Greetings from the DSSC!

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Congratulations on the successful completion of another academic year! As we approach the end of the year, we would like to reflect on our achievements, opportunities, and the fun that we've shared as a group of students.

We would like to extend hearty congratulations to Dan and Grace, who have successfully defended their dissertations and will soon graduate. As you embark on this new chapter of post-doc life, may you have success in continuing your great work. All the best to you both!

As classes wrap up, we congratulate Allison, Ama, Dan, and Fritz for completing their first year and wish them luck on their upcoming preliminary exams.

On April 29th, the DSSC hosted a Mexican-themed End of the Year Party. We enjoyed delicious food from Los Gallos, and the kids collected toys and trinkets from a rainbow piñata. Thank you to the many faculty who joined us in celebrating our accomplishments from the year. We were pleased to acknowledge and thank several of the faculty for their investment in our program. This year, we thanked Susan Sorenson for her leadership as the former director of the PhD program. During her time as director, Susan advocated for our group, provided direction and advice, and encouraged each of us to excel. We also thanked Phyllis Solomon for stepping in as interim director during the fall semester and Dean Jackson for his leadership as director during the spring semester. Both devoted many hours to ensuring that our program continued to run smoothly and were available and responsive to various concerns throughout the semester. Finally, we thanked Andrea Doyle for her dedication to our group as she has led our weekly professional seminar with thoughtfulness and flexibility for the past three years. All in all, it was a wonderful time of celebration!

Thank you to all of the PhD students who have helped to make our program the great one that it is. Thank you to Lauren who served as the PhD student representative on the program’s advisory board, Seongho who served as the GAPSA rep, Allison Russell who served as the PhD student rep for SP2’s student government, and Grace and Travis who co-edited the Fellow. We also want to thank Allison Thompson for her service as DSSC co-chair over the past two years, and we warmly welcome Dan Heist as the new DSSC co-chair. He will begin his service this fall alongside Kalen. We wish everyone a restful yet productive summer and look forward to seeing you in August!

DSSC co-chairs,

Kalen & Allison
**My Teaching Experience**

Before starting this program, I would have told you that I loved teaching and that it was one of the things that drew me to academia. When I was a child welfare practitioner, I taught a parenting class for parents that were involved in the child welfare system, and a class for prospective foster and adoptive parents. I loved seeing people learn and gain new perspectives. I also had a desire to inspire and train upcoming child welfare social workers so that they could provide innovative and quality services to children and families.

While I came with this enthusiasm and excitement, I was unprepared for the internal processes that teaching would spark. I TA’d in a child welfare practice class this past fall and found myself walking the line between being a student and having a teaching role. I consider myself to be a pretty laid back and casual person and since my teaching was limited to two lectures that semester, I oftentimes sat in class and learned right along with the students. I graded papers and dressed in business casual clothes, but I did not feel like an expert or an instructor.

Perhaps this same theme carried into this semester as I co-instructed a child welfare policy class with my cohort mate. While I love policy, I approached this semester of teaching with apprehension. I was hoping to finish my dissertation proposal, which I knew would take time, was taking a half semester organizational theory course in Wharton, and had heard all the horror stories of student evaluations. I remember the MSW students from my MSW program and they seemed hypercritical. So there were mixed feelings about teaching on my part for sure. So here are some lessons that I have learned to get through the semester.

**Be Prepared.** One thing that reduced anxiety for me was always completing the assigned readings ahead of time, even when it wasn’t my week to teach. This was challenging while my organizational theory class was going on because there was a lot of reading and there is a lot of temptation to not read or “wing it.” But I found that I felt more confident going into class knowing the material that would be discussed.

**Be Punctual (actually early).** My class was far and I knew that students oftentimes arrived early. There was set up time involved with the computer and projector and rushing in at the last minute to try to set things up made me more frantic. So I generally arrived about 10-15 minutes before class to set things up. I also got to know some of the students more since I had the time to really talk to them.

**Solicit Feedback Early and Often.** At the last class, my co-instructor and I found out that there were topics or framing of policies that the students would have liked to see in the class. Had we checked in with them midway through the course, we could have made adjustments.

