

IE NEWSLETTER

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

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From the Division Chair

Janet Rankin

Greetings from Calgary, Alberta. Even though this will be considered the spring newsletter, the ice continues to cover the river and last week I had to plug the car in at the university because the temperatures were dipping to minus 20 C. Nonetheless, the Canada Geese have returned for their nesting season and the all-day, all-night battles for nesting territory are noisy harbingers of spring.

Planning for the SSSP meetings, conference and workshop in Denver are well underway. The call for papers for the session is closed and I am confident that we have some great sessions. For the co-sponsored session "IE that makes a difference" we only had a single paper submitted. Rather than filling the precious time with non-IE papers we put out a call for "works in progress". This seemed a great strategy to maintain the IE integrity of the conference sessions and will hopefully generate good feedback for those people who submitted work that may still be a bit rough around the edges.

The workshop program is almost finalized and is included in this newsletter (page 5). The link to register is on the SSSP home page (\$70.00 USD for students and unemployed; \$100.00 USD for employed). We are going to spend the morning focused on doing IE analysis. Marie Campbell is doing the core thinking for this session, but it will be interactive and others have agreed to share exemplars of their analytic processes. After lunch Dorothy Smith will be talking about her new projects and current thinking. Later in the afternoon we are going to break into four streams. Some of the topics for these streams may come out of the main conference sessions.

Currently I am grappling to contribute effectively on graduate students' committees when the supervisor and other committee

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(Chair's message continued)

members are not familiar with the core ontology of IE. I would be interested in participating in a breakout stream to discuss this difficulty. If others of you have pressing issues for the streams, please send your ideas to me. My email address is at jmrankin@ucalgary.ca

Election of the IE Division Chair

Please vote in the election today through Tuesday, April 24. To cast your vote, please go to: <http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/pageId/1017>. If you cannot click the link from your e-mail program, try copying and pasting it into the address bar of your browser. If you have any questions, please e-mail sssp@utk.edu.

There are two nominees for the position of Chair-elect of the IE Division. Lauren Eastwood and Naomi Nichols have generously agreed to let their names stand. Their biographies follow.

Lauren E. Eastwood

As an Associate Professor at the State University of New York, College at Plattsburgh, I teach courses in sociology and environmental studies. Since I conducted dissertation research under the guidance of Marjorie L. DeVault at Syracuse University, I have been committed to using institutional ethnography in my work, and to better understand how others apply the methodology. When Dr. DeVault introduced me to institutional ethnography in the late 1990s by way of the “Sociology for Women, Sociology for People” conference organized by Marie Campbell in Toronto, I was hooked. Subsequently, Marj and I organized the 2001 “Mapping Social Relations” conference at Syracuse University in 2001. I applied institutional ethnography to my dissertation project as I analyzed the making of forest policy under the UN. After completing my PhD in 2002, I have been working on various projects that utilize the ontology of IE. For example, I have become further immersed in the world of UN environmental policy making (with the support of a grant from the Social Science Research Council), as I attended meetings, spoke with policy makers and traced texts through processes associated with the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While no longer funded by the SSRC, I am continuing this research as I map out various aspects of what is commonly known as “international environmental governance”. Additionally, I have been speaking to people in the Western United States (primarily in the state of Wyoming) regarding their experiences with resource extraction on their land. My approach to this research is also informed by institutional ethnography, as I analyze the policy context of individuals’ experiences and talk to them about how they engage with various texts. For example, a significant (ongoing) piece of this research has involved asking people about how they learn to read ‘Environmental Impact Statements’, as individuals with whom I have spoken have articulated the need to intervene in policy processes, and see the EIS as one place to do that. This may sound strange, but institutional ethnography provides me with a methodology that allows me to see myself as a sociologist. I would be honored to represent the IE Division of the SSSP.

