We hope this newsletter finds you well! The Sociology/Criminal Justice faculty and staff would like to share some exciting updates about what has been happening within the department and what we have been focusing our efforts on. Enjoy!

GREETINGS!

The Sociology/Criminal Justice Department is seeking program alumni to form an advisory board. We want to gather feedback on your experience at SUNY Potsdam, and specifically, within the Department. This feedback will be used to determine how we can improve upon future programs.

van Blommestein Conducts Research in South Africa

In June, Dr. Jeremy van Blommestein traveled to his home country of South Africa where he continued a longitudinal study exploring the many varied and distinctive experiences that mixed-race or multiracial individuals undergo in South Africa. He then compared those experiences to the data he collected in the U.S. Dr. van Blommestein also continued building relationships that he established in 2013 on a study abroad to South Africa with SUNY Potsdam students. During and after the study abroad trip, he met with South African professors and administrators who work at University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), and University of Cape Town (UCT). Dr. van Blommestein will continue his research while on sabbatical this fall.
Dr. David Bugg, Chair and Associate Professor of the Sociology and Criminal Justice Department, offered a series of human trafficking awareness events in April 2022 in conjunction with the Safe Harbour New York program. Safe Harbour New York is a program that implements a system-level approach within existing child welfare and allied youth-serving systems, including Runaway-Homeless Youth programs (RHY), Probation, Persons In Need of Supervision (PINS), Youth Bureaus, and other critical partners. The program supports counties in developing their capacity to identify youth who have been trafficked, sexually exploited, or are at risk of victimization and to meet identified service needs of these youth.

The goal of the educational series was to teach students, faculty, staff, and community members about some of the history of human trafficking in the U.S., connections to our local region, and the global scope of human trafficking internationally.

The series kicked off with a film screening and conversation with Jane Wells, director and producer of Tricked: The Documentary. The American documentary explores human sex trafficking, and its presence within the United States, from the perspectives of the victims involved in sex trafficking, the “johns” who pay for the sex, and the pimps responsible for instigating the illegal business. The film also follows law enforcement agencies and their efforts to crack down on this illegal enterprise. Wells attended the screening and provide real time updates on the progress and lives of individuals from the film and answered audience questions.

The event closed with Rebekah Charleston’s talk, "Silence Gives Wings to the Abuser(s)." Charleston, a survivor of human trafficking and victims advocate, is the Executive Director of Valiant Hearts, a ministry dedicated to eradicating sexual exploitation, and a consultant with the National Criminal Justice Training Center. She shares her story in the hope that it will help give understanding to the crime of human trafficking as well as shed light on what happens here in America.
Dr. Lauren Diamond-Brown is working on a community-based mixed-methods study of perinatal care experiences in St. Lawrence County and Akwesasne. She and student research interns will collect data via surveys and in-depth interviews to understand people’s experiences of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. Women’s and Gender’s Studies major and Human Services minor Breanne Allen ’23 is assisting on the project this summer and fall. The findings from this study will serve as a valuable resource for advocacy and perinatal care improvements. St. Lawrence County has concerning rates for key indicators of maternal infant health such as high rates of cesarean deliveries and preterm birth, inadequate prenatal care, and low breastfeeding rates. While public health provides these basic clinical statistics, we do not know the story behind them. This study will go beyond data collected by public health to measure aspects of care that research has shown to be meaningful to childbearing people and affect health; for example, the level of transparency, empowerment and respect patients felt they received from communication with providers. It will also be the first study in the county to examine the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as they relate to perinatal wellness and experiences with trauma-informed care. The research findings will support ongoing and new community efforts to provide quality perinatal care that is grounded in respect, dignity, and human rights.
Since the first academy class was offered in the Spring semester of 2017, our cadets have gone on to law enforcement careers at every level from small municipal agencies to employment in the nation’s largest police departments and the federal system. Whether it is in local departments as members of the North Country community, out of state in Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, Vermont, or Washington, D.C., our cadet graduates continue to shine and thrive in the profession. This is in large part to the approach we have taken to teach a new generation of law enforcement officers who can lead the profession in facing challenges and bringing new leadership to meet them.

