News flash: Philadelphia undergoes major brain drain!

The moving vans are circling the block as Samira and I write this final piece for the Fellow. It is bittersweet that we must bid farewell to Sungkyu Lee, Manisha Joshi & Kristie Thomas. We wish them immense success, good health, and happiness in their new junior faculty tenure track professorships in their soon-to-be hometowns of Knoxville, Tennessee (University of Tennessee), Tampa, Florida (University of South Florida), and Boston, Massachusetts (Simmons College). We’ll miss you! Don’t forget to write and call often.

We would also like to congratulate the students whose hard work and academic labors have come to fruition, our May PhD graduates, Francis Barchi, Rosie Frasso, Sungkyu Lee, and Mary Zhou. Cheers! Others will certainly follow in their footsteps later this Summer and will be featured in the Fall edition of the Fellow.

This issue of the Fellow marks significant shifts in our School of Social Policy and Practice’s PhD students. We thank Dr. Susan Sorenson for her leadership, guidance, and support; Katy Kaplan and Michelle Evans-Chase for their work as Colloquium co-chairs; Tom Byrne as our GAPSA representative; and Stacey Barrenger as student representative for the PhD steering committee. We also want to thank Kristie Thomas for her contribution to the Fellow over the past several years. Kristie served as editor of the Fellow for two years, and this is her last issue. She has been an invaluable member of the team and will be missed. We take this opportunity to thank Sara Wiesel Cullen and Mary Zhou for their work on the Fellow. Stay posted as we determine new leadership for the 2011/2012 academic year!

We want to welcome our incoming class for Fall 2011 - Erica Dean, Dexia Kong, Chenyi Ma, Angelina Riley, Megan Stanton and Jia Xue. We look forward to meeting you in the Fall!

Finally, we have enjoyed our roles as co-chairs of the DSSC and will take with us great memories of this past year because of YOU! One of our best memories will be the beautiful day of the Mural Arts Tour. Jane Golden was inspirational in describing her visionary work using art to transform and bring together Philadelphia communities these last twenty-five years. Best wishes for a productive, adventurous and memorable summer!

We hope to see you at our end of the year party.

Samira Ali and Julie Tennille, DSSC Co-Chairs
Audit Methodology: A Powerful, Underutilized Tool to Study Access to Services
by Joanna Bisgaier | Bisgaier@sp2.upenn.edu

A primary goal in pursuing our graduate degrees is to develop an effective set of research skills which will enhance our empirical studies throughout our careers. My dissertation research uses a unique research tool called audit methodology. This technique gets less exposure in the literature, but it has the potential for extensive utility for studies across the many content areas that comprise social welfare research. Historically, audit studies have been used to measure discrimination in labor and housing markets and have been widely applied for market research tasks in the private sector. In recent years, audit methods have been employed by health services researchers to measure disparities in health care access. I contend that any attempt to measure “access” or “discriminatory behavior” in any field would benefit from using audit methods.

Irrespective of the field in which this tool is applied, the design is straightforward. Two auditors pose as consumers attempting to gain access to a product or service. They are matched on all variables except for the independent variable of interest. They contact the same supplier of the product/service two times, with everything identical about the two contacts except for the independent variable. The response they encounter is documented as the dependent variable and analyzed for patterns of differential treatment. Although the design involves deception, it is considered an ethical research design if it is used for studying systems and not for the purpose of exposing an individual's conduct. Identities of audited firms must be kept confidential; results must be reported in the aggregate; and the potential benefits of conducting the audit must outweigh any costs incurred by those audited.

In my research with Dr. Karin Rhodes, our goal was to determine whether children insured by Medicaid—compared to children with commercial health insurance—are more likely to be denied needed specialty care. Therefore, we trained research assistants to pose as mothers attempting to schedule timely appointments with specialty physicians. In our case, the same caller called the same clinic twice, separated by approximately four weeks. Everything about the two calls to the same clinic was standardized and identical except for the caller’s report of her child’s insurance status (once reporting Medicaid and once reporting Blue Cross/ Blue Shield coverage). Therefore, any variation in clinics’ willingness to schedule an appointment that could be attributed to the parent or child (e.g. tone of voice, accent, persistence, knowledge of the child’s condition, possession of a referral, willingness to travel, ability to provide co-pays, and the severity of the child’s symptoms) were eliminated or minimized. Real appointments were made (and cancelled at the end of the call), enabling the comparative analysis of appointment rates and wait-times.

