice fundraising. We invite additional contributions from a diverse range of non-traditional perspectives. We look forward to seeing you at the TASA conference – be sure to come up and say hello!
Christopher Baker is a Research Fellow in the Asia-Pacific Centre for Social Investment and Philanthropy (ACSIP) at the Faculty of Business and Enterprise, Swinburne University of Technology. He is passionate about the contribution of private citizen resources to the public good. In his research role at ACSIP Christopher seeks to draw on theoretical understandings and an array of practical experience.

His research interests focus on charitable giving from personal estates, diversity and diaspora giving, and high net worth philanthropy.

Christopher’s prior career as an executive manager and Director includes over 25 years of experience in leading people and managing change across not-for-profit, public and private sectors, from manufacturing to employment services. Christopher’s experience includes working for the ANZ Bank in human resources roles at Group Headquarters in Melbourne from 1996 to 2003; and nine years on the Board of The Salvation Army Employment Plus. He is also on the editorial board of the *The Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business & Government*.

In addition to being a member of TASA, Christopher Baker is a member of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organization and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA); the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR); and the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP). He is also an associate member of the Fundraising Institute Australia (FIA) and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD).

Sue Malta is a Research Fellow at the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI), which is affiliated with the University of Melbourne and Royal Freemasons Homes Victoria, where she works on a number of applied research projects involving older adults, health, community and aged care. She was also recently appointed as Adjunct Research Fellow at Swinburne University. Sue is a sociologist with interests in late life sexuality, health and technology and, slightly tangentially, social connectedness and social isolation, relocation and acculturation. She is particularly interested in the notion that older adults are not supposed to be sexual beings. Recent publications include an invited chapter in a qualitative research methods book (*Researching Later Life and Ageing - Expanding Qualitative Research Horizons*, Palgrave Macmillan 2012). She was a plenary speaker at last year’s Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) national conference in Brisbane and a keynote speaker at this year’s South Australian AAG conference.

Until recently, Sue was Managing Editor/Editor of the online journal, the *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society* (*IJETS*) a post she held for six years. Her prior experience is considerable. She was Executive Officer for TASA, where she oversaw the relocation of the office from Queensland to Melbourne; she worked as a tutor and occasional lecturer at Swinburne University and undertook various research projects in academia, local government and community health. She has held administrative roles across a range of academic and corporate institutions. She has also lived in the USA, where she was the owner of a business that provided social support services for the partners and families of personnel relocating from all over the world.

In addition to being a member of TASA, Sue Malta is a member of the Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG), Council of the Ageing (COTA), the International Association of Relationship Research (IARR) and the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR).
**Postgraduate Corner**

**Karen Soldatic**  
UNSW, TASA Postgraduate Representative

First, I would like to thank Kirsten and Nick for organising the article in this edition on publication and co-authorship with your supervisors. While many of us have benefited from the opportunities provided via co-authorship, there is no doubt that the area of supervisory co-authorship is fraught with difficulties and there are far too many stories that reflect this. On that note, I would also like to thank Kirsten and Nick on behalf of TASA Postgrads for their role as editors of *Nexus* over the last couple of years. From my perspective as postgraduate representative, they have provided extensive support to ensure that PG issues are raised in each publication. So a BIG thank you from me – you have both been great to work with!

The preparations for the Annual Postgraduate Day are almost finalised. We have had a heap of interest from you all and it looks as though it will be a full house. This year’s focus is a little different to previous years in that we are examining employment for postdoctoral researchers beyond the academe. We have decided to do this for two reasons. The first is that many of you have let us know that you are not necessarily interested in moving into a university teaching or research position upon completion of your studies, because you have more ‘applied ambitions’. Secondly, as many of you are aware, the successful transition to full-time, secure, decent work within the academy has become more difficult over recent years. On this front, you will be pleased to know that Professor Marian Simms, Executive Director, Social Behavioural and Economic Sciences, Australian Research Council, will be opening the day and will provide an overview to us about ECR development. The full program is here at this link: [http://www.tasa.org.au/uploads/2013/09/PG-day-flyer.pdf](http://www.tasa.org.au/uploads/2013/09/PG-day-flyer.pdf)

In developing the day’s program, we have been working in close contact with the Applied Sociology Thematic Group. Alan Scott, the Convenor, has been a great support and has been critical in tracking down applied sociologists who have successfully navigated the employment path. We also have a range of employers attending as panel discussants. These employers all are engaged in forms of sociological research, from contracted work responding directly to requests by clients to research for policy advocacy, service delivery and design. The aim of this session will be to give you some insight into what employers’ expectations are of sociology practitioners; how to position your CV when applying for this kind of position; and how to draw upon your own research to position you within the non-university employment market.