After our cadet graduates’ interview with agencies and land that coveted position, Director Sonny Duquette and Dr. David Bugg often hear from hiring officers and recruiters who share how impressed they are with the answers given in interviews. These agencies often see the graduates of the Law Enforcement Training Institute (LETI) program as the future leaders of their department. To this end, several agencies are starting to make each new academy class a destination for recruiting to add high quality candidates to their ranks.

The fall 2022 academy class will be the first group of cadets to engage in the newest changes to the program. Cadets will now complete 15 credit hours of upper division credit toward their degrees. The academy will now fulfill two electives in the Criminal Justice or Sociology major as well as the senior seminar requirement, with the additional six credit hours applying towards general upper division hours in the degree. This will allow cadets to engage in a deeper examination of their new skills, career exploration, and leadership development. During the seminar portion of the academy, cadets will be engaging with experts in the field of law enforcement from across the country to explore various topics while also engaging with mentors in the field. Also, agencies will be interacting with cadets during the seminar about the opportunities their agencies have for future employment in departments across the nation.
In addition to these changes, the police academy continues to see Director Duquette engage in training with agencies in the area to improve their skills. His stellar reputation and commitment to community policing has also made the LETI the hub for peace officer and county probation officer training. This opportunity was awarded to the LETI program after an interview with Director Duquette by the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services. His training approach continues to prove that LETI is a destination program both for agencies in the area, across the state, and even across the country. 

Recent graduate Lia Clemons '22, engaged in a research project for agencies in St. Lawrence County to develop a resource manual about mental health in law enforcement. The project grew from Lia's leadership development white paper (LDWP) and in conjunction with the Canton P.D. and the SUNY Potsdam University Police, she identified several resources for departments and officers that will serve as the basis for ongoing development in the county in this much needed area.

Incoming cadet, Jason Sanchez '23, who served as the President for the Law Enforcement and Tactics Club at SUNY Potsdam, with the assistance of Associate Director Lougheed Center for Applied Learning Toby White and SUNY Potsdam Police Chief Tim Ashley, has also developed a new University Police co-op program that will hopefully launch in the coming year. Jason has been serving as a dispatcher at University Police as well as an EMT with the Village of Potsdam. His proposal for greater opportunities for LETI graduates to be able to engage in service in the law enforcement field will give involved students an opportunity to work alongside University Police in a series of credit bearing experiences over the course of three years. Beginning in their sophomore year, selected students will have the opportunity to learn the skills to become a dispatcher, participate in ride alongs, and work alongside officers in developing programming for the campus community.

Dr. Bugg will be taking part in the 2022 Department of Criminal Justice Services Annual Public Safety Symposium in Albany, NY this September. He will be presenting research based upon on meeting the needs of crime victims from diverse backgrounds, with particular attention given to national origin and LGBTQIA+ identities.

In the words of Director Duquette, “We’re squared away!”
On March 30, 2022, students from Dr. Sullivan-Catlin’s Sustainable Communities class joined more than 1,000 universities, colleges, K-12 schools, and greater communities across the globe in a one-day Worldwide Teach-in on Climate and Justice. The Worldwide Teach-In is a project of the Graduate Programs in Sustainability at Bard College in New York, in conjunction with partners worldwide and the Open Society University Network. Participating students (pictured above from left to right) Riley Notarthomas ‘23, Courtney Loffler ‘22, Kaitlyn Bernhardt ‘23, Zoey Fiber ‘23, Preston Santimaw ‘23, and Trent Weston ‘23 spoke to students, faculty, and staff about Sustainable Development Goals. The students gave a brief history and an in-depth analysis of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as how they apply to the local community, and the world as a whole.