But most importantly,

**BE YOURSELF.** I struggled with this last one, but by the end of the semester, I felt better in my own skin. I felt insecure about my casual and laid-back nature, and the fact that I oftentimes sit and listen to my students and solicit their feedback more than I like lecturing. I also felt insecure when I compared myself to my co-instructor, who has a different personality and teaching style than I do. But I realized that there are things about me that will resonate with students and things about
me that won’t. But I can’t change that and shouldn’t try to. It seems that part of the magic of teaching is being confident (but humble) in what you know and honest with what you don’t. Learning not to base my self-worth or identity in what my students or co-instructor thought of me was so freeing for me this semester. I could enjoy teaching more because I was no longer putting pressure on myself to perform. I gave things my best effort and was happy with that.

So I’m not sure where you are on your teaching journey, but hopefully, some of the things that I have learned and shared are helpful to you. Best wishes.

The Myth of Academic Isolation  Dean John L. Jackson, Jr.

Some people like to describe “the life of the mind” as inescapably lonely and even asocial. Academicians are seen as reclusive thinkers who claw away at their obscure research interests in relative isolation and obscurity. However, one of the things that I like to stress to my own PhD students is the fact that any characterization of academic life as isolated and solitary is decidedly inaccurate—or at least incomplete. In every single way that is important, academic scholarship is a fundamentally and profoundly social venture. To lose sight of that fact is to set oneself up to be an unsuccessful and potentially miserable scholar.

We can lose sight of the social grounding for our scholarly efforts because of the ways in which we learn to make a fetish out of books and articles, convincing ourselves that these products always have some intrinsic value above and beyond what they contribute to ongoing intellectual conversations. When I was still completing my dissertation, I remember joking with some of my graduate student peers that as long as the dissertation got published by a top-tier academic press and made it onto library shelves, I wouldn’t care if a single person ever read it. The book would get me tenure, and that would be enough.

Of course, book and articles don’t get junior scholars tenure. The deciding factor is whether or not other scholars are reading those offerings and finding them to be valuable contributions to “the literature.” And even this notion of “the literature” is merely a way to talk about enduring discussions and debates between and among scholars. Indeed, “the literature” itself is just another “social fact” in many of the ways that Max Weber might have appreciated.

What gets you tenure aren’t the books or the articles, it is the extent to which colleagues can confirm your work’s value as part of a larger, unfurling public discussion. That’s why some of the most important elements in any tenure file are the letters written by external reviewers—again, a decidedly social metric. If you chop down a tree to make an academic book and that tree falls in the forest for nobody to hear (or read), then you won’t get tenure, regardless of what library shelves your book might occupy.

In the age of “big data” and “big science,” it is becoming increasingly clear that some of the most vexing and interesting questions we can ask across the social and natural sciences—and across the humanities!—require robust and ongoing collaborations between scholars with different specialties and approaches. Such collaborations are just another example of the social contours of our scholarly efforts today. We must remember that scholars don’t have the luxury of pretending that social contacts and connections don’t matter, of downplaying the significance of social factors in their lives. If
anything, I think we should spend much more time thinking critically about the ways in which we can re-enchant the social scaffolding of our scholarly explorations in ways that privilege all the benefits that come with taking academia’s collective and interactive coefficients seriously—not just as luxuries to be enjoyed after the fact (by way of happy hours and the like) when the real work is done, but as constitutive of every scholar’s life, through and through. This might allow us to cultivate more academics who are sane and functional over the course of their entire professional careers.

**PEER CITES**

**Publications**


**Presentations**


Sharlein, J. (March, 2016). Recognizing and Addressing Disproportionate Neighborhood Contact with the Juvenile Justice System: Towards a Research and Policy Agenda. City, Culture, & Community Program Graduate Symposium, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Grants, Awards, & Fellowships


Ruffin, A.: Summer Training Fellow at the University of Michigan’s Center for Urban African American Research.


Thompson, A. E.: Doctoral Dissertation Grant Recipient, Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation ($5,000).

Xue, J.: Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship Award, Wharton Risk Management and Decision Processes Center, University of Pennsylvania ($3,000).

If you have any inquiries or suggestions about the Fellow, please contact Eunhae Kim (eunhaek@sp2.upenn.edu), Travis Labrum (tlabrum@sp2.upenn.edu), or Ama Nyame-Mensah (amanyame@sp2.upenn.edu) Thank you!