One of the key areas that we will be pursuing over the coming 18 months is the development of pathways from academia to employment – both inside and outside academe. Outside of this year’s conference Postgrad Day, other opportunities will be explored to encourage greater dialogue on this issue. This work will be undertaken with the support of the new Postgraduate National Subcommittee, who are also particularly concerned about the future of sociology in Australia for emerging sociologists.

I would like to welcome Ashlin Lee (University of Tasmania) and Ly Phan (University of Sydney) as members to the new sub-committee. You’ll get the chance to meet the new Sub-Committee members because they will be chairing a number of the sessions on the Postgrad Day. The new TASA PG Sub-Committee held its first meeting, via teleconference, in August. This exciting new initiative has been designed to provide greater support to TASA Postgrads through advancing a range of developmental opportunities such as research master classes, training and mentoring. I look forward to working with Ly and Ashlin in pursuing a range of strategies to support TASA Postgrads and establishing a vibrant sociology postgrad community across Australia.

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**2013 Jean Martin Award**

The winner of the 2013 JMA Award will be announced at the conference dinner on Wednesday November 27th, 2013.
Ly Phan - member of the new PhD sub-committee

Ly Phan is currently a PhD student at the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Sydney. She holds a Bachelor degree from Vietnam and a Master degree from the University of Washington, USA, both in Sociology. Before continuing her PhD education, she had been working as a researcher at the Institute of Sociology in Vietnam. She is also an Endeavour Award holder and a Harvard-Yenching alumna.

Ly’s research interests include demography, gender equality, migration and urbanization in Vietnam and Southeast Asian region. She is working on her thesis, “Women's Empowerment and Fertility Changes in Southeast Asia”, which focuses on how women's empowerment indicators affect their actual fertility decision, and consequently the amazing fertility decline in Southeast Asia. Ly joins the TASA Postgraduate sub-committee with the hope to bring postgraduate sociology students nationwide together and to build an extended network for academic exchanges on a regular basis, not just once a year at the TASA conference. The network will be a good place for students to look for others with similar research interests, and potentially great research partners in the future. Hopefully, it will also increase postgraduates’ job seeking opportunities once they complete their program.

Ashlin Lee - member of the new PhD sub-committee

My PhD explores the role of the latest generation of mobile technologies, such as smartphones and tablets, in the lives of their users. Of particular interest are the implications and experiences of using a device that is convergent, combining previously separate digital functionalities in a single device, and its impacts on areas such as communication, surveillance, and personal relationships. I am also interested in how technology acts to mediate social relationships. I wanted to be a part of the postgrad subcommittee because, as an aspiring sociologist, I am growing increasingly concerned about the future of our discipline, and the opportunities that are available both for the emerging scholars of my generation, and for sociology more generally. I feel that sociology has a tremendous amount to offer society and the issues it faces, yet our voice and profile seems strangely weak in the discussion of these issues and their solutions. Concurrently, there are growing concerns among us students that our future careers may be killed off before they have even started. I don’t know what can be done to combat these issues, but what I do know is that I wish to contribute in some way to rectifying them.

2013 Conference Postgraduate Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to:

- Cathrin Bernhardt (Jerzy Zubrzycki) - La Trobe
- Andrew Gilbert - La Trobe
- Amy MacMahon - University of Queensland
- Ashlin Lee - University of Tasmania
- Bronwyn Moore - University of Tasmania
- Toni McCallum - University of Newcastle

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Kirsten: Hello. We're coming to the end of quite a fun ride as co-editors of Nexus. You've been doing it for ...

Nick: Three and a half years – but who's counting? I came in with Brad and Priscilla in 2010, then a year with Peta Cook and then two years with you.

Kirsten: And you seem to be relatively busy at the moment. Do you want to tell me about the service you're doing, how you're filling your time?

Nick: How do I fill in my time? [Laughter] That's an interesting question. Well, I'm currently co-editing Nexus with you which is probably the most enjoyable aspect of working with TASA sometimes. On top of that, I am working at, obviously, the conference which I dragged two of my colleagues from Clayton Campus into, Catherine Strong and Helen Forbes-Mewett. And that's probably taking up most of the time at the moment.

