



Society for the Study of Social Problems

# Teaching Social Problems

Fall 2012

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## A Note from the Chair

### The Problem of Teaching Social Problems



It's been a tough semester. Getting students to read, encouraging discussion about almost anything, or coaxing them out of what they themselves call their "comfort zones" has been like excavating heavy rocks, semi-embedded in earthen clay. Teaching has become something between a Sisyphean task and a Promethean punishment—only it's my soul not my liver whose crumbs litter the classroom floor. Apparently, though, my students have it even worse.

According to many studies, most notably the work of UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (2011), student stress levels are at an all-time high. Only a little over half of all incoming students describe themselves as having an emotional well-being above average or better. This number dropped 3.4 percent from last year, and has declined steadily since 1985 when almost two-thirds reported feeling above average. Reasons for increased stress are probably many (although students report actually spending less time on course work) but exponential increases in time with social media, extra-curricular activities and wage work, and the volatility and hyper aggressiveness of campus social life all certainly contribute.

Above all, however, financial insecurities (especially since the fiscal crises of 2007 and 2008) weigh heavily on students. Over half of first year students used loans to pay for college, with almost 40% having \$6000 or more their first year. Meanwhile, almost 60% of seniors graduated with debt in 2010, the average accumulated debt? \$33,000! According to Andrew Ross (2012), over 40% of 2005's graduating class is either delinquent or in default of their student loans. *(continued on next page )*

## A Note from the Chair: The Problem of Teaching Social Problems (continued from page 1)

(continued from previous page) Citing Jeffrey Williams (2008) Ross wonders if we should compare student debt to indentured servitude. He writes: "In a knowledge economy, when a college degree is considered a passport to a decent livelihood, workforce entrants must go into debt in return for the right to labor. This kind of contract is the essence of indenture." Regardless of unemployment rates still being significantly lower for college grads, "the promise" of a college degree is fading faster than Obama's Hope posters.

Yet, today's students clearly *count* on this promise more than ever. Over 85% of them list "getting a better job" as their number one reason for going to college. Thus, ironies abound. As students *commit* themselves to the transactional nature of higher education, their ability to spin sheepskin into gold appears an ever greater alchemy. Simultaneously, the *belief* in the transactional nature of the educational enterprise diminishes their ability to seek the kind of critically engaged and dialogic inquiry into the social conditions and political contexts shaping their dilemma. C. Wright Mills (1959) classic introduction to *The Sociological Imagination* has never been more appropriate, with a possible caveat concerning the ways in which cell phones and social media make students feel incredibly powerful at the same time that their inundation by texts, tweets, and tumblrs inspires an overwhelmingly blasé paralysis.

Mills, of course, made an entirely different promise about acquiring certain habits of mind. A sociological imagination ought to be somewhat liberating to students feeling "trapped." But our students don't define their academic malaise as feeling "trapped;" the only language they have for their general condition is that of being "stressed." A Social Problems course (or any sociology course really) ought to present students with the discipline's approach to defining, describing, understanding and ultimately addressing our society's most pressing issues and their impact on individual feelings and attitudes. But it's hard to do so when some of these most pressing concerns actually make it almost impossible to teach, regardless of one's traditional or innovative approaches.

I am sure that many of you will see this missive as a challenge, and it is my hope that we are inundated with examples of teaching effectiveness and, even better, a pedagogy of hope for the twenty-first century. Freire (1992) once wrote of hope as imperative for any successful struggle for justice.

The idea that hope alone will transform the world...is an excellent route to hopelessness. But the attempt to do without hope in the struggle to improve the world...is a frivolous illusion. To attempt to do without hope, which is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle, is tantamount to denying that struggle is one of its mainstays. ...hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice....in order to become historical concreteness. Without a minimum of hope we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness....Hence the need for a kind of education in hope.