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(Election of the IE Division Chair continued)

Naomi Nichols

A recent graduate from the doctoral program in Education at York University (April, 2011), Naomi Nichols is currently working as a Research Associate for York University's School of Social Work, the York Centre for Education and Community, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, and a collaboration between the Social Sciences Research Council (SSHRC), United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC), and Research Impact (RIR). Nichols' doctoral research combined community-development and institutional ethnographic (IE) research of human service provision for marginalized youth. Each of her current research projects involves collaboration with governmental organizations and/or non-profit agencies, and each is informed by the sociological shift that IE makes.

Naomi Nichols has been a member of the SSSP since 2004. As a graduate student, two of her IE research papers were awarded divisional awards. She was the graduate student member of the SSSP board of directors between 2006 and 2008 and has been a regular session organizer and conference presenter since becoming involved with the SSSP in 2004.

Remembering Ellen Pence



Ellen was recognized for her scholar-activism at the 2008 SSSP Annual Meeting in Boston and is shown here accepting the Dorothy E. Smith Award.

Many of you will have already heard the sad news of Ellen Pence's death on January 6. Ellen's work is well-known and deeply admired by members of the IE network and by many others whose work is made possible by her leadership in the movement to stop violence against women. One such admirer is Barb MacQuarrie, the Community Director of Western University's Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children. Barb wrote the following tribute to Ellen.

“The violence against women movement is a field densely populated with brave, compassionate and intelligent advocates working every day to save lives and create safety. Others have earned widespread recognition and respect as leaders, but Ellen Pence held a singular status and a special place in our hearts. She changed the way society understands domestic violence, and shifted the ways we work to reduce it.

Ellen bridged the gap between academic theory and real life practice effortlessly. In the process she has saved lives and inspired excellence in those of us who work in the field. Her ability to listen carefully to women experiencing abuse, to men who used abusive

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(Remembering Ellen Pence continued)

behavior and to people in the systems that respond to domestic violence led her to ask radical questions. She explains, "It's important for us to take a deep, deep look at this kind of gender based violence and ask the question, not just how can we create more laws to outlaw this kind of violence, but what are the structures that we put in place in our state and our communities that foster this kind of violence. And then respond not just in a single faceted way, but in a multi-faceted way to that violence."

Graham Barnes knew Ellen for 25 years. He writes:

"Since the mid 80s, I was part of an informal national multi-disciplinary team in Aotearoa/New Zealand that was trying to progress our work on intervening with men's violence against women. We looked around the world: Who was doing the most progressive work? Where were government and community agencies working together with a common purpose? Who is really listening to the community agencies that always seemed to be "on the back foot?"

My friend and colleague Roma Balzer, the Māori Coordinator of the National Collective of Women's Refuges, spent a lot of time collecting articles and talking about them with us. Roma summarized them in meetings, and when she started talking about Duluth, Minnesota, we knew she was onto something.

In Aotearoa, we already had a strong network of agencies at a national level, and Roma was one of the reasons for that. There was a lot of work to do if we were going to build close links between government and community. The Ellen/Roma combination was formidable from the late 80s on. Much more was to be done, but their ability to move, manage, challenge, cajole and get people thinking and acting was a rare time in our domestic violence history, and created real change in a Minnesota-sized country. It was mesmerizing.

Looking back now, Roma and Ellen's leadership (along with Raewyn Good, Brenda Pilot, Dave Smith, and others) formed really productive national working teams that engaged, excited and energized people who normally might not go the extra distance in their work. I was inspired to step out - across the world to work with another team that did the same thing in Minnesota - and USA. It felt like we changed the lives of battered women and their families. But that change has also been in our lives - inspired by Ellen's own life.

In Aotearoa, we created a new baseline for domestic violence intervention with a national pilot project based on Duluth. We changed how men's and women's programs were organized; we made co-facilitation of men's programs by men and women the norm; we encouraged refuges across the country to reach out to abused women when police attended domestic offences; advocates started monitoring police calls and tracked cases throughout the system; we changed the thinking about abuse away from pathology, reframing it as power relations between the offender and the victim, recasting the state's responsibility to act on behalf of the victim's safety and autonomy. These are fundamental changes in how systems intervene in people's lives. They all rely on partnerships between government and community agencies and they all reflect the way Ellen applied institutional ethnography to her day-to-day work. But it's never just Ellen applying her theories. It's always Ellen and her colleagues, learning from people's daily lives. It was Ellen and Roma and many others that made the changes happen in Aotearoa.