Kirsten: How much of a typical week do you reckon that's taking up?

Nick: Well, when we first started it was not that bad and we kind of felt like we were cruising and then we hit this mad rush at one point with all the papers having to be dealt with, constantly getting emails from members, which is fine, part of the job. But we're also trying to organise all sorts of other things like programs. So on average, we're supposed to have one day a week of doing research, but I (can only speak for myself) think I'm spending that one day a week doing this, unfortunately, plus all the emails we're currently responding to.

Kirsten: So are you on a 40/40/20 [40% research, 40% teaching, 20% service] model?

Nick: Yes, we're on a 40/40/20 at Monash. I don't know what it will be in the new Federation University model ... but the 20% is not covering the service that I have to do right now. But that's fine, and in a sad sadistic kind of way, I'm kind of enjoying working on the conference ... It's been challenging and at times you want to throw the towel in a little bit, but it's been good. That's probably taken up most of the time, but I have been doing a fair bit of work in my other role as chair of the public engagement committee.

Kirsten: So this is part of your role on the TASA executive.

Nick: Yes. So on that I've been trying to get down and talk with some of the associations in charge of the secondary school teaching of sociology in Victoria, trying to figure out what the other ones across the country are. Not many schools teach sociology but it's always good to think about social science in general. We've been talking to The Conversation about getting a series of articles in around November, to coincide with the conference, which may or may not happen. We're thinking about other ways that we can get engaged. We had a TASA working group more recently to look at social media and what we could do to increase our presence there and we've got some pretty good ideas. There's a lot of talk about content creation these days, and I think especially for academics, content creation is quite difficult to do in a public sphere where you've got to constantly be working on other stuff.

We (the working group) have talked about content mobilisation more than anything else, which is quite a good idea, I think. That's using stuff that's already existing out there and linking it over to the website, using social media to advertise that, Twitter, and whatever else. A lot of people are sold on that idea, I think, especially people like Deborah Lupton. I must admit I'm a bit cautious, because I always see social media, especially something like Twitter, as only being engaged by a certain section of the population. So we're looking for other avenues where we can do public sociology.

Kirsten: Through other publics and other audiences?

Nick: Yeah, other publics. Mike Michael made that point, last year, in our culture and theory session at the conference and I think he's right. There are other ways you can get into the public. And when I was talking to David Inglis in the UK, he made the point, that we can probably easily get into something like The Guardian and here in Australia you can probably easily get into The Guardian online or something like that, but the most-read newspaper in..."
the country is the Herald Sun, so how does sociology get a piece in that? So, anyway, this is stuff that we have to think about, I think, a bit more, but it starts off small, and then grows big, I think.

**Kirsten:** One of my former PhD colleagues, Kate Huppatz, now at UWS, had her research on the front page of The Sun-Herald a few months ago. It was work on classed attitudes towards mothering – it wasn’t labelled as a piece of sociology, but it clearly was.

**Nick:** Yes, the Herald Sun is not exactly always the evil paper that everybody probably thinks it is. There are some decent journalists there. It’s certainly not comparable to the Daily Mail in the UK, I think they’re totally different papers. But still, there are some moments where you just shake your head at something like the Daily Tele, and think … do we want to publish in The Daily Telegraph? I don’t know.

**Kirsten:** There’s also the issue of the extent of control in how academic work is portrayed when engaging with journalists and papers. Although the same happens with journals, I guess …. Anyway, back to the question of service, are you doing anything else that’s more connected to your university?

**Nick:** Now that’s another kettle of fish altogether. We are in the transition from being part of Monash University to Federation University Australia. I don’t know if you’ve seen the ads – it’s probably come up more in Victoria than anywhere else. So that is requiring a heck of a lot of effort on a lot of people’s behalf. I’ve been asked to conduct or be involved with a few things, one of which is an assessment working group, which sounds a bit mundane and silly, but the problem that we have is that Ballarat University has much different assessment requirements than Monash University does, so we have to somehow come to a workable arrangement because next year we will have both Monash University students and Federation University students in the same classroom. So this is going to be an exceptionally long task, I think.

There’s also all the other sort of requirements. We’re currently looking into how we’re going to adopt a new research plan, new research targets, staff arrangements – because staffing is changing, we’re losing a chunk of our staff, unfortunately – so that’s basically ongoing … And it’s going to get even worse next year, unfortunately, because next year is our transitional year and we’ll probably have to work out a whole range of kinks in the system. So that’s what I’m doing.