I believe the pedagogy of this historical moment hangs in the balance between hope and hopelessness. I look forward to joining you all, my friends and colleagues, as we explore together a practice of hope in the cause of justice. (References on page 9)

## SSSP 2013 Annual Meeting

### The Society for the Study of Social Problems 63rd Annual Meeting

August 9-11, 2013

The Westin New York

at Times Square

New York City, NY

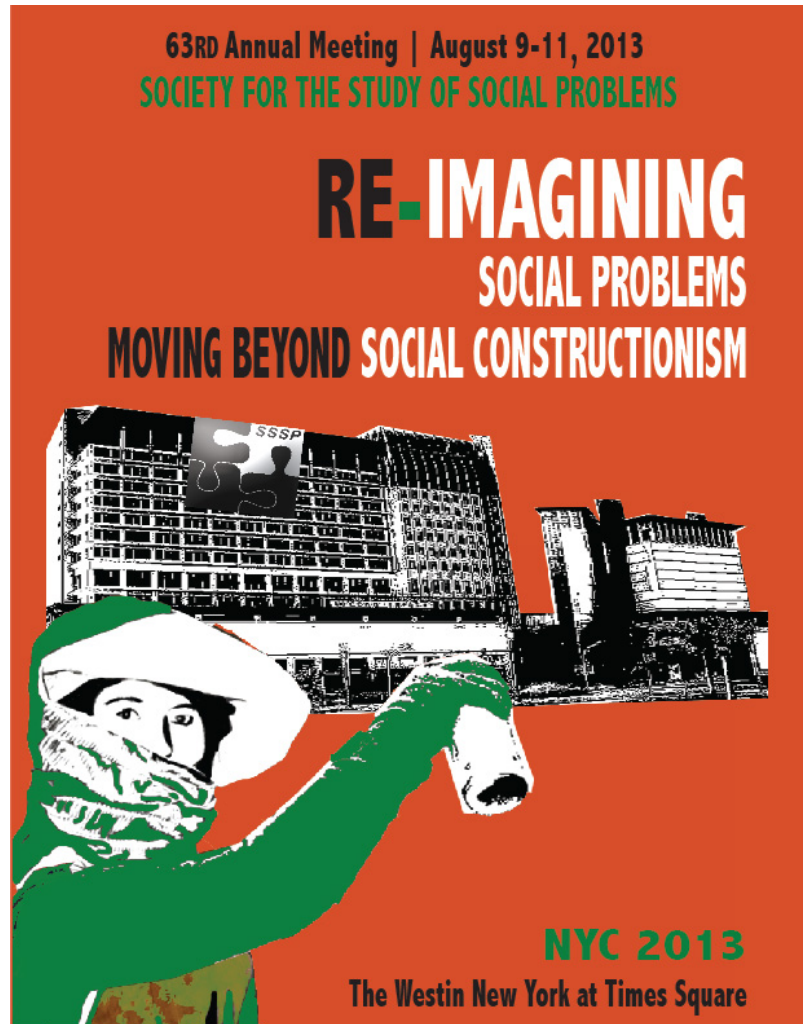
The online conference registration will be available in February 2013.

#### CALL FOR PAPERS: January 31, 2013

Submit an extended abstract and paper at the SSSP website:

<http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/509/fuseaction/sspsession2.publicView>. SSSP members should use their SSSP login information.

All papers must be submitted by midnight (EST) on **January 31, 2013** in order to be considered.



## SSSP 2013 Conference Sessions

### Teaching Social Problems Division Sponsored Sessions

#### Session One

Title: *New Trends in Teaching Social Problems: Content, Technology, Engagement and More*

Organizer: Carrie Smith, Millersville University. [Carrie.Smith@millersville.edu](mailto:Carrie.Smith@millersville.edu)

#### Session Two

Title: *Teaching the World that isn't: Envisioning Social Change in the Classroom*

Organizer: Kathleen Korgen, William Patterson University. [KKorgen@wpunj.edu](mailto:KKorgen@wpunj.edu)

#### Session Three

Title: Teaching about Human Rights and Social Justice

Organizer: Corey Dolgon, Stonehill College and Andrea Miller, Webster University,  
[cdolgon@stonehill.edu](mailto:cdolgon@stonehill.edu)

### Co-Sponsored Sessions

#### Session Four

Title: Community-Based Social Justice Activism, Education and Social

Organizer: Debbie Perkins, Coastal Carolina, [dperkins@coastal.edu](mailto:dperkins@coastal.edu)

#### Session Five

Title: Teaching Sexuality and its challenge

Organizer: Elroi Windsor, Salem College, [elroi.windsor@salem.edu](mailto:elroi.windsor@salem.edu)

