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IE Newsletter

Institutional Ethnography Division of the Society
for the Study of Social Problems

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From the Division Chair: Hans-Peter deRuiter

Dear SSSP IE division,

We are living in complex times. What once struck me as an imperfect system, one in need of institutional ethnography's insights, now, when I look back, that time feels like it was pretty straightforward. I often return in my mind to my postdoctoral days in Toronto: sharing a glass of Pinot Grigio with Dorothy Smith, listening to Glenn Gould in my headset as I walked from my University of Toronto office to my apartment near Chinatown, just steps away from where Emma Goldman once gave her talks. Those memories remind me of how quickly the world has changed and how I now find myself in unfamiliar terrain. In moments like these, I draw inspiration from what is called "beginner's mind," returning to the basics and approaching the world with openness and humility. For me, this means reading more deeply, paying close attention to the problems real people face in real time and space, and finding ways to give their concerns a voice. It also means seeking out the small, practical changes that can improve actual lives. These small moments keep my hope alive that change and justice remain possible.

As an IE Division, we carry a wealth of collective knowledge and insight, resources that feel more urgently needed now than at any point in my 17 years of muddling along with IE. This fall, our online meeting reminded me of this: we connected in ways that felt genuinely meaningful, and we began important conversations about our future. Looking ahead, we plan to meet again in early 2026, and I am excited to continue building on this sense of connection, shared purpose, and hope. I also want to express my deep appreciation for all of you, our division members, for your continued commitment, both by remaining members and by staying engaged with the division.

Hans

Alison I. Griffith Distinguished Contribution Award: Dr. Marie L. Campbell, University of Victoria

Tribute by Janet Rankin

Dr. Marie Campbell is a foundational figure in the institutional ethnography (IE) community, widely recognized for her lifetime contributions to the development and dissemination of IE as both a method of inquiry and a political project. Having studied directly with Dorothy E. Smith — who supervised her PhD — Marie has extended, enriched, and clarified Smith's radical call to start from people's everyday lives and examine how institutional processes coordinate those experiences.



Marie's commitment to Dorothy Smith's insight—to discover something latent in the everyday world—has shaped her mentorship and scholarship. Rather than merely confirming what researchers think is going on, Marie persistently challenges her students and colleagues to engage deeply in discovery through the tracking and mapping of ruling relations. Her critiques help surface how institutional processes shape what people do, think, and experience — those practices that lie beneath the surface of official representations. She ruffles assumptions, insists on clarity, and supports sophisticated findings that disrupt what is thought to happen, illuminating what is actually happening, and in whose interests.

Over the decades, Marie has supervised and mentored numerous graduate students, including those engaged in frontline settings such as nursing, education, social work, mental health, Indigenous governance, and bureaucratic administration. Her students' projects are as diverse as the workplaces they study, yet consistently reflect her rigorous insistence on careful description, respect for participants' knowledge, and attention to the material practices that organize people's everyday lives.

Despite Marie's official retirement from the University of Victoria in 2005 she has maintained an ongoing program of research and writing. She has an impressive record of publications, most recently contributing a paper to the 2023 Luken and Vaughan edited collection "Critical Commentary on Institutional Ethnography".

One of her most influential contributions is the co-edited volume *Knowledge, Experience and Ruling Relations* (with Ann Manicom), which compiled research by the early cohort of institutional ethnographers studying with Dorothy Smith in the 1980s. This seminal volume was among the first to elaborate Smith's theoretical and methodological innovations by presenting concrete examples of how institutional ethnography could be applied across varied contexts. It remains a vital reference for those learning and practicing IE.

In addition, Marie authored *Mapping Social Relations: A Primer in Doing Institutional Ethnography* — a widely used text that introduces the core concepts, logics, and sequences of IE inquiry. Subtitled "A Primer," a little-known fact is that the book was catalogued with cookbooks and DIY manuals by the Canadian Scholar's Press, which resulted in her not receiving the modest royalties that scholarly books generate! Marie managed this anomaly with her usual clarity and resolve, seeing humour where others might gripe!

Whether in her writing, teaching, or supervision, Marie embodies clarity, curiosity, and political integrity. She listens closely, speaks carefully, and champions the project of making visible the ruling relations that structure our everyday lives. This tribute honors not only her remarkable intellect, but also her generosity and vision. Her legacy lives on in the work of the many scholars she has shaped and inspired.

With gratitude, we celebrate Dr. Marie Campbell's lifetime of contribution to institutional ethnography

MARIE'S GARDEN: A Tribute by Timothy Diamond.