Last year, Assistant Professor Dr. Anna Sorensen accepted the Coordinator position for the Women’s & Gender Studies program. The program houses more than 26 majors and minors with courses contributing to several other programs across campus. Dr. Sorensen hopes to continue to expand the program and reach a wider breadth of students.
In April, Dr. Lauren Diamond-Brown's Sociology of Mental Health class hosted an event called "Breaking the Stigma of Mental Health" in the Knowles Conference Center. The focus was on not only educating individuals about the myths and facts regarding mental health, but also offered tips to help feel safe and comfortable with your own emotions. The evening also included a trivia game, open mic, a fire ritual with s'mores, and ended with a pledge to help break the stigma.
Driven to Succeed

At just 20 years old, Victoria Sekyere ’23 has already published a book, started a non-profit organization, and is in the process of applying to law school as she wraps up her degree in criminal justice with a minor in pre-law at SUNY Potsdam.

Her drive for excellence dates to her youth. Raised in Kona, a rural area of Kumasi in Ghana, Africa, Sekyere understood the value of a good education at an early age. Guided by her father’s ideals, hard work and a passion for learning were an integral part of her upbringing. “He was the first person in my family to go to college, to become a teacher. He always instilled in us that education was key,” Sekyere said.

When she was 11 years old, Sekyere and her three older brothers moved to the U.S. to live with their mother. At first, cramped into a one-bedroom apartment in Yonkers, they later moved to a larger building in the Bronx. When she graduated from high school, she enrolled at Westchester Community College to pursue a degree in biology, while also working as a phlebotomist for Impact Health Biometric Testing, a company that administers vaccines and covid tests.

“Because most of my brothers are in the medical field, my mom wanted me to become a doctor very badly. It’s always been her dream to have a daughter who was a doctor,” she said. “I went to a community college for two years as a biology major, but I did not like it. I was bored in every class, and I wasn’t doing good on the tests. I was like, ‘OK, this is clearly not something I’m interested in.’”

In the fall of 2021, she decided to make a change and she transferred to SUNY Potsdam. “Potsdam seemed like a great place. I visited and I fell in love with it. Because I live in the city where it’s noisy, now I get to actually sleep. It’s very calming. I love it here,” she said. Her first semester on campus she pivoted from the medical field, and discovered an academic path that was a much better fit—a degree in criminal justice with a minor in pre-law. “I realized that I was doing really good in my classes, and actually interested in it,” she said. “I like sitting in class and learning about the criminal justice system, and learning about things that need to change,” she said.
Combining courses from the Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice with pre-law classes from the Department of Politics has given Sekyere the background knowledge that she needs to succeed in law school. Supportive faculty like Dr. David Bugg and Dr. Robert Hinckley have been with her every step of the way. “I’m really grateful that I encountered them. Dr. Bugg is one of the people who truly believe in what I’m trying to do. He’s been really supportive,” she said. “And Dr. Hinckley is the sponsor for my internship. I talk to him regularly and he’s also writing one of my letters of recommendation for law school. He’s amazing. I love the professors and the really supportive staff.”

Beyond the classroom, Sekyere has found support through the Collegiate Science & Technology Entry Program (CSTEP). As she applies to law school, CSTEP has been helping to cover her Law School Admission Test (LSAT) prep course costs and application fees. “It’s probably the best organization that I’ve gotten involved with since I got on campus,” she said. “It’s very beneficial. They do resume review and mock job interviews. They talk to you about how to build relationships with your professors, time management, what’s expected in grad school, and the application process.”

Mirroring the support she has received at SUNY Potsdam, Sekyere recently launched a non-profit organization, Take a Look Back, to help children in orphanages in Ghana. “You see really smart people with a lot of potential who just didn’t have the opportunity to pursue education further, so I just wanted to help out a little bit,” she said.

Launched in December 2021, her new organization has 12 members, including five board members with Ghanaian roots who now live in the U.S. Three events are in the works at orphanages in Kumasi, with the first being held in June. Sekyere and her volunteers will be providing children with book bags, pens, pencils, crayons, and other school supplies, as well as hygienic care items and food. As the founder and CEO, she has taken the lead on financing the new non-profit by donating the scholarship money she received this semester for her internship.