There are many advantages to the audit methodology tool that make it more appealing than traditional methods used to measure access and/or discriminatory behavior. I will explain these advantages using our study as an example. More conventional methods of measuring insurance disparities in children’s access to health care include retrospective analyses of administrative records (usually claims data), surveys of parents (asking parents of both insurance types whether they have encountered access problems), and surveys of physicians (asking providers whether they limit access to children of different insurance types). None of these other approaches are able to directly measure and compare the availability of health services for children of both insurance types while controlling for both parent behaviors and the child’s clinical need for care. Retrospective examination of administrative records cannot easily decipher children’s urgency of need for a used specialty service and cannot readily detect adverse health outcomes resulting from access failures (e.g. unused services). In surveys of families, investigators rely on parents’ perceptions of their child’s met or unmet needs. Perceptions of specialty health care needs may vary by socioeconomic status, as less-educated and less-informed parents may not realize what specialty services their children required. In fact, family survey studies have derived contradictory conclusions about specialty access problems by insurance type, which may reflect limitations in their measurement of clinical need. Surveys of specialty providers report whether providers say they accept children with public insurance. However, provider surveys lack precision in measurement of whether access barriers vary by the clinical severity of referrals. This factor is critical for understanding whether access problems meaningfully undermine the safety and health of children. In contrast, audit methodology allows a singular focus on the measurement of provider acceptance of insurance. The researcher is able to experimentally control for all other variables and isolate children's insurance status as the sole independent variable, which results in findings that are more accurate and persuasive than other methods.

In sum, I encourage your exploration and consideration of audit methods in planning your future investigations. A great book to consult is Clear and Convincing Evidence, by Michael Fix and Raymond J. Stryk (1993). In addition, Dr. Rhodes has conducted two large audit studies, and she is an excellent resource at SP2. Please let me know if you would like references for the statements above and do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at Bisgaier@sp2.upenn.edu.

Research Opportunity
Wanted: Someone who wants experience with small-scale survey data analysis and qualitative analysis of interviews from a multi-site, two-country study of middle-income families in the great recession, with a particular focus on the national policy contexts in which the families are embedded. Hopefully will result in a presentation at SSWR (abstract deadline usually at the end of April, but the call hasn’t been posted yet). Sorry - no research funds...The work needs to be started soon. Please contact Prof. Bobbie Iversen at riversen@sp2.upenn.edu.
Tell us about your work and how it relates to your research at Penn.

Right now I am working in the field of prisoner re-entry. I came to this topic based on my research in Philadelphia on unregulated and unlicensed recovery houses in the Kensington neighborhood. The work in Kensington got me interested in the intersections between substance abuse recovery, criminal justice, urban poverty, and welfare. Judges, probation and parole officers, and social workers send offenders with substance abuse problems to these recovery houses, even though in most cases these houses are unlicensed and technically illegal. Nonetheless, they are providing services for ex-offenders and serving as a point of re-entry into the community.

Through this experience, I also developed an interest in the prison system. The prison population in America has increased five fold since 1970, and many are now saying that incarceration acts as the 21st century welfare state. With the fiscal crisis of 2008, however, states are experiencing tremendous financial problems, and prisons are now being seen as increasingly unsustainable and untenable. Across the political spectrum, elites are devising new policies and practices in order to find cost-effective alternatives for incarceration. Currently, I am looking at a medium security prison fully dedicated to substance abuse treatment. I am also doing research on a prisoner re-entry program in Illinois, as part of a second book project.

What experiences at Penn have been the most valuable for you?

The interdisciplinary structure of the doctoral program is the primary reason I went to Penn. The foundation course in history and philosophy of social welfare with Dr. Cnaan, as well as the solid methodological training I received from Dr. Solomon, provided core knowledge for understanding many complicated social problems. But I especially appreciated the way that after the first year of coursework, the program encourages or even insists you take courses across the university. For me the result was an interdisciplinary training in anthropology, urban studies, communication, and even comparative literature; a very useful and definitely a durable benefit of the program. Also, I would say that just being in the city of Philadelphia was a great benefit. As an urban poverty researcher, Philly was an exceptional place to conduct my research.

What has been your biggest challenge as you have transitioned from being a graduate student to your current position?