Over the years you have nurtured your backyard garden into lush and verdant foliage.

You have also cultivated institutional ethnography. Here we suggest a textual trail that maps some of the major contributions you have planted.

Starting back in 1988, seeds were sown in "Management as Ruling," with its all-important subtitle: "A Class Phenomenon." Class analysis has been trampled under in recent years, but thankfully it is front and center here: "Categories place the nurse in an ideologically constructed relation to the patient (1)."



That same year you and Roxana Ng in "Program Evaluation" clarified "standpoint of women" that "makes visible a ruling process carried forward through standard evaluation procedures (2)." You emphasize a key to institutional ethnography: "standpoint" is a departure, not a destination.

In 1992 you wrote a "labor process analysis." Nurses, forever grounded in a standpoint of care, become "professionalized" by transposing their consciousness into a standpoint of ruling. "Nursing science models may ... contribute to the very problems they are meant to solve (3)" 1992 also sprouted the splendid "Learning to Nurse," with Nancy Jackson. Here you offer a cornerstone to all our work with the elegant finding that "Plans do not produce orderly action but rather a record of action as having an orderly character (4)."

By 1995 a bush of multiple blossoms sprang forth. With Ann Manicom you edited *Knowledge, Experience and Ruling Relations*. These original readings are as fresh as ever. A must read for beginners, for veterans it's flush with fine reminders of our roots (5). A 1998 piece spoke truth to postmodern feminism. In your brilliant "Experience as Data," the aim of the paper "is to show how to put personal experience into the center of a trustworthy analysis (6)."

The writer Marge Piercy observed that "connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground." In 2001 with "Textual Accounts and Routine Conduct," you unearthed the hidden consternations that "the case manager rules the client even as she herself in being ruled." And "the re-routing of ruling power through nurses may be the most troubling finding of my analysis (7)."

Then in 2002 you and Fran Gregor co-authored the extremely helpful *Mapping Social Relations: a Primer in Institutional Ethnography*. In there you teach that "understanding the textual architecture of routine organizational action is crucial to understanding institutional ethnography," because "power is carried in texts (8)." 2003 brought forth another bright bloom. "Dorothy Smith and Knowing the World We Live In" firmly plants the "knowing subject" as "an actual person located bodily in space and time (9)." Here is the crucial core of institutional ethnography, the ontological shift: we start with *people* doing things.

By 2006 you and Janet Rankin produced your magnum opus, *Managing to Nurse*. In Gillian Walker's review "consciousness is reorganized through a form of language manipulation that makes use of (nurses') altruistic ideals --- while emptying beds." To nurse, one must manage. You conclude with "The most important thing we have said is that the effects of restructuring are a significant component of the conflict that often grips nurses." Yet... "what our analysis makes possible is a way to 'talk back' to forms of knowledge that misrepresent the everyday world (10)."

We close with a mention of the 2023 piece in Luken and Vaughan's *Critical Commentary*. You highlight the dilemma of a professional's dual consciousness -- with an experiential grounding in the everyday world and a text-based accounting that gives it over to management (11).

We are grateful, Marie, for the bounteous garden you and your collaborators have sown. We hope you'll keep it up, because even as all these insights radiate brightly, we continue to learn from you how to grow the flowers of our field.

1) Campbell, Marie L. 1988. "Management as 'Ruling: A Class Phenomenon in Nursing," *Studies in Political Economy*, 27: 29-51.

- _____ with Roxana Ng. 1988. "Program Evaluation and the Standpoint of Women," 2) *Canadian Review of Social Policy/ Revue Canadienne de Politique Social*, 22: 41-50.
- 3) _____ 1992. "Nurses' Professionalism in Canada: A Labor Process Analysis, *International Journal of Health Services*, 22: 751-85.
- 4) _____ with Nancy Jackson. 1992. "Learning to Nurse: Plans, Accounts and Actions." *Qualitative Health Research*, 2: 475-96.
- 5) _____ ed. With Ann Manicom. 1995. *Knowledge, Experience, and Ruling Relations: Studies in the Social Organization of Knowledge*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 6) _____ 1998. "Institutional Ethnography and Experience as Data, *Qualitative Sociology*, 21: 55-73.
- 7) _____ 2001. "Textual Accounts, Ruling Action: The Interaction of Knowledge and Power in the Routine Conduct of Community Nursing Work, *Studies in Culture, Organization, and Society*, 7: 231-50.
- 8) _____ with Frances Gregor. 2002. *Mapping Social Relations: A Primer in Doing Institutional Ethnography*. Aurora, Ontario: Garamond Press
- 9) _____ 2003. "Dorothy Smith and Knowing the World We Live In, *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 30: 3-22.
- 10) Rankin, Janet M. and Marie L. Campbell. 2006. *Managing to Nurse: Inside Canada's Health Care Reform*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 11) _____ 2023. "Human Service Professionals and Institutional Ethnography: Interpreting Some Quandaries over 'Standpoint,' in Paul C. Luken and Suzanne Vaughan, ed., *Critical Commentary on Institutional Ethnography*, pp. 27-52. Switzerland AG: Palgrave Macmillan.



