Saying Goodbye to Professor Potuchek

Reported by Chad MacLeod ’14

This past January Professor Potuchek celebrated her 25th anniversary at Gettysburg College. To put that in perspective, the World Wide Web made its debut during her first semester of teaching here. And like the web, Professor Potuchek has had an illustrious career. From acting as the Coordinator of the Women Studies (now the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies) Program, to teaching integral courses in both the WGS Program and Sociology Department, to mentoring hundreds of students, and to working on a number of her own research projects, Professor Potuchek has had a one-of-a-kind experience here at Gettysburg. So when I asked her what has been one of her favorite or best memories over the years, I had to laugh when she immediately responded: “my particularly impressive snotty memos… the kind that will make your eyes burn when you read them.”

Such an answer just goes to show the kind of person Professor Potuchek truly is: awesome.

But let’s back up a bit. Before we say goodbye to one of Gettysburg’s Greatests to retirement this spring, let’s remember Professor Potuchek’s 25 years at Gettysburg College.

As soon as you meet Professor Potuchek it’s difficult to ignore the fact that she is a fount of knowledge. The depth and diversity of her sociological (and inter-disciplinary) interests are incredible. So I think it would surprise many students (and it might even relieve senior job-hunters) who know Professor Potuchek that she was originally the runner-up candidate when she applied for a job at Gettysburg College. Luckily for us, though, the chosen candidate backed out shortly thereafter, and Professor Potuchek eventually signed on to be a professor in both the Women Studies Program and Sociology Department.

At that time, the Women Studies Program was still in its infant stages. And it was actually Professor Potuchek, who acted as Coordinator of the program for its first 10 years of existence (from January 1989 to May 1999), who played an integral part in building the WS (now WGS) program into what it is today. In addition to being a professor in the program, Professor Potuchek developed and structured many of WGS’s courses, created faculty positions to teach those courses, and designed a minor then major option for students. In short, Professor Potuchek and her capacity to be a leader put all the pieces together and got the WGS Program up and running.

When she stepped down as Coordinator of the WGS Program in 1999, she continued to teach WGS sections but shifted her focus to the Sociology Department.

As majors or minors of sociology, most of us know Professor Potuchek as a professor of sociology. And like many of us, I am sure, Professor Potuchek initially decided to study sociology as an undergraduate student because she wanted to be a social worker and, after all, “sociology sounds the most like social work.” But after her stint as “the world’s worst social worker,” Professor Potuchek decided to go back to graduate school to “rethink sociology.” Even at that point, teaching was not in the picture; she was much more interested in fusing sociology with public policy. However, after having to teach a course as a graduate student, she fell in love with teaching. Why? According to Professor Potuchek, because of “the light bulb thing – the moment when you get to push people’s thinking and then watch them understand life or some experience in a new way.” Getting to help others have that light bulb experience is what led Professor Potuchek to
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Learning material for the Sociology of Family wasn’t a particularly difficult task for Professor Potuchek. Not only because, as I have said, she is a
fount of knowledge and a quick study, but because family has a gender angle, and the study of gender is perhaps her most passionate sociological interest. One thing Professor Potuchek recommends to students is to find an interest – whatever interest you
care passionately about in life – and to place that
interest in a sociological context. And Professor Potuchek practices what she preaches. She has tried
to find a gender angle in nearly every one of her own
research projects over the years: her dissertation on
social services for women, her projects on
breadwinning and single women, and her blogs on
retirement and gardening. “What I am working on has
always come out of my own experience and what’s
happening in my own life by putting it in a larger
context.”

What’s more is that when you’ve been at the
same college for the amount of time that Professor
Potuchek has been here, you witness all sorts of
changes. A few of those changes that Professor
Potuchek noted was that Gettysburg College as a
whole is no longer as big of a party school as it once
was, and that the position of women students and
faculty on campus has improved greatly. And within
the Sociology Department, not only has the
department mirrored the discipline’s shift to the
centrality of sexuality and gender, but it has also
separated itself from the Anthropology Department.

But what really sticks out when your life
revolves around the college and when you have been
such an important piece in the Gettysburg puzzle for
so many years are all of the things that you realize
you appreciate, take for granted, and are going to
miss (and not miss!) once you leave. And like many
seniors who are realizing all of this right about now,
so is Professor Potuchek as she faces retirement. And
for her, what she says she will miss most about
Gettysburg is the intellectual community and the
sheer amount of intellectual stimulation she receives
on a daily basis. Whether that means sitting down to
Friday Faculty Lunches to share ideas with a wide
variety of faculty, peeking her head into different
colleagues’ offices to chat about a book she has just
finished, or coming out of classes “mentally flying”
about ideas that she might have never thought about
before. All of these moments add up to something
very special that she will sincerely miss.