Every project Ellen has been involved in is spectacularly collaborative, and the process is similar, and it's kind of heartwarming. We are always reading, talking, discussing, and bringing people in from the outside. We are always insiders and outsiders working together. We watch carefully what the old hands who have been there for years are doing. Why do you do it that way? Help me really understand. We always welcome both government and community, state and nonprofit.

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(Remembering Ellen Pence continued)

We read case files; notice what's written, what's not written. We argue at some points. We come together in small meetings to work through our most difficult topics; we have big meetings to celebrate our biggest agreements and landmarks. We find we have to reinvent our work every five to eight years, because it's always designed from the bottom up, and it's working in a top-down system. It keeps needing to be rebuilt, so we rebuild it. We sit with the least powerful in our community and listen to their experiences to help inform what changes to make. It takes a while, because it's such a *thorough* process.

This is what Ellen taught in Duluth. This is what Ellen brought to Aotearoa and it's what she brought to the world, along with helpings of humor and

humility so no one was left out in the cold as we did our work together. It's a rare thing. Such a privilege to learn these ways for the last 25 years – Ellen Pence is inside our heads and hearts so we can keep rebuilding justice from the bottom up. Seems like it's up to us now. “

Selected web links:

The Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jan/19/ellen-pence>

Praxis International

<http://www.praxisinternational.org/>

YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9dZOgr78eE>

IE workshop at the SSSP

The workshop is being held on August 19 in Denver. Details of the agenda follow.

9.00 a.m. to noon

Learning Analysis: Seeing the Forest

Key Organizer: Marie Campbell

Marie Campbell has been paying attention to problems she has experienced in working with people as they begin the analysis of their research projects. Marie says that she finds it difficult to provide people with practical, concrete suggestions for beginning to do the analysis; she shows them, gives examples, and suggests things to read, but it is still hard for people to feel confident to figure out the institutional ethnographic use of new data. Marie's intent is to show people how to make the (variously organized) world accessible and knowable, that she thinks of as learning “how to see the world as the forest and not just the trees”.

In this session, we will consider two key approaches to IE analysis: mapping and writing. We will identify if and/or how they differ from one another and how each illuminates the analytic work to be done.

Marie will elaborate on her thinking and describe how she pays attention to the explicit junctures when researchers grasp an IE analytic in the data. Then two or three student-teacher dyads will reflect empirically on how their analytic work has proceeded, where they started and how they moved.

Participants will be invited to contribute their ideas and experiences.

1.00 – 2.00 p.m.

Keynote Session with Dorothy Smith

Dorothy will discuss her new work and current thinking.

2.00-4.00 p.m.

Small Group Session

Up to four small group sessions will focus on issues that participants bring to the workshop. For more information, please go to:

http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/493/Institutional_Ethnography_Workshop/

New book: A request from Dorothy Smith and Susan Turner

We have compiled and edited a book called *Texts in Action: Exploring Ruling Relations Ethnographically*. If you are faculty and would use the book for a course, we would very much appreciate if you would provide details (course name and code, department, university, course enrolment, and so on). All comments will be helpful. Please contact Dorothy at desmith@uvic.ca and Susan at turnersusanm@gmail.com

The book collects institutional ethnographic (IE) studies that incorporate texts. For IE, “text” is an open term referring to any object that carries a designed message, image, or sound so that it can be read, heard, watched without direct contact with its maker/s. Institutional ethnography has introduced a major innovation in ethnographic method. Unlike approaches such as discourse analysis, texts are not isolated from courses of action. This discovery makes it possible to take ethnographic method beyond the observable local and into exploration of what institutional ethnographers call the “ruling” or trans-local relations that extend way beyond, and yet organize, people's everyday lives.