#### Session Six

Title: Teaching the sociology of crime and delinquency

Organizer: Rebecca Maniglia, Northern Arizona University, [Rebecca.Maniglia@nau.edu](mailto:Rebecca.Maniglia@nau.edu)

#### Session Seven

Title: Teaching About Race and Ethnicity

Organizers: Corey Dolgon, Stonehill and David Embrick, Loyola, Corey Dolgon,  
[cdolgon@stonehill.edu](mailto:cdolgon@stonehill.edu)

#### Session Eight

Title: Graduate Student Teaching: Work and Workers

Organizers: Reuben Roth, Laurentian University, [rroth@laurentian.ca](mailto:rroth@laurentian.ca)

#### Session Nine

Title: Teaching Theory in Social Problems

Organizer: Kathleen Lowney, Valdosta State University, [klowney@valdosta.edu](mailto:klowney@valdosta.edu)

#### Session Ten

Title: Teaching Institutional Ethnography

Organizer: Susan Marie Turner, [turnersusanm@gmail.com](mailto:turnersusanm@gmail.com)

## Moving the DREAM University from the Streets to the Classrooms



The author teaching a course about social movements at a Boston *DREAM University*, September 2010

By Thomas Piñeros Shields, Ph.D. Candidate, Brandeis University

During the summer of 2010, undocumented immigrant student activists, shut out of many opportunities in colleges and universities, established their own “DREAM Universities.” College professors and graduate students were recruited to offer ‘teach-in’ style classes, literally, in the streets in events that combined public protests and lobbying, with

classes, calisthenics and dancing. Now, the students are moving out of the streets and into college classrooms.

This past June, President Obama announced a new administrative policy at Department of Homeland Security that would grant relief from the threat of deportation and work permits to some qualifying undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as children. As of this writing, over 300,000 young people have enrolled in the new policy, called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Although DACA is temporary (2 years) and limited to only a fraction of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States today, and even those who receive DACA remain ineligible for federal financial aid, the impact of DACA on colleges and Universities who have struggled to figure out how to incorporate undocumented students into their campuses is beginning to be felt. Some campuses, such as University of Houston (TX), CUNY (NY), Ivy Tech Community College (IN), Linn-Benton Community College (OR), and Union County College (NJ) have established programs to help students complete DACA applications. In August, Hampshire College (MA) joined a handful of colleges including UCLA, UC Berkley and several Jesuit universities (such as University of San Francisco, University of Santa Clara, Seattle University and Fordham University) in offering scholarships specifically to undocumented students. Most recently, in October, the Governor of Massachusetts extended in-state tuition benefits to DACA eligible students. Such cost-savings measures attempt to accommodate these students who receive no federal financial aid.

As these barriers to enrollment fall away, we can expect this generation of “*DACA-mented*” students to arrive on our campuses with an energy and eagerness to engage in school after years of pent-up desire to learn. The challenge for us as educators will be to engage them and to incorporate their life experiences in ways that can enrich the campus environment.



## We should stand with Jammie

By Corey Dolgon, Stonehill College



Faculty, even sociology faculty informed with a “sociological Imagination,” are not always very good at recognizing their collective class or institutional interests. We don’t reflect on our conditions as wage workers inside institutions increasingly more corporate. We labor ever more intensely while often ignorant of the “speed-up” tendencies that technology, consumers (students) and burgeoning administrators demand. And we allow skirmishes over work rules and shop control (academic freedom) to result in censorship and intimidation creeping into our classrooms and curricula.

Major institutional transgressions, however, sometimes force us to take notice. In fact, they give us opportunities to awake from our professional slumber and act in our own collective interests. One of these events has taken place at Appalachian State University where Dr. Jammie Price, a tenured Sociology Professor and Editor for the *Journal of Applied Social Science* was unjustly disciplined by the University’s administration. We must take a stand. We must speak out!