Sekyere delivers donations to an orphanage in Ghana.
Outside of academics and her non-profit work, she has also authored a book of poetry, “A Trail of Time,” which can be purchased on Amazon or Barnes and Noble. The newly published book taps into personal loss in her life and focuses on love, family life and family dynamics. “My dad passed away from cirrhosis of the liver when I was 16, and I had a very close relationship with him. It was just a way to express my grief, and poetry is the only way I feel comfortable talking about feelings,” she said.

Sekyere is now reflecting on her family once more as she writes a children’s book, “Nana Yaa and the Morning Prayer,” which focusing on the importance of religion in her grandmother’s life and the daily worship services she hosts at her home in Ghana. “My grandmother started the Seventh Adventist Church in my village when I was young. In the morning, around 5 a.m., a bunch of people all over the village would come to my house for worship,” she said. ‘When I go to Ghana and share a room with her, she wakes me up at 4 a.m. and says, ‘Let’s pray.’

“I LOVE THE PROFESSORS AND THE SUPPORTIVE STAFF. I LIKE THE FEEL OF A COMMUNITY HERE AT SUNY POTSDAM, IT’S AMAZING.”
-VICTORIA SEKYERE ’23

Her connection to her homeland remains strong even as she continues to make a new home at SUNY Potsdam while pursuing her undergraduate degree. “It’s my favorite place to be. I don’t even like going back to the city. I like the food and I’m always eating at Becky’s Place. I love the professors and the supportive staff,” she said. “I like the feel of a community here at SUNY Potsdam, it’s amazing.”

This summer, as she prepares for her senior year at the College, she will be taking the LSAT and applying to 15 law schools, with the goal of becoming a law professor—an opportunity for her to be a teacher like her father, and follow in the footsteps of her professors at SUNY Potsdam.

Article and photos by Jason Hunter

What have you been up to since you left SUNY Potsdam? We want to celebrate all of your professional and personal achievements and would love to hear about your most memorable moments during your time here! Please share any updates with the department by emailing Sarah Carr, Sociology/Criminal Justice administrative assistant, at carrsl@potsdam.edu.
Students Share Immersive Experience at Ithaca Ecovillage

In Spring 2022, Sociology Professor Dr. Heather Sullivan-Catlin taught a new full-semester course that serves as both an elective for Sociology and Environmental Studies majors and as the capstone for a new Sustainability minor. Formerly offered twice as a short-term summer course, students previously traveled abroad to ecovillages in Ireland and Scotland.

This year, students spent a packed weekend at the Ecovillage at Ithaca, NY where they experienced community life through social events, service-learning activities on sustainability projects, workshops with community residents and educators, lunch at the vibrant Ithaca Farmers’ Market, and exploring the ecosystem restoration areas at EVI.

Upon reflecting on the experience, one student said, “I found the trip to be one of the most impactful educational opportunities that I have been offered during my time at SUNY Potsdam. Truly, this trip and what I learned and took from, it will be something that I never forget.”
Give to the Sociology/Criminal Justice Department

SUNY Potsdam’s Department of Sociology/Criminal Justice offers many programs and experiences for students that would not be possible without your support. From field experiences to scholarships, your generosity provides opportunities for students to excel as scholars and citizens of the world. YOU can make a difference in the lives of our students!

• Give online: Visit SUNY Potsdam’s giving form at potsdam.edu/give. To restrict your gift, select “Other” in the designation field and type “Department of Sociology/Criminal Justice.”

• Send a check: Mail your check, made out to “Potsdam College Foundation,” to the College Advancement Office with the giving form provided below.

• Make a gift of appreciated stock, held long-term, and save on capital gains tax. Call us for help making your gift.

• Establish an endowed fund to impact sociology and criminal justice studies students for generations.

Contact the College Advancement Office for assistance as you make your gift:

(315) 267-3253 or invest@potsdam.edu www.potsdam.edu/giving

Thank you for ensuring the continued growth of our department and our students!

Make your gift to support Sociology/Criminal Justice today!

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Address __________________________________________
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☐ I am including my check, made payable to “Potsdam College Foundation.”
☐ I have included SUNY Potsdam in my estate plan.
☐ I have questions please call me.
SUNY Potsdam and St. Lawrence University are among 67 colleges nationwide selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative. Created by the U.S. Department of Education in 2016, the Second Chance Pell ESI distributes federal Pell grants to fund education programs for those incarcerated in state and federal prisons. A total of 130 colleges, representing 42 states and the District of Columbia, are now eligible to implement prison education programs, involving credit-bearing and non-credit courses and a degree pathway.