But what she won’t miss are the 80-hour
workweeks stocked full of grading and first drafts. Her
love for gardening and blogging will keep her happily
busy in retirement.

To end my interview with Professor Potuchek, I asked her to give advice, or impart words of wisdom, to different areas of Gettysburg College:

• For the student unsure as to whether sociology is the right major/minor for you: be aware
of the advantages and the disadvantages of choosing sociology. An advantage is that “sociology is about
everything, and it’s about your everyday life, and it’s
about seeing the world that just opens up all of this
understanding.” But a disadvantage is that “you’re
going to have to work your butt off. You will learn an
incredible amount, but be prepared for tough
professors that demand a lot of you and push you.”

• For all students: “don’t waste your
college education. You’ll never again in your life have
the opportunity to have nothing else to be
responsible for than just learning.”

Eastern Sociological Society
Reported by Chad MacLeod ’14

The Sociology Department sent four students to
present their original research projects at the Eastern
Sociological Society Conference in Baltimore, MD from
February 20-23, 2014. The theme of this year’s
conference was “Invisible Work.”

On Friday, February 21, two students presented
their original research projects (papers written in
Sociology 303) at the Undergraduate Poster Session:
Evan Mickel ’14, “Internal and External Factors that
Influence School Violence”; and Elizabeth Jones ’14,
“The Impact of Family Size and Parent or Guardian
Education Level on Childhood and Adolescent Obesity.”
Then, on Saturday, February 22, Chad MacLeod ‘14, Ethan Budgar ‘14 and Professor Lair presented their research project titled, “Making Visible Employers’ Expectations of Domestic Work: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly” at the “Domestic Labor” Regular Paper Session. This research was a product of the Mellon Summer 2013 Scholars Program.

In addition to presenting their own research projects with professors, graduate students, and undergraduate students in the field of sociology, the student presenters were also able to visit roundtables, mini-conferences, conversations, thematic sessions, regular paper sessions, and undergraduate poster sessions to listen to other sociologists presenting on a wide range of research topics mainly concerned with some aspect of invisible work. The conference offered the students many opportunities to collaborate with sociologists working in a variety of sub-fields.

All participants would like to thank the Provost’s Office and the Sociology Department for providing the necessary funds to make the trip possible.

A Scientist Among Mediums
Reported by Miranda Wisor

Julie Beischel, PhD of the Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential was the Keynote Speaker for the conference Exploring the Extraordinary. She spoke on Friday, March 21st to a full house in Joseph Theater. Trained as a pharmaceutical researcher with a PhD in Pharmacology and Toxicology from the University of Arizona, Dr. Beischel outlined the personal journey that she took in shifting her career’s focus toward researching the Human Potential.

The lecture outlined the methodology utilized by her company in conducting research into communication with the dead. Each medium that the Windbridge Institute works with has been vetted with an 8-step vetting process. Focus of the research conducted is split between three primary efforts: animal consciousness, life after death, and basic parapsychology.

Beischel’s most recently conducted study offered promising preliminary findings in the field of life-after-death research although she admitted that research on the topic is young and due to funding constraints, the scope of the study was limited.

The next project that the Windbridge Institute plans to undertake will look at life-after-death contact with animals. In fact, Beischel encouraged the audience to visit the institute’s website to volunteer to participate in the study.

This program was also the Stuckenberg Lecture in Sociology.

From Foe to Friend: An Overview of Barbara Schmitter Heisler’s Book Talk
Reported by Chad MacLeod ‘14

Barbara Schmitter Heisler, an Emeritus Professor of Sociology here at Gettysburg College, returned to campus on March 17 to discuss her recent book, From German Prisoner of War to American Citizen: A Social History with 35 Interviews. The book talk was sponsored by the Sociology Department and The Sociological Experience, and partnered with German Studies, Peace & Justice Studies, and Globalization Studies.

The central concern that inspired Heisler’s research on German prisoners of war who were interned in the US and who later became American citizens dealt with understanding why these prisoners of war would return to a land where they had been imprisoned. What images and thoughts did these
Germans have of America that made them want to return post-WWII?

All of the 35 men Heisler was able to interview for her book were “ordinary guys caught in a uniform” – they were either volunteer or drafted enlisted soldiers in the German army during WWII, captured in North Africa (1942-1943), Italy (1943-1944), or during the Normandy Invasion (1944). Upon being caught, these men were sent to America on Liberty Ships along with the 390,000 other German prisoners of war, where they were then imprisoned in one of 500 POW camps around the US.

At first, as Heisler mentioned, American soldiers working in the POW camps were distrustful of the German soldiers believing them all to be Nazis, which was certainly not the case. For many of the German prisoners of war, although they knew very little about the states at the time, they actually had a positive idealized vision of the US, which they called “Traumland Amerika” – America, the land of dreams. The German prisoners of war were at once naïve and curious about life in the US.