For those of you who have not heard the details of this case previously, I would point you to numerous articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and elsewhere, but most recently an excellent overview of the case appeared on the website for *Inside Higher Ed* at <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/11/26/faculty-panel-backs-professor-dispute-over-porn-documentary> . This article explains the initial student complaints and the administration’s exaggerated response. Administrative overreach clearly violated faculty contract and due process, judgments shared and well-articulated by a faculty grievance committee. According to reporter, Scott Jaschik, the faculty report concluded that Price *deserved* a hearing before being suspended, and rejected the administration's response that suspension did not constitute a serious enough sanction to merit a hearing. Jaschik continues:

Further, the report defended Price's right to talk about issues related to athletics, higher education and race -- even when those comments include criticism of the university. "In teaching race and ethnicity, Prof. Price discusses race in the context of higher education and student athletics. In doing so, she does not paint a pretty picture, and it intentionally hits home with many students," the faculty report says. "Even if her illustrations are critical of Appalachian, that is legitimate sociology. Teaching about the intersections of race and higher education and athletics is a legitimate topic for a sociology class. It is a legitimate argument in the field that student athletes receive special privileges.... In fact, ASU athletes do receive special privileges."

Ironically, the student athlete complaints about Price, “received speedier consideration than is the norm, and that every effort was made to immediately make the athletes happy, rather than -- as the panel suggested should have happened -- to bring the athletes and Price together to try to work things out informally.” Thus, Prof. Price's case suggests an object lesson in the fact that student athletes *do* get preferential treatment.

ASU Chancellor, Kenneth Peacock, however, “rejected” the report and its recommendations saying they were inconsistent. The only thing inconsistent is the ASU administration’s behavior and the notion that ASU is an institution of higher learning. ASU seems more like a Banana republic than a bastion of free inquiry and democratic ideals. But the Chancellor and his minions clearly operate with little concern for such niceties as due process, contractual obligations, etc. because so far no one has *made* them. It is a common yet still sad lesson that every generation must learn, that the quality and quantity of the justice you get is based on the amount of power and will individuals and groups can muster to demand it. For now, there is no justice for Jammie Price.

But we can help! We must write our own letters and distribute them far and wide. Read the Chronicle of Higher Education piece at <http://chronicle.com/article/Chancellor-Defends-Discipline/135944/> or the Inside Higher Education piece and add your comments. People will see them. Post this letter or your own comments on face book. Call or write your own professional organizations, regional and national groups (especially officers) and demand they write letters supporting Jammie Price and calling on Chancellor to accept faculty panel’s report. Call or write the ASU administration directly. If nothing happens, then we should all pursue professional sanctions against the college—up to and including not accepting students with ASU sociology degrees into graduate programs or not accepting papers from ASU faculty and students for conference presentations and publications. In other words, ASU as an institution needs to be disciplined by those of us in the professions until they clean up their act.

If any of you have questions about how you can be involved in this struggle or have ideas for other ways to make our voices heard and take a stand, please don’t hesitate to contact me at [cdolgon@stonehill.edu](mailto:cdolgon@stonehill.edu) . And, finally, for those of you who would like to simply support Jammie on a personal level, you may contact her at [jammieprice@gmail.com](mailto:jammieprice@gmail.com). As you can tell from the papers and surmise from the nature of these struggles, she should know the solidarity that’s out there and be buoyed by your actions and your words. This is the time and this is the place for action. Please join me and stand with Jammie Price!

## Teaching Tools: The Sociological Cinema

The Sociological Cinema is edited and published by Valerie Chepp, Paul Dean, and Lester Andrist, a team of three public sociologists. As graduate student colleagues and close friends in the Sociology Department at the University of Maryland, we launched this site in September 2010 as a way to facilitate using popular culture and video to teach and learn about sociology.



The idea of The Sociological Cinema came to us over the course of several conversations in which we repeatedly found ourselves discussing our use of video clips in the classroom. While teaching we found that videos were highly effective at illustrating course concepts and theories, supplementing analyses found in course texts, and keeping students more engaged. At the same time, we were each teaching new prep courses and had

many other competing demands, so we commiserated over the time-consuming nature of finding useful video clips to show our students. Then, suddenly, the idea hit us—“Wouldn’t it be great if there was a website for sociology instructors that tagged video clips by sociological themes so instructors could easily search and find clips appropriate for various lecture topics?” Since then, we have committed ourselves to creating precisely that kind of resource and locating it here on The Sociological Cinema.