Institutional ethnography always stays with actual people, their doings/activities/work and how their doings/activities/work are coordinated. In research practice therefore, concepts such as institutions, discourse, corporate organization, power and so on are *always* to be resolved back into sequences of coordinated activities in which texts play an essential part. Each chapter displays particular and distinctive ways of incorporating texts into ethnographies.

The introduction to the book will address what is distinctive and to be learned from each chapter. Close attention of the chapters to exploring and explicating the textual practices of organization in ethnographic studies of contemporary forms of organization sets the collection apart. The range and variety includes George Smith's detailed analysis of how detectives recorded observations in a steam bath used by gays for sex to fit the categories of the Ontario 'Bawdy House' law and enable charges to be brought; Liza McCoy's analysis of the invention of accounting procedures subordinating the front-line of community college instructors to the college's financial management; and Paul Luken's and Suzanne Vaughan's chapter of how, in the inter-war years, US government agencies allied with relevant business interests campaigned to promote homeownership and identify the public image of the suburban house with the ideal conditions for childrearing. Each chapter is preceded by an introduction by Smith and Turner that shows the strategies each author uses to incorporate texts in their exploration and explication.

We have brought these ethnographies together to make accessible the innovatory work being done, as well as to be responsive to the increasing interest in institutional ethnography and how to go about it. Like *Institutional Ethnography as Practice* (published by Rowman and Littlefield), the approach is to draw on the work of institutional ethnographers to describe aspects of how they go about their research. It demonstrates effective research approaches; it is not a primer, nor simply a thematically-linked collection, but it draws on institutional ethnographies to make available to readers some of the possibilities of opening up the regions that are their concern to exploration, once they can see how to draw texts into accounts of sequences of action. Such explorations are not necessarily exclusively academic, as there is a whole development (in the US as well as in Canada) known now as institutional analysis, which uses the institutional ethnographic approach in investigating how to make change from below and within institutional and organizational relations (Ellen Pence of Praxis International has been a leader in this area).

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(New book request continued)

While our book aims specifically at readers interested in institutional ethnography, its potential interest extends also into the more general area of interests in the social scientific relevance of texts and documents as is evidenced by Lindsay Prior's massive four-volume edited collection (both Smith and Turner have contributions) *Using Documents and Records in Social Science Research* (2011). It also extends into the fields known as composition and rhetoric, organizational studies in the US and among some information technology theorists.

One of the somewhat unexpected aspects of institutional ethnography's expansion is that it is not confined to sociology. Since it does not rely on orthodoxies of sociological theory, it has become widely used in faculties of education, nursing, adult education, social work, and organization and management, its range of relevance widened beyond the academic. The chapters included in the book are listed below.

1. Introduction (Dorothy E. Smith and Susan Marie Turner)
2. Policing the gay community: An inquiry into textually-mediated social relations (George Smith, 1988)
3. Shift work, text work: Texts in embodied nursing practices (Tim Diamond, 1992)
4. Doing child protection work (Gerald De Montigny, 1995)
5. Producing "what the deans know": Cost accounting and the restructuring of post-secondary education (Liza McCoy, 1998)
6. Organizing creation: The work of the musical text in concert performance (Leanne Warren, 2001)
7. How texts worked in standardizing child rearing through housing (Paul C. Luken and Suzanne Vaughan, 2006)
8. "Three in a bed": Technologies of utilization (Janet M. Rankin and Marie L. Campbell, 2006)
9. Regulating the alternative: Certifying organic farming on Vancouver Island, British Columbia (Katherine Wagner, 2011)
10. Negotiating UN Policy: Activating texts in setting-specific moments of policy deliberations (Lauren Eastwood, 2012)
11. Reading practices in decision processes (Susan Marie Turner, 2012)
12. Discourse as social relations: Sociological theory and the dialogic of sociology (Dorothy E. Smith, 2012)
13. Afterword (Dorothy E. Smith and Susan Marie Turner)

Request for citations for **sociopedia.isa**

(from Alison Griffith, Suzanne Vaughan and Dorothy Smith)

The Editor of **sociopedia.isa** has asked us to write an article on institutional ethnography.