The Dorothy Smith Award for Scholar Activism: Erica R. Meiners, Northeastern Illinois University

The Dorothy Smith Award for Scholar Activism recognizes the activities of an "individual who has made substantial contributions to institutional ethnographic scholar activism over a long trajectory of work. The contributions may involve IE research conducted and used for activist ends, and activist efforts that have drawn upon or contributed to IE scholarship." This year's winner is Erica R. Meiners, Professor of Education and Women's Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. Erica earned her PhD in 1998, at Simon Fraser University in Canada. She is the author of several books including *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* with Angela Y.

Davis, Gina Dent and Beth Richie published in 2021 by Haymarket Books and *For the Children: Protecting Innocence in a Carceral State* published by University of Minnesota Press in 2016. Currently the Bernard J. Brommel Distinguished Research Professor, Erica teaches classes in justice studies, women's and gender studies, and educational studies. Erica is a member of the University Professionals of Illinois, and she is co-director of the university curriculum for the Prison Neighborhood Arts Project. Throughout her career she has been involved in anti-prison organizing, anti-racist feminisms, prison abolition and decarceration movements, decriminalization of undocumented communities and restorative and transformative justice. For 20 years, Erica ran a high school for people coming out of prisons and jail. You can learn more about Erica and hear her talk about her book *For the Children* [here](#).

Awarding the Dorothy E. Smith Prize for Scholar-Activism to Dr. Erica R. Meiners by Colin Hastings

The **Dorothy E. Smith Award for Scholar-Activism**, established by the Institutional Ethnography Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, honors individuals whose work exemplifies the integration of critical scholarship and activism. The award celebrates those who have made substantial contributions through research conducted in service of activist ends or through activist efforts.

Today, we are privileged to present this award to **Dr. Erica R. Meiners**, a writer, organizer, and educator whose work embodies precisely this ethos: rigorous, embodied, intervention-oriented knowledge-making in service of transformative justice.

Dr. Erica R. Meiners is Professor of Educational Inquiry & Curriculum Studies and of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. She lives and works in Chicago, where she teaches, writes, and co-organizes across movements for prison abolition, feminist justice, queer and immigrant rights, and educational justice.

Her peer reviewed scholarship appears in journals such as *Teachers College Record*, *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and *Harvard Educational Review*. She writes abolitionist teacher education, prison/school nexus research, community-based inquiry, and urban education models supported by foundations such as the U.S. Department of Education and the Illinois Humanities Council.

Dr. Meiners has published extensively! Among her highly influential writing: ***Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies*** (2007): In this groundbreaking work, Meiners analyzes how the school-to-prison pipeline is normalized through disciplinary policies, pedagogy, and cultural narratives—making incarceration an expectation for urban youth of color. She connects schooling practices directly to practices of state surveillance and marginalization. In ***For the Children? Protecting Innocence in a Carceral State*** (2016): Meiners critically challenges prevailing ideas of child protection, showing how such frameworks often reproduce racialized and punitive logics. Angela Davis calls her “one of our most important scholar/activists,” emphasizing her capacity to provoke deeper engagements with the ideologies that uphold mass incarceration. Her manifesto ***Abolition. Feminism. Now*** (2021), co-authored with Angela Davis, Gina Dent, and Beth Richie brilliantly articulates the indivisibility of abolitionist and feminist thought, surveying decades of theory and organizing to insist that liberation can only emerge through their intersection.

What's clear from reviewing Dr. Meiners' work, is that it is a model for how scholarship can be embedded in organizing campaigns (against prison expansion, police, school disciplinary regimes, and gendered state violence). Following the model of Dorothy Smith, Dr. Meiners research and writing is grounded in the embodied, situated realities of those she works with, it is designed to expose ruling relations with a view to intervening in them toward liberation. Like those who have received this award in years past, Dr. Meiners' scholarship is inseparable from her activism – it is a praxis of deeply rooted feminist, abolitionist, and anti-carceral commitments that is needed now more than ever.