You need to learn the publishing game. Transitioning from being a student to a faculty member means everything you are writing has to be of publishable quality. You need to learn the ins and outs of academic publishing, in particular for me this meant going through the difficult process of turning my dissertation into a book. I also found that the learning curve was quite steep in terms of the need to balance teaching, committee and departmental work as well as publishing. Lastly, I really noticed that as a student, I had a lot of institutionally protected reading. It’s very difficult to protect reading time as a junior professor. You have to create time to read in order to keep up with the literature but it certainly becomes more difficult with so many competing demands on your time.

Do you have any advice for current SP2 Ph.D. students vis-à-vis the job market and their career prospects and options?

I encourage people to take their time with the job market. It’s very important to be sure to find a place that cares about your work, and that the faculty that’s going to hire them knows who they are and appreciates what they do. You want the university to not only tolerate your research interests, but to encourage you to pursue that agenda and to give you the necessary resources to actualize it. I see too many people rushing through the graduate school experience, taking a job too quickly and then finding out it’s the wrong fit. Because of the accelerated hiring process of social work schools, sometimes people are forced to make a decision too early. You don’t want to take a tenure track job that’s a wrong fit.

Is there anything else you think current Ph.D. students should know?

I think you really need to take the time to do a good dissertation. There is this tendency to speed everything up, and to just get it done. I certainly understand the sentiment here, however, you have to realize that the first thing you are going to publish is your dissertation. If you take a job but cannot publish your dissertation - you are in trouble. So I would suggest people take time, even extra time to do a stronger dissertation. I also feel that the school should encourage you to write your dissertation as your first book manuscript, or at least to make this more of an institutionally viable option. That is the tradition in the academic disciplines, in political science, history, sociology, anthropology for example. In Social Welfare we are under a lot of pressure to publish journal articles, but I think welfare scholars need to pick up the tradition of writing books. Another piece of advice is not to underestimate how much you will miss Philly when you leave. I was very homesick (surprisingly) for Philly for many years. Philly is a great city. Take time to explore the city when you are still there. Some people in my cohort didn’t get out of campus let alone get to know the city. I was lucky, because I was doing ethnography, so I got out of west Philly and explored other parts of the city, in particular North Philly and Kensington. I really consider Philly to be the best kept secret of the US.
**Publications**


**Presentations**


**Awards/Funding/Jobs**

Joanna Bisgaier received a travel award of $800 from the Robert Wood Johnson Health & Society Scholars Program at the University of Michigan to attend their upcoming symposium, Social Determinants of Child Health (May 17-18, 2011)

Michelle Evans-Chase received a GAPSA-Provost Award for Interdisciplinary Innovation.

Itay Greenspan received the 2011 Annual Doctoral Research Scholarship by the Israeli Center for Third Sector Research at Ben Gurion University and a Doctoral Fellowship from the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).

Manisha Joshi accepted an Assistant Professor (tenure track) position in the School of Social Work at the University of South Florida.

Minseop Kim received a GAPSA-Provost Award for Interdisciplinary Innovation.

Kristie Thomas accepted an Assistant Professor (tenure track) position in the School of Social Work at Simmons College.

Marlene Walk was accepted as a fellow in the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service’s 2011 Summer Fellowship Program in Austin, Texas (June 1-24).

Mary Zhou received a Doctoral Fellowship from The Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) as well as the ARNOVA Emerging Scholars Award.

**Sources & Tips**

In recognition of Earth Day, 2011 the following is a list of sources and tips for becoming a sustainable student, green graduate, or eco-friendly faculty member.

Tip: One ton of recycled paper saves approximately 17 trees, saves enough energy to power the average home for 6 months, keeps 60 pounds of pollution out of the air, and saves 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space (taken from Fat Campus website http://legacy.lclark.edu/~envag/fatcampus/index.html)

Sources of eco-friendly student/office supplies: recycled binders, folders, etc.

http://www.rebinder.com
http://www.thegreenoffice.com (free, next day CO2 neutral delivery on orders of $49+)

Tip: being eco-friendly off campus can be easy & cost-effective! Here are some tips from Josh Dorfman, host of the Sundance Channel's upcoming show "The Lazy Environmentalist":

- Shut down and unplug electronics.
- Wash your clothes in cold water.
- Fill a reusable bottle with filtered tap water.
- Exchange CDs, DVDs and books instead of buying.
- Use refurbished electronics.
- Use kitchenware products made of recycled materials.

Source of more info: http://www.filterforgood.com/tips/

Tip: it is possible to literally put your money where your mouth is by choosing eco-conscious restaurants, coffee shops and grocery stores.

Source of environmentally friendly places to eat, sip and shop in Philadelphia: http://www.greenopia.com/PH/