Sociopedia.isa is a new online publication of the International Sociological Association (ISA) with review articles on subjects in the social sciences. It is a new concept in the production and dissemination of knowledge as it combines the best of two worlds: i) the opportunities the Internet offers for rapid publication and dissemination, and

ii) the quality guaranteed by thorough and imaginative editing and peer review. All the articles in **sociopedia.isa** are up-to-date, 'state-of-the-art' reviews and will be revised on a regular basis.

Please send the citations for any IE articles or books you have published in the last five years to Alison Griffith (agriffith@edu.yorku.ca). We will take a look and include in the bibliography those that fit with our review. **We will need your citations by April 30, 2012.** Thanks so much for helping us do a comprehensive review of the new work in IE.

Member news

Dr. Margo Kushner is a member of the “Child Custody Sub Committee of the Maryland Judiciary Committee on Family Law.” She was appointed to this committee in 2007 based on her expertise in the area of child custody and access. For the last four years she has consulted on the development of house bills pertaining to family law matters in Annapolis. Dr. Kushner was particularly interested in House Bill 761 which is concerned with grandparent rights in child custody cases. Maryland law does not currently permit grandparents visitations rights to their grandchildren when a divorce occurs within their familial system. Eliminating interference by grandparents was the original rationale supporting this law. If a parent passes away children are often left to reside with a step parent who could deny grandparents access to their grandchildren. Dr. Kushner’s work in this is indicative of the changes social workers can make at a macro level. She presented at a major conference concerned with family law matters in Washington and had the privilege of meeting the Honorable Chief Judge Bell of the Maryland Court of Appeals. Judge Bell provided Dr. Kushner’s name to the Chair of the Family Law Committee. The moral of this story is don’t forget the power of networking.

New dissertation

Laura Bisailon successfully defended her dissertation entitled *Cordon Sanitaire or Healthy Policy? How Prospective Immigrants with HIV are Organized by Canada’s Mandatory HIV Screening*.

New publication

Parkinson, H. C. & Stooke, R. K. (2012). Other duties as assigned: The hidden work of reading and writing assessments in two primary classrooms. *Language & Literacy*, 14(1), 59-77.

<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/langandlit/issue/view/1223>

Welcome to new members

The IE Division welcomes the following new members who joined since the last newsletter.

Gary Barron
Patricia Brock

Annie Carrier
Alison Fisher
Lindsey Freeman
Kristin Kelly
Elena Kim
Yan Long

Melody Norton Ninomiya
Yasmin Ortiga
Ulluminair Salim
Megan Welsh
Aaron Williams

Call for nominees and papers for the IE Division’s Awards

Dorothy E. Smith Award for Scholar-Activism (The deadline for nominations is May 1, 2012).

The IE Division is pleased to solicit nominations for the 2012 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 some longer trajectory of work. The contributions may involve IE research conducted and used for activist ends, or it may involve activist efforts which have drawn upon or contributed to IE scholarship. The award committee invites members of the IE

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(Call for nominees and papers continued)

Division to send a one-page statement describing the contributions of the nominee to Janet Rankin at jmrankin@ucalgary.ca. The honoree will be recognized with a certificate at the IE Division business meeting during the SSSP Annual Meeting in August 2012 in Denver.

George W. Smith Graduate Student Paper Award (The deadline for papers is May 12, 2012).

Faculty, please circulate this Call for Papers to your graduate students.

