

Teaching Social Problems

A Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

Newsletter

Winter 2006

From the Division Chair:

Dear members of the Teaching Social Problems Division of the SSSP:

The Teaching Social Problems Division is thriving and active. Thank you to all our division members for contributing to the following:

- TSP sponsored three sessions at the 2005 annual meetings. Thanks to our organizers!
- TSP awarded the 2005 Graduate Student award for "The Forbidden Chapter: Representations of Sexuality in Introductory Sociology Textbooks," by Alicia Suarez and Alexandra Berkowitz (Indiana University). The authors presented their papers at the 2005 meetings.
- TSP contributed to a joint reception of association divisions at the 2005 meetings.

This year, the division is undertaking the following activities, highlighted in this newsletter:

- TSP Division will sponsor 3 sessions and co-sponsor 3 sessions at the 2006 SSSP meetings in Montreal, Quebec.
- The Division announces a call for nominations for candidates for Division Chair. The division will hold an election shortly for the 2006-08 Division Chair position.
- Susan Warner of Cedarville University joins us as co-editor of the Division Newsletter.
- The newsletter will feature a new column called "Problems!" By Stephanie Medley Rath of West Georgia University. The first installment appears in this issue.
- The Division announces its 2006 Graduate Student Paper Competition. Details Inside.

Thanks to all TSP Division members for your support and participation.

Glenn W. Muschert
Miami University – Oxford, Ohio
muschegw@muohio.edu

Call for Submissions to Teaching Social Problems Division Sponsored Sessions:

Contributors can submit papers via the online form: <http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/23/m/212>

Teaching Social Problems Division is sponsoring the following sessions:

- **Session 1:** Service Learning for Building Just, Diverse, and Democratic Communities – Thematic Session
Organizer: Will Holton
W: 617-373-3853; w.holton@neu.edu
- **Session 2:** Challenges to Teaching Social Problems Courses for Beginning Faculty
Organizer: Stephanie Medley
W: 678-839-6324; smedley@westga.edu
- **Session 3:** Creating and Maintaining Effective Internships
Organizer: Glenn W. Muschert
W: 513-529-1812; muschegw@muohio.edu

In addition, Teaching Social Problems is co-sponsoring the following sessions:

- **Session 22:** Teaching Justice and Compassion: Learning Through the Inclusion of Animals into our Sense of Community – Thematic Session (Environment and Technology Division and the Teaching Social Problems Division)
Organizer: Lisa Anne Zilney
W: 973-655-7225; lisa.zilney@montclair.edu
- **Session 32:** Teaching for Global-Local Problem Solving: Curriculum Transformation and Social Change – Thematic Session (Global Division and the Teaching Social Problems Division) Co-organizers: Walda Katz-Fishman and Jerome Scott
W: 301-367-1079; wkatzfishman@igc.org
- **Session 47:** Teaching Theory in Social Problems Courses (Social Problems Theory Division and the Teaching Social Problems Division) Organizer: Susan Warner
W: 937-766-7930; warners@cedarville.edu

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Announcing a New Column: Problems!

Welcome to the first column of “Problems!” This column is a forum where you can write to me with any problems you have teaching Social Problem courses. I invite you to submit questions to smedley@westga.edu with any challenges you have encountered teaching Social Problems.

How do you identify the problem? How do you make a convincing argument that a problem even exists?

As teachers of sociology, we often live in a bubble—the problems are often so obvious to us. One of our jobs is to make social problems obvious to our students. We are challenged to explain or identify the problem for our students.

Compounding this challenge is the functionalist explanation of the problem. Here we are justifying the problem and explaining how the problem is beneficial, while at the same time trying to convince students that the issue is still problematic. How can something be beneficial and problematic? Our job is to make social problems real to our students.

For example, why is poverty problematic? Poverty can be very beneficial—as long as you yourself are not poverty stricken. How do we make sure students do not get hung up on the benefits of poverty (e.g., how else do we motivate people to work harder)? And, how do we make sure students do not continue in the bad habit of blaming the victim—especially because many college students are living in near poverty (or at least, pseudo poverty) conditions? Of course, statistics almost always help. Show your class measures of poverty from the U.S. Census. Recently, *The New York Times* ran a series of articles about how poverty is lived in the United States. Students do benefit from reading these articles because it makes them think about the variety of harms related to poverty. There is also a great documentary, *People Like Us*, illustrating not only poverty—but the whole spectrum of social class in the United States.

Even with these resources, not all students will be convinced. But convincing our students isn't really our job—they have to come to conclusions on their own. Our job is to get them to think critically about the issues.

--- Stephanie R. Medley Rath

Resources mentioned in this column:

- Alvarez, Louis and Andrew Kolker. 2001. *People Like Us* [Videotape]. New York: Center for New American Media.
 - Correspondents from *The New York Times*. 2005. *Class Matters*. New York: Times Books.
- U.S. Census:
www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html

Call for Nominations for TSP Division Chair

The Teaching Social Problems Division solicits nominations for the 2006-08 Division Chair's position. The Division Chair is responsible for coordinating division activities, many of which occur at the annual meetings. Nominations should be sent to the current chair, Glenn W. Muschert (muschegw@muohio.edu), including the name, institutional affiliation, contact information, and brief biographical sketch. Self-nominations are acceptable.

Call for Submissions to TSP Division Newsletter

The editors of the division newsletter welcome essays, reviews, and announcements. Please submit suggestions and materials for future TSP Division Newsletters to:

- Susan Warner, Dept. of Social Sciences and History, 251 N. Main St., Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio 45314, Phone: 937-766-7632, Fax: 937-766-7583, (warners@cedarville.edu)
- Glenn W. Muschert, Department of Sociology & Gerontology, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056-1879, Phone: 513-529-1812, Fax: 513-529-8525, (muschegw@muohio.edu).

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Teaching Social Problems Division 2006 Students Paper Competition Deadline: 3/15/06

The Teaching Social Problems Division announces its 2006 Graduate Student Paper Competition. Papers may be on any aspect of teaching about social problems. Topics for papers can include “best practices” in the classroom, service-learning courses, using technology, using media, assessment of learning, and other areas. The winner will receive a stipend of \$100 plus a ticket to the 2006 SSSP Banquet. The winner will be offered an opportunity to present this paper at one of the Teaching Social Problems Division sessions being held as part of the 2006 SSSP meeting. To be eligible, a paper must meet the following criteria: 1) The paper must have been written between January 2005 and March 2006; 2) The paper may not have been submitted or accepted for publication (papers that have been presented at a professional meeting or that have been submitted for presentation at a professional meeting are eligible); 3) The paper must be authored by one or more students, and not co-authored with a faculty member or colleague who is not a student; 4) The paper must be 25 pages or less, including notes, references, and tables; and, 5) The paper must be accompanied by a letter from a faculty member at the student’s college/university nominating the paper for the Teaching Social Problems Division Student Paper Competition. Students should send three copies of their paper, accompanied by a letter of nomination from a faculty member to the Student Paper Competition Chair:

Professor Patrick F. Gillham
University of Alaska – Anchorage
Department of Sociology
3211 Providence Dr.
Anchorage, AK 99508
(907) 786-1976
gillham@uaa.alaska.edu

The deadline for submission is 3/15/06. The winner will be announced prior to the 2006 SSSP Annual Meeting.

Student Paper Award Committee:

Patrick F. Gillham (Chair), University of Alaska
Nelta Edwards, University of Alaska
Glenn W. Muschert, Miami University