**Nick:** So I suppose I might return that question, what service are you currently doing with TASA?

**Kirsten:** I have quite a modest load by comparison. I’ve basically been editing Nexus with you this year, so…

**Nick:** Yes, but you have been doing a lot of that work

**Kirsten:** Well, it’s a team effort, and as you say that’s actually been really fun, which I might talk about a bit more later. In the couple of years before that, I was co-convening the TASA teaching sociology group with Kris Natalier, which was also fun. And we were on the TASA group that set up the threshold learning outcomes for sociology, which was a bit of work, but really interesting and with some great people. And I’m on the TASA Executive in my Nexus role. So that’s it – obviously, I’ve had to wind back a bit this year. As you know, I was diagnosed with motor neurone disease earlier this year, so I’m actually now working about a three-day week, in effect, just to kind of manage the array of health care appointments and getting tired very quickly. Yes, that’s what I’m doing. And in terms of university service, not terribly much at the moment, just little tiny ad hoc things rather than anything particularly defined.

**Nick:** Well, with the teaching thematic group, it’s not the biggest group, but how did you find that…?

**Kirsten:** No, it’s not and it’s interesting because there’s a sense in which convening a thematic group is service, but it was also about teaching, and as some of my research is about the discipline of sociology, the history of sociology, and uses teaching materials to examine that – I think my service/research/teaching categories are not very clear, they kind of blur together quite readily.

With the thematic group, Kris and I co-edited a special issue of the Journal of Sociology that’s coming out soon on teaching sociology, which came out of the service but was really a researchy job, I guess. Quite fun, very interesting. First time I’d been in that kind of editor role …

**Nick:** I think it’s interesting to see how much teaching sociology has come onto the scene, and I’m wondering if that’s a relationship to the greater emphasis that seems to be coming through on teaching these days.

**Kirsten:** It’s interesting, I think, in terms of universities – when you think about the workload model that we operate under, 40% research, 40% teaching, 20% service – my sense is that the unspoken, or maybe spoken, assumption is that really what universities are most interested in is research. They need you to teach, they need you to be on committees, but what’s
really rewarded, what's valued, is research. But yeah, I'm kind of wondering if teaching is being seen as maybe a bit more valuable these days. It might well be that with MOOCs and the idea of a possible new teaching world there's an impetus towards thinking about how do universities respond to that and how do they make the classroom experience a valuable one?

**Nick:** Yeah, it's a good point. There seems to be a lot of people that are getting these teaching and learning positions across universities these days. Having said that, you are right, in some respects, research is pretty much a fundamental thing that attracts universities to particular academics. But, you know, University of Ballarat, for instance, is far more inclined towards teaching than anywhere else. They've got a lot of awards for teaching...

**Kirsten:** Well, Sydney has, you know, faculty-level and institutional-level teaching awards, too, so you know, there is that sense in which excellent teaching is valued. And now that I think about that, that PhD alumni award I got from the University of Sydney was also partly about service – contribution to the community – as well as the academic research side. And those things should be valued.

**Nick:** But I do think, with the 20% for service, I don't know how much they really value that service. Something that struck me from Robert van Krieken's article in the ISA newsletter was trying to create pathways to recognise people and their work, because I don't think service is going to get you promotions. I can't be certain about that, maybe that's different for different universities, but you wouldn't get a promotion to senior lecturer with Monash University just because you worked on a conference, for instance. So that's quite interesting to note, in some respects, while they were quite keen for us to do 20%, it's less clear that they're going to recognise that work.

**Kirsten:** One of the issues is the amount of time formally allocated to teaching. I know there are some academics who've been teaching a long time who can do good teaching in the amount of time that's allocated, but I think lots of people spend more time on marking, more time on preparing, more time on engaging with students than officially fits into two days a week or the equivalent. But basically all, or most, of the things that we do are enjoyable – certainly most of the things I do as an academic I enjoy doing. With the MND diagnosis this year I've had to think deeply about what I want to do – in some ways what I want to do with my life, and with my limited energy – and I have realised that teaching and research and working on Nexus have been things I've wanted to keep doing while I can … So we're pretty lucky in many ways, and we put the time in.

**Nick:** People often comment that you need to be careful what you say “yes” to, because there are no rewards really for service – unless you get an award from TASA, which tends to be really for those people with longstanding commitment. And it's not going to do that much for your career-wise, but I suppose in some ways it's more of a personal reward, isn't it?