The IE Division solicits papers for its 2012 George W. Smith Graduate Student Paper Competition. Papers should advance institutional ethnography scholarship either methodologically or through a substantive contribution. Authors must be currently enrolled graduate students or have completed their degree since September 2011. Prizes include a \$100 cash award, registration fees and an opportunity to present the paper at the 2012 SSSP meetings, and a ticket to the SSSP awards banquet. Students who submit papers should be prepared to attend the conference. Send a copy to Laura Bisailon at lbisa082@uottawa.ca and Marie Campbell at mariecam@uvic.ca. (For an overview of institutional ethnography and the purposes of the IE Division, see the [IE Division webpage](#).)

Work in progress

In response to the last call for newsletter items, Becky Carnes asked for advice from more experienced IE researchers.

I am interested in the decline of long-term volunteering, the popularity of short-term service-learning projects, and the "career volunteers", those who might identify with volunteerism as a "job". I work as a volunteer in a local non-profit homeless shelter. I would like to investigate how "career volunteers" make sense of what they do and who they are. The homeless shelter is championing my project. They would like to see me develop a volunteer management resource.

I'm not sure how I should engage with institutional hierarchies and I'm not sure how much I can say about any alienation that I see occurring as volunteer tasks are professionalized. How would you suggest that I balance research with activism?

Naomi Nichols replies:

I did a similarly complicated piece of work for my doctoral dissertation, and I found it very rewarding. Like yours, it straddled multiple expectations for practical and research outputs. I now see that using research to make change *always* requires that one work with contrasting (even conflicting) priorities.

Beginning with the experiential knowledge of people who *do volunteering*, you could productively chart the institutional relations that shape this work (e.g. the push for universities to be "engaged" institutions by increasing service and experiential learning opportunities for students or the push for foundations like the United Way to harness more "civic muscle" and the granting frameworks that emerge in response to this push). I would, however, caution you to avoid a term like "career volunteer" in case this is not how some people understand their work. In other words, focus on the work, not the category. *(continued)*

(Work in progress continued)

You may need to set some boundaries around the different aspects of your work. The research can (and should) inform the development of the "volunteer management resource" that the shelter needs. BUT you need to see the development of this resource as separate from (although in conversation with) your research. You want to invite people to tell you their stories, and you want to be able to build from these an investigation of the institutional coordination of volunteering work, such that you can (hopefully!) discover how volunteer "alienation" is socially organized.

Keep in mind that the critical analysis will be of processes of social coordination. Not people. In a nutshell, I'm suggesting the that you privilege space for critical social science research, while also recognizing and accommodating the shelter's desire for a particular and practical outcome (the management tool). People at the shelter are not likely to be as interested in your dissertation as they will be in the *outcomes* of the research.

I hope this is helpful. Good luck.

Liza McCoy replies:

I have worked as a volunteer at the board level in the non-profit social service sector for many years, so I appreciate your interest in this area and I think it's very important. Right now, your questions focus on the volunteers themselves, producing them as an object of study – which is why the homeless shelter management is interested (they hope your research will help them recruit and manage volunteers more effectively). But that generates tension between research and activism, as you put it. This is why institutional ethnographers like to start their research from a place outside of administrative relevancies and categories of ruling. If you were going to do this research from the standpoint of volunteers, what would you look at? For example, you mentioned that volunteers feel alienated as a result of the professionalization of volunteer tasks, by which I think you mean that work they had done is now being done by paid staff, leaving the volunteers less interesting work to do.

Institutional ethnographies often start from questions or disjunctures that arise in people's everyday experiences. So why not start there? How is that situation coming about? To answer that question, you would probably need to explore agency practices of recruiting and using volunteers, as well as the funding and reporting practices that shape those practices. Perhaps there are networks of accreditation and relations with other agencies that also drive the push toward professionalization.

Of course, this is complex terrain. Some community activists argue for the creation of more decently-paid, stable jobs in the nonprofit social service sector, rather than the maintenance of interesting volunteer opportunities. Public discourses valorizing volunteerism, they point out, allow for the underfunding of these organizations.

The important thing in institutional ethnographic research is to bring all of this into view, as it happens through the work that people do, and from a starting place in the actuality of people's everyday lives.

Good luck with your research.