The Sociological Cinema [www.thesociologicalcinema.com](http://www.thesociologicalcinema.com) is an online resource designed to help sociology instructors incorporate videos into their classes. The centerpiece of the site is a searchable database of video clips. Many of the clips housed on the site are especially useful for teaching social problems. Each clip is tagged with sociological themes, year, and includes a summary of the clip with suggestions of how to use it in the classroom. The site also includes a blog, assignments, video-related scholarship on teaching and learning, and a form to submit new video clips to the site. Additional teaching resources can be found on The Sociological Cinema's Facebook and Twitter (@TheSocyCinema) pages.



## Division Member News and Publications

### Fulbright Teaching Scholarship

Dr. Mary Hollowell at Clayton State University in Atlanta has received a 2013 Fulbright Teaching Scholarship to China. She will be teaching American Educational Policy at Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an, China. Dr. Hollowell also plans to write a book on comparative education while in China.

### New Appointment

Assistant Professor Yung-Yi Diana Pan joined the Department of Sociology at Brooklyn College – City University of New York this Fall.

### SSSP 2012 Conference Highlights

Congratulations Sarah E. Rusche and Kendra Jason from North Carolina State University. They are the winners of the 2012 student paper competition. Their winning paper: "Welcoming the Personal as Sociological: Critical Self-Reflection and Transformation in the Classroom,"

## A Note from the Division Chair (continued from page 2)

### References

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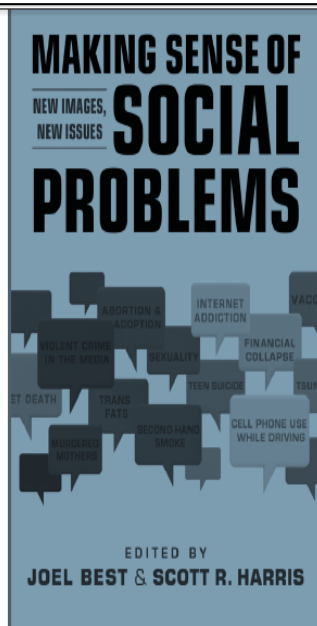
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—Kathryn Fox,  
University of Vermont

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pb \$26.50 **\$21.20**

## Making Sense of Social Problems: New Images, New Issues

JOEL BEST AND SCOTT R. HARRIS, EDITORS

**“Thoughtful, accessible, and engaging. . . This volume shows readers the power and value of the constructionist approach to social problems.”** —Kent Sandstrom, North Dakota State University

Internet addiction. Cell-phone-distracted drivers. Teen suicide. Economic recession. The health risks of trans fats. The carefully selected collection of case studies in *Making Sense of Social Problems* is designed to help students understand and critically evaluate a wide range of contemporary social issues.

The cases are organized to highlight a series of key elements:

- why “objective” claims deserve critical attention
- how advocates bring attention to issues
- why expert interpretations may change over time
- the role of the media in shaping or distorting concerns
- the consequences of public policy

The introduction, conclusion, and section notes provide a coherent framework for the text. Reflecting the promise of the constructionist approach, the result is a powerful set of tools for systematically investigating social problems. It can be used to advantage as a “stand-alone,” as well as with such texts as Joel Best’s *Social Problems*.

**Joel Best** is professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Delaware. **Scott R. Harris** is professor of sociology at Saint Louis University.

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## Teaching Sociology Conference

**Save the Date: April 13th, 2013**

### **Teaching Sociology: New Approaches to Practicing a Discipline That Matters**

The Association for Humanist Sociology, The Society for the Study of Social Problems [SSSP] Teaching Social Problems Division, and the Stonehill College Department of Sociology and Criminology would like to invite faculty and students to participate in a one-day conference on teaching and learning in sociology. The conference will have a focus on civic engagement and Applied Sociology (public sociology, service learning, community based research, etc.), but will not be exclusive to community-based pedagogies. Papers may include theoretical and pedagogical discussions of humanist or public sociology; examinations of using community based research and service learning to enhance student learning; building effective and transformational community partnerships; innovative classroom practices; and other topics.

We also expect to have a luncheon keynote speaker and we hope to save some time in the afternoon for a more open and informal set of conversations about the future of teaching and learning in sociology and links to social justice and the public engagement of scholar/student activists. The deadline for paper or session proposals, workshops or others type sessions, or posters (especially student posters) is February 1st. All submissions should be sent to Corey Dolgon [cdolgon@stonehill.edu](mailto:cdolgon@stonehill.edu)

The Conference will be held at Stonehill College. More details, possible lodging and other logistical information will be forthcoming. If you are interested in serving on the program committee or have any other questions, please contact Corey as well. ASAP!