**Kirsten:** Yeah, and for me part of that's about becoming more a part of the community, the sociological community; so the people – you know, working with you, making those connections with other sociologists around Australia – and that's actually quite rewarding. I feel really lucky about the colleagues I've been able to work alongside, not just at my own university, and the friends I've made. And for obvious reasons I'm not particularly focused on my career as such these days, but it's probably easier to build a career when you're part of the community, well established and networked, than when you're not, as well as it being more fun.

**Nick:** Yeah, I think that's been one of the rewarding aspects of working for TASA. I'm not really an overly career-minded person in some respects, maybe sometimes people mistake me for that because of the work I do, but I do enjoy working with other people, meeting new sociologists and working to enhance the discipline, which is why I was pretty keen to take on the public engagement role and work towards getting it more recognised in the country. We're a country that doesn't have much recognition of sociology but it has been good to connect with other people, make new friends and colleagues, I suppose, more than anything. But I'm wary, also, this year, I mean, you're in a different circumstance than I am, obviously, but I've also become very wary of how much I commit myself to.

**Kirsten:** You are incredibly committed!

**Nick:** I'm quite sad in a way to give up Nexus but I think I'm also slightly relieved in a way, because I also find the research that I do very rewarding personally, and it also helps me find new colleagues around the world. But I feel as though I've concentrated too much on service and not much on research. But having said that, there's an inextricable link between the two in some ways that the more service you do, the more people you get to know, the more opportunities that arise for you to get connected with people doing the same research as you. For instance, it was only through Brad West – who first invited me to start working on Nexus – that I got to know a UK colleague of mine who I’m writing with now.

In some ways I owe my career to Brad – although he's not the only one that's influenced my career by any stretch – but he was the one that sort of
introduced me to TASA service, although I was kind of already one of the convenors of the cultural sociology thematic group before that.

**Kirsten:** Yeah, so when did you join TASA? How did you get involved?

**Nick:** I joined TASA in 2006, as a PhD student, and then I became convenor of the cultural sociology thematic group with Catherine Strong, Luke Howie, Michael Walsh and Kate Maher in about 2008, and we thought that Brad and Eduardo de la Fuente had done such a good job that we really needed to continue on with that, so we really tried to do as much as we possibly could ... Running a thematic group, as you know, is a much different animal to doing actual service for TASA, in some ways. But, like Nexus really, what you can do relies upon how much your members are willing to commit to it. And in some ways they’re less willing to commit to thematic group stuff.

**Kirsten:** I think we found that with some aspects of the Teaching Sociology group, but then we had these wonderful surprises, like the workshop we had the day after the TASA conference last year. The numbers weren’t huge and we were all tired at the end of the conference, but we had fabulous people in a room together, giving great papers, and it was really wonderful, exciting, inspiring to spend a day having deep focused conversations about teaching.

**Nick:** When Peta and I started working together on Nexus, it took us a long time to be able to get people interested in getting back into the newsletter again. And I think a lot of it has to do with the reformatting of it – which people like Roger Wilkinson and Sally Daly have done a lot of work on – and the change of structure but also the change in what we wanted Nexus to be. So Peta and I had this vision of making it more commentary-orientated, but it wasn’t really until you and I took it over that probably it started becoming a bit more like that.

**Kirsten:** There was that great piece you two did on ERA in 2011.

**Nick:** That was one of our first efforts to try and do that and it illustrated to us what we could do. And I think the future’s very bright if Nexus keeps doing that, because the public isn’t so interested in reading a seven-page article about some sociological research that someone has done with that kind of sociological language; what they are interested in is when people write comments about what’s going on at the moment, perhaps the Victorian bushfires, and to speak sociologically about that, but no-one ever responded. But now I suppose we’ve learned from our mistakes and come to realise that people want to comment more about what’s going on in the education sector and the other sectors where we work as sociologists, more than anything.

**Kirsten:** Do you have any advice to “youngsters”, unlike us “oldsters” …

**Nick:** I’m still a youngster, apparently.

**Kirsten:** Me too in that ECR sense – but what’s your advice about how to make a start on service?

**Nick:** There are two examples I can talk on. It’s really interesting that, in this country, there is little interest in running or being involved in thematic groups, whereas in the US, if you became an ASA section convenor, it’s a big prestige and honour. Jeffrey Alexander, for instance, was a convenor of the ASA’s cultural sociology section at the same time I was one of the convenors of the Australian version. I kind of felt a little bit out of my depth! It seems to me that there’s little interest in working with TGs in Australia, but we also seem to have a declining interest of ECRs trying to get involved with TASA; mind you we have a good group too. I don’t know why that is, but I wonder if it’s to do with advice that they’re getting from various avenues suggesting that it’s not necessarily worthwhile doing that for your future career prospects. But I would actually argue the opposite to that. Not all of TASA
is about some sort of philanthropic, devoting your full time and energy to TASA. It's also about being able to get your name out there and network with other people so once you start getting involved with others then, yeah, I think that's one of the benefits of doing service.