Calls for IE Division Awards: Due Dates January 31, 2026

George W. Smith Graduate Student Paper Competition

The **Institutional Ethnography Division** is pleased to solicit papers for its 2026 George W. Smith Graduate Student Paper Competition. To be considered, papers should advance institutional ethnography scholarship either methodologically or through a substantive contribution. For an overview of institutional ethnography and the purposes of the IE Division [click here](#). Authors must be currently enrolled graduate students.

Submissions are to be 25 pages long or less, excluding notes, references and tables, and be submitted in Word-compatible and PDF formats, following the latest APA guidelines. An electronic letter from the student's supervisor attesting to the lead author's student status must accompany the submission. The student must be the sole author of the paper; submissions with co-authors are not allowed.

The recipient will receive a monetary prize of \$100, an electronic certificate of recognition, student membership, conference registration, and an opportunity to present the winning paper at the 2026 SSSP meetings. The winner of the 2026 paper will be invited to sit on the adjudicating panel for the 2027 paper submissions. Please note that any paper submitted for consideration for the George W. Smith Graduate Student Paper Award must also be submitted through the SSSP **Call for Papers** to be presented at the 2026 meeting of the SSSP.

Send submissions to: Naomi Nichols (naominichols@trentu.ca), Liz Brule (e.brule@queensu.ca), and Helen Hudson (hHUDS099@uottawa.ca) by January 31, 2026. Please be aware that a paper submission may only be submitted to one division.

Dorothy E. Smith Award for Scholar Activism

The **Institutional Ethnography Division** is pleased to solicit nominations for the 2026 Dorothy E. Smith Award for Scholar-Activism. This award recognizes the activities of an individual or group who has made substantial contributions to institutional ethnographic scholar activism in either a single project or longer trajectory of work. The contributions may involve IE research conducted and used for activist ends, or it may involve activist efforts that have drawn upon or contributed to IE scholarship. The award committee invites members of the Division to send a one-page statement of the nominee to committee members Viviane Namaste (viviane.namaste@concordia.ca), Colin Hastings (c2hastings@uwaterloo.ca), and Helen Hudson (hHUDS099@uottawa.ca) by January 31, 2026.

Alison I. Griffith Award for Distinguished Contribution to Institutional Ethnography

The **Institutional Ethnography Division** is pleased to solicit nominations for the 2026 Alison I. Griffith Distinguished Contribution to Institutional Ethnography. This award is designated for IE scholars who have made significant contributions to IE. The award recognizes outstanding contributions to the field of institutional ethnography through publishing, teaching, mentoring, organizing, or other activities. The award celebrates achievements of national or international significance made by influential institutional ethnographers over the duration of their careers. The award committee invites members of the Division to send a one-page statement of the nominee to committee members Paul Luken (pluken@bellsouth.net) and Suzanne Vaughan (suzanne.vaughan@asu.edu) by January 31, 2026.

Members' News and Notes

Emily Johnson, successfully defended her Institutional Ethnography dissertation at North Dakota State University. It is titled: "When Policy Meets Practice: How Healthcare Systems Shape Nursing Clinical Care Leaders' Work." Her advisor is **Laura Parson** from North Dakota State University.

Cailin Shovkoplyas, successfully defended her Institutional Ethnography Dissertation at North Dakota State University. It is titled: "The Challenges of Authentic Dei Communication in the Upper Midwest Professional Communicators' Lived Experiences." Her advisor is **Laura Parson** from North Dakota State University.

Congratulations Doctor Emily Schubert Johnson!

1. What made you choose IE for your thesis?

Institutional ethnography was essential to responding to the initial inquiry. My dissertation evolved from a case study with Sanford Health (a local hospital network) to identify benefits and areas for improvement for a mentor group for new inpatient leaders at the nurse manager and nurse director levels. From that project, several participants described concern for the Clinical Care Leader (CCL) who have a similar role to charge nurses in the healthcare setting. Participants shared that CCLs had the lowest engagement and retention, and if they (managers and directors) struggled to identify what success looks like as a leader, then CCLs might be facing a similar issue. I wanted to not only identify what was occurring, but also they why behind it. Using IE as a guide helped me to explore deeply into healthcare and nursing as institutions. It also created value to the organization I worked with; IE can be extrapolated beyond a singular space and moment in time, and the findings can be applied and processes repeated. I felt that it held the intimacy and depth of qualitative methods with the benefit of broad applications often associated with quantitative methods.