Thanks to this federal initiative, SUNY Potsdam will now be able to offer a Bachelor of Arts degree program in sociology, including a minor in human services, to Pell-eligible students at Riverview Correctional Facility in Ogdensburg, N.Y. Through partnering with community agencies in St. Lawrence County, the program will include stackable credentials, such as peer recovery coach and mental health first aid certifications—all designed to effectively position participants for employment after release from prison, with a clear pathway to graduate within four years.

This program was made possible by years of hard work and dedication. In January 2020, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology/Criminal Justice Dr. Nancy Lewis and Assistant Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance Rivka Eckert of SUNY Potsdam teamed up with History professor Liz Regosin of St. Lawrence University to submitted a proposal to the Department of Education Experimental Sites Initiative to be included in the Second Chance Pell program. The Second Chance Pell proposal was the result of earlier organizing and networking between faculty and staff of the Associated Colleges of the St. Lawrence Valley (ACSLV). The ACSLV provided seed money to Lewis, Eckert, and Regosin in 2017 to create Prison Education Through College Outreach (PECO). The coalition was comprised of faculty and staff from the associated educational institutions (St. Lawrence University, SUNY Potsdam, SUNY Canton and Clarkson University), staff from the state prisons and county jail, and community members to create innovative academic programs in in carceral spaces.
To apply for the Potsdam@RCF program, incarcerated individuals are required to write an essay and must be PELL eligible. Once enrolled, students complete at least four courses in each of the fall, spring, and summer semesters. Sophomore students with a strong GPA have the option of registering for a fifth class as well. Participants must also complete SUNY Potsdam’s general education program and take the same courses with many of the same instructors that on-campus students enjoy. Faculty teach in the prison and utilize WebEx, software designed for videoconferencing, which allows students on the SUNY Potsdam campus and students at RCF to attend class together virtually giving both groups of students the opportunity to collaborate.

St. Lawrence University faculty facilitate a book club and offer weekly stress and anxiety workshops at Riverview, while students visit weekly to play board games with confined individuals. SUNY Potsdam faculty and students developed a Seventh Step peer support group, mindfulness programs and a book club for women, as well as a weekly re-entry program at the county jail. Rivka Eckert has facilitated a drama club at Riverview since 2016, and created the Playwriting Across Prison Walls Festival, which brings 10-minute plays written by incarcerated individuals to the stage, as performed by undergraduates at SUNY Potsdam.

Numerous members of the SUNY Potsdam faculty have taught for the program, including Nancy Lewis (Sociology/Criminal Justice), Rivka Eckert (Theatre & Dance), Anna Sorensen (Sociology/Criminal Justice), Trevor Blank (English & Communication), Kate Cleary (Environmental Studies), Nathan Infante (Art), Alan Hersker (Anthropology), Jennifer Mitchell (English & Communication), and Blair Madore (Mathematics) to name a few. In upcoming academic year, students at RCF are looking forward to working with Heather Sullivan-Catlin (Sociology/Criminal Justice), Lauren Diamond-Brown (Sociology/Criminal Justice), David Bugg (Sociology/Criminal Justice), and Lisa Wilson (English & Communication) as well.

The sociology major is a good fit for this student population, according to program director Dr. Nancy Lewis.

“Many people I work with in custody and following release identify careers helping others as pathways to productive lives, allowing them to give back to their families and communities,” she said. The Department of Labor identifies community development, social services, and substance abuse treatment as areas of above average job growth. This degree will provide a productive pathway forward as the students rebuild their lives.”
The Academic Enrichment Committee (AEC) at RCF was created by Dr. Nancy Lewis and Andre Jon-Hope, a SUNY Potsdam student at Riverview Correctional Facility, in 2021 for the purpose of creating and sustaining extracurricular activities. The AEC is governed by its operating agreement (the operational constitutions), which is enforced by current executives President Brandon Rodriquez, Vice President Shance Jackson, Secretary Edgardo Aponte, and Treasurer Andrew Jon-Hope.