But I would suggest also that one of the things we need to do in sociology is pull together more. We really need to start, as Robert said, rewarding each good act in sociology. But I think it starts at the top. We need to increase the number of people interested in operating in working groups, committees. At the moment we go back to the usual suspects every time, which is not a bad thing, but after a while you've got to wonder how many times the usual suspects will turn around and say, actually, I'm kind of over this now.

**Kirsten:** It's interesting, though, because I joined TASA as an undergrad. I was doing my undergrad in sociology as an external student while I was working full time and so I didn't have a face-to-face community with classmates, so I saw it as a kind of way of connecting in to the community. I loved going to conferences and hearing about the work people were doing and meeting people, but I didn't envision myself as having any particular role in TASA – I suppose I thought that was for senior sociologists. I ended up giving a talk at one of the TASA postgrad days, about conference strategies, which came about because one of my fabulous PhD supervisors, Gary Wickham, recommended me, and I remember Tara McGee, who was then the TASA postgrad rep, being very helpful and supportive – reminding me to put that on my CV as service. But I didn't have any plans to have any particular roles in TASA; it grew out of my interest in teaching, when I heard at a conference about a new teaching thematic group I asked to join, then when Helen Marshall sent round a report on teaching and asked for comments I commented, and then she suggested me for the working group that she and Deb King were setting up on TLOs, and that started the process. So it all really flowed from just being interested and being supported. And I think that support from senior sociologists – or even junior sociologists who are already involved – is very helpful.

**Nick:** I wonder, also, sometimes, if there's a bit of timidity on the part of postgrads that think that they can't get involved or they don't have anything worthwhile to say. Okay, for instance, maybe something in relation to the current state of academia and neoliberalism and whatever else is probably true because they're not working in the university yet, but in relation to, you know, something like you just said, teaching sociology or various aspects of thematic group business and whatever else, I think it's important that they get involved because they actually are probably one of the biggest groups in the TASA membership.

**Kirsten:** We shouldn't be too negative about this, too, in that – I mean, for instance, there's a new postgrad committee that Karen Soldatic, the postgrad rep, has set up. And we have had a number of postgrads writing reports of thematic group events and other things for Nexus ...

**Nick:** Yeah, we have had some good responses from various postgrads and I know there are a couple of postgrads who are doing a lot of work in the thematic groups.

But you know, I do wonder sometimes if it's really the younger ones that we really need to be trying to get more involved or more the older ones. There's the question that always comes back to me, when I ask a particular senior Australian sociologist “Why don’t you join TASA?”, and they just say they don't see a need to. There are people I know (anecdotally) who are members of ISA but not members of TASA and I find that a bit weird to be honest.

**Kirsten:** We've talked a bit about pressures against service.

**Nick:** Well I think it’s time, isn't it, more than anything, and lack of reward. I really couldn't think of anything else to be honest. Especially when people have very busy personal lives as well it becomes an issue, and also unlike some other professional associations, like the ASA or Australian Psychological Society, we're not at a stage where it becomes such a status thing to be working for TASA. In some ways I kind of like that because we don't really want the status seekers, do we? But I don't really know of anything else that's really a hindrance to service, to be honest. What do you think?

**Kirsten:** I wonder. During a PhD there's often, particularly if people are working as well and have families, there's often that sense of how can I possibly fit something else in? I was on the Student Appeals Board when I was a PhD student, I kind of got involved almost by accident with our postgrad student rep association when it needed a new set of members of council and then via that I got involved in the Student Appeals Board and that was actually really interesting and quite useful, it felt like something where I had skills to contribute. But yeah, it's time. And then I also wonder if people always know how to get involved in something that needs to be done and is worthwhile for them, a good fit.

**Nick:** Maybe it's getting better, I don't know. I mean a good indicator to me is that the TASA Executive I joined the first year I was Nexus editor had an election with no contest for these great positions, but this time around we have had a contest, which may indicate that we are starting to get a little bit more
strength and maybe people are starting to realise that TASA is a good organisation to be involved with.