## **CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

### **Student Paper Awards**

#### **TEACHING SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

**Deadline: 1/31/13**

The Teaching Social Problems Division announces its 2013 Outstanding Paper Competition. Papers may be on any aspect of teaching about social problems, but does not have to derive from teaching a social problems course. 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 cash award of \$100, a ticket to the 2013 SSSP awards banquet, and a one year membership to SSSP. The winner also receives an opportunity to present this paper at the 2013 SSSP meeting.

To be eligible, a paper must meet the following criteria: (1) The paper must have been completed between January 2012 and January 2013; (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 30 pages or less, including notes, references, and tables.

Self nominations are welcome and highly encouraged. Please submit the paper electronically as a Word-compatible file, along with a letter of nomination, to the Outstanding Paper Competition committee chair: Dr. Corey Dolgon, Director of Community Based Learning, Stonehill College, 320 Washington Street, Easton, MA 02357, 508-565-1904 , [cdolgon@stonehill.edu](mailto:cdolgon@stonehill.edu) . The winner will be announced prior to the 2013 SSSP Annual Meeting in New York, NY.

**Call for Papers**  
**Special Issue of *Critical Sociology***  
**A Critical Assessment of Community-Based Research**

Special Issue Editors:  
Dave Overfelt, Rochester Institute of Technology  
Patricia Molina Costa, MIT Community Innovators Lab

We are seeking proposals for a special issue of *Critical Sociology* that will emphasize the *doing of* community-based research from a multidisciplinary perspective, bringing together high-quality, original, and theoretically driven research that utilizes the community-based approach. Authors are invited to propose articles **by January 7, 2013** giving a general assessment of the current and future state of the field of community-based or activist research and original research articles using a community-based approach. Within sociology, former president Michael Burawoy's now infamous 2004 address at the American Sociological Association's national conference touched off a firestorm of debate on the discipline's relationship to the world in which our science is embedded. Questions regarding the value of academic work to the rest of the world have become increasingly prevalent within sociology and other disciplines, while many raise concerns that even public academics still try to do things *to* the communities we study instead of *with* them. Urban areas face multiple complex challenges – economic, environmental, social, and political – that will alter much of what we now know about cities. Though rich in their engagement of multiple disciplines, urban studies tend toward fragmentation and compartmentalization, leaving urban scholars working in isolation with limited and episodic engagement with communities. These challenges indicate a need to shift away from working to fix isolated problems and toward a multidisciplinary approach emphasizing the great urban potential for innovation in democracy and equity. In this context, new forms of community-university collaboration are needed to strengthen and capitalize on community institutions and assets and to identify, value, and deploy the untapped social and intellectual capital found in urban neighborhoods.

The approach comes with challenges: fostering joint projects between scholars and urban residents can require bridging competing logics, incompatible styles of discourse and attitudes towards authority, or inaccessibility of methods and results, all of which can undermine collaboration. Conflicting needs have traditionally played out in unequal partnerships that do not necessarily benefit the communities. The concept of research justice, or who gets to set the research agenda and benefit from the collaboration, is crucial to advance engaged scholarship.

With the goal of addressing these issues, a group of scholars and activists have recently formed the Urban Research-Based Action Network (URBAN), a multidisciplinary platform that aims at facilitating and promoting engaged scholarship across geographic and disciplinary lines, connecting scholars and activists that are working with struggling communities. The primary purpose of the network is twofold: (1) to contribute to the advancement of this work within academia, and (2) to foster mutually beneficial interdisciplinary and collaborative research projects among scholars and community partners.

As part of this initiative, this special issue of *Critical Sociology* seeks authors from a variety of disciplines to provide a general assessment of the current and future state of the field of community-based or activist research and original research articles using a community-based approach. We are currently accepting proposals fitting these broad categories.

To submit your proposal, email title, abstract (250 word max), and detailed contact info for primary author to Dave Overfelt at [daveosociologist@gmail.com](mailto:daveosociologist@gmail.com) with the subject line "ATTN: SPECIAL ISSUE PROPOSAL". **Authors of accepted proposals will be invited to submit articles, all papers are subject to the standard review process at *Critical Sociology*.**