2. What are some of your thesis's take-home messages

Often healthcare professionals are clinically trained for their roles; however, there is an opportunity to improve the leadership development before promotion into a leadership or people manager role. Additionally, healthcare remains a gendered organization and gender remains one of the (many) ruling relations for how nursing work is coordinated, particularly caring work. As CCLs or charge nurses care for their team members that work is often unmeasured within the stereotypical hospital metrics or formally recognized in their annual review process; that work is just part of what they do to make sure the system runs smoothly which Marie Campbell also found in her research on economics and nursing. When nurses care work is unmeasured, it goes unseen, which further pushes that work (unrelated to patient care) into the background for nurses. Therefore, I ask, what do we do now? My recommendations can be applied across healthcare: collaborate with charge nurses or nurse leaders to 1) identify what work they de-prioritize to support staff nurses, 2) develop measurable expectations for both mentor and mentee work, and 3) provide space in annual review metrics to recognize and make visible caring work such as caring for colleagues or mentor work.

3. What are you doing now?

Taking a well-deserved break. My partner and I are going on vacation the first week of December just before graduation to take a breath. Next on the list is a collaboration with Laura Parson, PhD to write a textbook for how to write an institutional ethnography dissertation. I have. A few publications for articles I am working on and then working to repeat my research at either another healthcare organization or continue collaborating with Sanford Health to explore deeper into the institutional systems that have influenced how healthcare leaders learn their work.

Welcome New Members

Seven new members have joined the IE Division since the publication of our last newsletter. Welcome all!

Joaquín Argüello de Jesús
 Eriselda Danaj
 Isabella de Ruiter
 Irene Del Mastro Naccarato
 Anthony DiMario
 Tryphenia B. Peele-Eady
 Charlotte Xue Lian Wang

Stay Tuned!

Laura Parson reports that the first call for submission to the new peer-reviewed Journal of Institutional Ethnography is expected to occur in January 2026. That link will be ready January 2026.

Hans DeRuiter announces the Spring IE Division Meeting - SSSP (Online) on **March 3, 2026**, from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM CST. All members have received an invite. If IE-ers who are not members are interested in participating, they can [register by completing the form using this link](#).

Call for Papers: SSSP in New York City!

Below are the IE sponsored or co-sponsored sessions calling for papers for the **2025 SSSP Meeting in New York City, August 6-9, 2026**. All papers must be submitted by **midnight, January 31, 2026** to be considered for inclusion in the program. To submit, please consult [this link](#).



Advocacy and Change

Sponsors: Conflict, Social Action, and Change; Institutional Ethnography

Organizers: Lauren Eastwood, SUNY Plattsburgh

C. Michael Awsumb, Northwest Missouri State University

Description: This session features presentations that broadly address advocacy and making change. Institutional ethnographers start from the “everyday” with the premise that people’s experiences are organized by larger ruling relations. However, the goal, to paraphrase Marx, is not simply to analyze these phenomena, but to change them, as “ruling relations” pertain to power dynamics that generate disjunctures, inequalities, and marginalization. The papers in this session take up and explore this dynamic in some manner through research, activism, or both.

CRITICAL DIALOGUE: Mapping Colonization of Lifeworlds: “How Institutions Invade Daily Life”

Sponsors: Global; Institutional Ethnography

Organizers: Lauren Eastwood, SUNY Plattsburgh
Brenda Solomon, University of Vermont

Description: This session examines how powerful institutions shape and colonize everyday life across the globe. By tracing how rules, policies, and systems embed themselves into daily routines, we will explore how these “invasions” influence personal experiences, limit choices, and transform the ways people live, work, and relate

THEMATIC: How Institutional/Systemic Factors Impact Family, Health & Well-Being

Sponsors: Health, Health Policy, and Health Services; Institutional Ethnography

Organizer: Hans-Peter de Ruiter, Minnesota State University

Description: This session explores how institutions extend their reach into the lifeworlds of individuals and communities, shaping the rhythms of daily life in ways that often remain hidden. By mapping these processes, we uncover how policies, organizational practices, and global systems influence personal choices, relationships, and opportunities. Drawing on examples from diverse contexts, the session highlights both the subtle and overt ways institutions colonize lived experience and considers how approaches such as Institutional Ethnography (IE) can make these dynamics visible and open pathways for change.

New Directions in Institutional Ethnography

Sponsor: Institutional Ethnography

Organizer: Katherine E. Koralesky, University of British Columbia

Description: This session explores innovative applications of Institutional Ethnography (IE) that address contemporary social issues, shifting political contexts, and new methodological intersections. Presenters highlight how IE continues to evolve as a critical, justice-oriented sociology for uncovering ruling relations in everyday life.