Maybe that's got a lot to do with the shifting tide, I don't know. But I do wonder sometimes what the universities could do to encourage that or if they should, actually, encourage it or not? Maybe from their perspective they don't even see it as a good thing, I don't know.

Kirsten: I think community involvement is often seen as a good thing by universities, but there's a sense in which their higher priority is probably stuff that's tied back to the reputation of the university, so where you're actually working for another organisation, maybe that's less obvious, I don't know.

Nick: Yeah, I think maybe it depends on what sort of industry and what sort of field you're in. I suspect that maybe a lot of universities are starting to scale back their desire for people to be involved and that 20% service is less disciplinary involvement and more in-house service – committee involvement – and/or engagement with the community sector or some industry sector.

Kirsten: Which then might be linked to research funding and research relationships.

Nick: And it’s interesting that with the new university that’s starting out here – Federation University Australia – there's going to be a very big emphasis on going out and being involved with community groups, so that may alter how I spend my 20%!

It sounds pessimistic, but I’m less inclined to think that universities are going to change their stance on that any time soon. It’s, I guess, a non-money making venture to be involved with disciplinary groups like TASA.

Nick: That last question is a doozy. Do you think working on Nexus has been worthwhile?

Kirsten: Yes, absolutely!

Nick: I’m kind of glad since I asked you to be on board.

Kirsten: You talked before about you and Peta Cook working towards giving Nexus more of a commentatory focus, and I benefited in coming in after you two had started that process, and then being able to keep going with that as it was getting easier to find people to write, to be anonymous commentators on things. And so I’ve been thinking about the huge amount of service that a lot of TASA members have done in terms of writing for Nexus as part of this. But I've really enjoyed myself, I've made good friends along the way, I've read great things other members have written, and I’m proud of Nexus and the interesting, good, useful conversations it has hosted. But it’s also been fun.

Nick: Yeah, I think it’s been good and there are some personal benefits that you get from that. I guess that’s just, once you put yourself onto a piece of publication that goes out to all the members, I guess you’re going to get that somehow anyway, but one of the things it does do is it does give you an opportunity to be exposed to how everything is going in other parts of the university sector around Australia. Before I’d started getting involved with TASA, I probably had no idea of what was happening in various institutions across the country. But it was interesting when Peta and I started we tried to get updates on what’s going on in your universities, this thing, but it kind of fell flat, but you kind of find out like that in other ways.

But generally, you know, one of the beautiful aspects of working with Nexus has been the people, as you’ve already mentioned. And also having opportunities to talk to people that you never talked to before. Apart from working with you and Peta, the highlight for me was when I got to interview Juliet Schor. I confess, I must have looked like a bit of a beetroot, because I was quite shy about it, and sheepish, as I had a massive intellectual crush on her work when I was an undergrad and ever since then I’ve had the beauty of being able to be involved with her work a bit more, and she wrote a book chapter for me for a book that just came out a couple of months ago now. That sort of stuff doesn't happen unless you get involved. We had a Skype conversation, face-to-face, like we did with Raewyn. It was just remarkable. And also, you know, John Holmwood.

Kirsten: Yes, and email conversations with Loïc Wacquant and...

Nick: And all these sorts of different people that we’ve had an opportunity to talk to that you just normally wouldn’t.

Kirsten: Yes, and in fact those conversations with Australian sociologists that you know are out there but don’t necessarily get to talk to.

Nick: I suppose one of the little things that I really want to happen over the next three or four or so years is that the people who are not contributing yet start contributing and so we can have a much more vibrant debate about various things that are occurring in Australian sociology. It’s great to have contributions from the Raewyns and the Garys and Frans and Petas and so on, but it’s the others that don’t say much that I would really like to see start getting involved.

Kirsten: I’m sure the new editors, Sue Malta and Christopher Baker, will be making contact with people …

Nick: Absolutely. I think they’ll do an excellent job!
Last week around 50 representatives from migrant settlement organisations, relevant government departments and academics gathered for a symposium on migrant settlement in Western Australia, funded by The Sociological Association of Australia (in association with the Migration, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism thematic group) and supported by the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Fremantle Multicultural Centre and the WA Office of Multicultural Interests.

It was the third such symposium held over the last few years in WA, designed to enable the different sectors with an interest in migrant settlement to come together and hear about each other’s work.