The AEC's short-term goals include increasing recruitment to the Potsdam@RCF program, contributing to academic excellence, establishing a guest speaker series, providing inspirational speeches, and re-entry and employment programs. Guest speakers will address the entire student body regarding their chosen topic.

Long-term goals of the AEC focus on bringing students and faculty from SUNY Potsdam and St. Lawrence University to RCF to participate in musical theater and art performances, sporting events, and to hold debates. In addition, the AEC is seeking collaboration with student clubs and organizations on the SUNY Potsdam and SLU campuses. They are currently in talks to merge with SUNY Potsdam’s Sociology Club.

If you are a student or faculty member interested in being a guest speaker for the Potsdam@RCF program, please contact Dr. Nancy Lewis at (315) 267-3717 or lewishnlpotsdam.edu.

The vast majority of incarcerated people will one day return home, and providing access to postsecondary education in prison means that these individuals are far less likely to recidivate and are better equipped to play productive and positive roles within their communities. Access to postsecondary education also improves prison safety for both incarcerated people and corrections employees alike.

To date, one student in the program was released from RCF and is now a full-time student in community college. He is doing wonderfully and is directing his efforts into completing his studies and making a successful transition to the community.
Families are missed
D.O.J. makes me pissed.
Years, months, weeks it don't' faze me,
All I know is this time changed me.
Count time is dorm time,
Chow is nasty but I have to keep it classy.
I eat slop but think about steak with the tiny shrimp on top.
I walk the yard,
I ran from what I've done,
I'm doing time,
Just not with my mind.
Life is frozen,
Kids getting bigger,
It's dark,
I see no light,
Fences, chains
Things ain't the same.
Ten-minute clicks on the shower,
They make sure you have no power.
I'm here
Your there,
I'm writing,
Your reading.
Sidewalks,
Streets is a metaphor,
But I choose none of these.
Nine years, Post release,
To much time it's the last time
Stress, gray hair,
Some of us feel life isn't fair.
Now the pandemic, people are sick.
Now the pandemic people are sick.
Take the vaccine or lose your life real quick.
No visits, no hugs.
People got the bug.
Family friends I love all of them,
Even if it is the end.
The corona virus this is wrong.
Yet as long as we stand together
We will endure this nasty weather.

Poem by Freddie Lopez
Student, Potsdam@RCF
SUNY Potsdam’s Second Chance Pell college in prison program, Potsdam@RCF established a foundation account to receive contributions. Your gift will make a difference for the students who are working hard to make a positive difference in their lives, and the lives of their family and community members.

Funds will be used to pay expenses not covered by Pell, such as:

1. Supporting students when they return to the community to continue their college education, i.e., scholarships.
2. Purchasing equipment and supplies, i.e., computer, AV technology, and library resources.
3. Celebrating student achievements during graduation at RCF by covering the expenses for a guest speaker to attend the ceremony.

To contribute to the Potsdam@RCF program, please visit: [www.potsdam.edu/give](http://www.potsdam.edu/give).

Select Designation-Other and add Potsdam@RCF to the Gift Summary box.
By the Numbers

6
The number of full-time faculty members. View the department directory [here](#).

2
Students were inducted in the Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society in spring.

14
The number of departmental majors and minors who made the Dean's List. (GPA 3.25-3.49)

68
The number of departmental majors and minors on the President's List. (GPA 3.5 or higher)

68
The number of seniors graduating from the Department in 2022

7
Students received departmental awards.

6
The number of programs offered by the department.

12
Students were inducted into the Alpha Phi Sigma National Criminal Justice Honor Society this year.

2
Social media accounts. Follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/SUNYPotsdamSociologyandCriminalJustice](https://facebook.com/SUNYPotsdamSociologyandCriminalJustice) or on Instagram at [@potsdam_sociology_and_cjs](https://instagram.com/@potsdam_sociology_and_cjs) for all of the latest news.