Often these sectors are unaware of what the other is doing. Academics may do research resulting in policy recommendations that service providers are unaware of or government is already trying to do. Government sometimes has questions that researchers have already answered. Service providers may have rolled out programs that would benefit from evaluation by researchers. This workshop offered an opportunity for each sector to learn from each other, and get a sense of what is going in terms of migrant settlement in Western Australia.

Sociologists and speakers from other disciplines shared their work. The range of topics covered older and new migrant communities, from temporary migration to community detention of asylum seekers to settlement issues among older communities such as Italians. Other topics included issues for Muslim parents and perspectives from the Department of Child Protection and Family Support; effects of the housing crisis; and models of best practice for youth engagement; all indicated that government and community organisations are attempting to respond to challenges that researchers have identified. The full range of papers is included below.

The workshop offered opportunities for networking between academics and policy makers and NGOs. The recent publication edited by sociologists Andrew Jakubowicz and Christina Ho, ‘For those who’ve come across the seas...: Australian multicultural theory, policy and practice’, in which organiser Farida Fozdar has a chapter, was launched during the break.

The workshop was designed as an opportunity for ‘public sociology’, an effort to take the sociology of migration beyond academia, engaging public policy, activism and civil society. Some of the papers also took a psychological approach, and others simply described successful ‘intervention’ programs.

A small publication will be produced showcasing one page summaries of the papers. This will be distributed to participants and government agencies, NGOs, communities and other interested parties.

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<td>Effects of migration and/or domestic violence (DV) on psychosocial developmental systems</td>
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<td>Eduardo Farate (University of Western Australia)</td>
<td>Western Australian Muslim parents: Stories from the home front</td>
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<td>Caroline Speirs (Department for Child Protection &amp; Family Support)</td>
<td>Is there really a government department in Australia who steals children?</td>
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<td>Farida Fozdar (University of Western Australia)</td>
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<td>Emanuela Sala (University of Western Australia)</td>
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Books of Note

Note that other recent books by TASA members can be found on the TASA website, at: http://www.tasa.org.au/publications/publications-by-tasa-members-2/new-books/

Legal and Political Challenges of Governing the Environment and Climate Change: Ruling Nature

GARY WICKHAM AND JO-ANN GOODIE

(London: Routledge, December 2013)

The environment has not always been protected by law. In the 19th century the law, in its tense but productive partnership with politics, did take at least some steps to save some aspects of ‘nature’ from the ravages of the Industrial Revolution. But it was not until the middle of the 20th century that ‘the environment’ came to be understood as an entity in need of special care. It was not until this time that the law–politics duo firmly fixed its focus on this issue.

In this book, Wickham and Goodie tell the story of how law and politics, having uneasily joined together as a single governmental force in early modern Europe to successfully resolve 150 years of civil war, first came upon the environment as an object in need of its attention. They outline the unlikely intersection of aesthetics and science that made ‘the environment’ into the matter of great concern it is today. Then, after describing the way each of private common law strategies and public law legislative strategies have approached the task of protecting the environment, they turn to the greatest environmental challenge to have so far confronted environmental law and politics: the threat of global climate change. Here, they not only offer descriptions of many of the strategies being deployed to meet this challenge, they also present some troubling assessments of them.

The book will be of great interest not only to students, teachers, and researchers of environmental law, but also those in socio-legal studies, environmental studies, the sociology of the environment, and political theory.

On Bondi Beach

ANN GAME, ANDREW METCALFE AND DEMELZA MARLIN

(Australian Scholarly Publishing/Arcadia, October 2013)

On Bondi Beach tells the story of a day in Bondi by allowing residents and visitors to tell their stories. The beach changes as the day passes. Different people arrive and leave, and as their lives and stories intersect, those being talked about become those who are talking. This is a book about living in a particular place, but it is also about contemporary Australia, flourishing in transience and diversity.

‘… I love to see this extraordinary beach democracy where we are all pretty much stripped down: no matter how much jewellery and stuff and sunglasses you might have on, basically we are all bodies on the sand. I don’t know how many other places would get that.’ (Murray, retiree, swimmer)

The authors have worked together in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales. Ann and Andrew have written four books collaboratively: Passionate sociology; The mystery of everyday life; The first year experience; and Teachers who change lives. Demelza has recently completed a PhD in religious elements in secular life.

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TASA YouTube Channel:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3WCzD4z9DiTLTempQrMUeg
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