Once the Americans realized that the German prisoners of war were of no major threat to them, they began treating the Germans as they would treat their own compatriots. Soon the prisoners of war were playing soccer and learning at universities in their leisure time, as well as working outside of the camps at farms and in other laborious activities. During their time as POWs in the US, many of the Germans that Heisler spoke with mentioned how “we never had it this good...we had access to luxuries we had never seen,” and how “we were happy to be out of the war.” The German prisoners of war felt saved when they came to the US.

But when the war ended in 1945, all of the German prisoners had to return to Germany. Not only did this upset many of the Germans who had grown to love life in the states, but it also frustrated many Americans who had gotten used to the Germans as an extra source of labor. As a result, many Germans, like the 35 men interviewed by Heisler, tried to find a way back to the states post-WWII.

Although the Quota System refused many Germans’ attempts to return to the US, some were able to find a way back by: (1) getting married to an American woman, (2) having a relative in the states, (3) receiving a church sponsorship, (4) using the Canadian-Escape Hatch route, or (5) accepting sponsorship via one of the connections in the US that the Germans had made while they had been prisoners of war.

By using one of these pathways, some of the Germans who had been prisoners of war in the states during WWII were able to return and later become American citizens. As Heisler noted, “the Germans might have come as enemies, but they left and, in some cases, came back as friends.”

Email to Faculty...

From: Alexander Zurn
Sent: Sunday, April 13, 2014 9:25 AM
To: VoonChin Phua
Subject: You'll never believe what I'm doing

Professor Phua!

Whatsup?! Hope this email finds you thoroughly enjoying statistical analytical work from a new batch of Juniors and Seniors!

I was just in the middle of starting my questionnaire for the dissertation I’ll be doing this summer. Yeah, you read it right...a dissertation! My question is: Does the usage of social networking sites improve sales and overall market value? (Unfortunately, Sociology was not offered in the master's program at DBS...I had to do business).

Let me fill in you real quick though. I ended up receiving a scholarship at Dublin Business School (DBS) to earn my master’s and play basketball for the school and a professional basketball club team out here called Swords Thunder! Ideally, I would have taken off a few years of schooling before getting a master’s (even if I wanted to!!). BUT, this was an unreal opportunity that I found for getting a free master's while being able to play basketball and further my (hopeful) professional career next year.

ANYWAY, I'm sitting here starting this questionnaire and I was thinking of questions related to my topic, going through them 1, 2, 3 all related to the specifics of the topic question. And then I started thinking... “it
Email to Faculty...continues

may be important to know the RESPONDENT's SEX for this...actually, you know that the AGE is important to consider as well. I may as well look at their INCOME to get a general perspective of the respondent. I think their STATUS could affect them too."

That's when I caught myself and said... "O. My. God, Professor Phua was right! I am going to be using statistical analysis in my life after college." ...then I thought to email you.

So this is really an email to tell you and let you know that you were right! And, obviously, how thankful I am that I took that class and had you as a professor.

So like I said, hope you’re finding ways to enjoy the amount of work I’m sure you’re grading or doing for another journal (always busy). I am proud to be an example now!!

P.S. - by no means am I looking forward to doing more statistical work but I thought it’s important that you know I’m going to haha

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AWARDS (2013-2014)

Distinguished Teaching Award
Jean L. Potuchek

Sociology Departmental Honors
Chad Michael MacLeod

Sociology Banner Carrier at Graduation
Chad Michael MacLeod

Holly Gabriel Memorial Award
Kathryn Elizabeth Needham

Harry C. and Catherine Noffsinger Hartzell Award in Sociology
Chad Michael MacLeod

Senior Scholarship Prize
Anna Michelle Baldasarre
Chad Michael MacLeod

Edwin and Leander M. Zimmerman Senior Prize
Chad Michael MacLeod

Young Alumni Service Award
Kelly Keegan Blavatt ‘03

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Making the List

Commendation list Fall 2013

Yisbely Ramona Alevante ‘15
Isabelle Ann Boguski ‘15
Collin Rudolph Wiemer ‘14
Emily Franklin Hall ‘15
Jenny Kate Morris ‘14
Kathryn Elizabeth Needham ‘14
Chelsea Carolyn Reed ‘15
Mackenzie Rose Aquino ‘15
Brian Reginald Burrows ‘15
Emmett Tod Moore ‘13
Shae Edward Belenski ‘17
Ashley Elizabeth Boone ‘16
Ethan Randall Budgar ‘14
Curran Dhar ‘15
Karla Mishel Cobos ‘14
Christopher Anthony DiBona ‘14

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Sociology Departmental Honors
Chad Michael MacLeod

Sociology Banner Carrier at Graduation
Chad Michael MacLeod

Holly Gabriel Memorial Award
Kathryn Elizabeth Needham

Harry C. and Catherine Noffsinger Hartzell Award in Sociology
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Senior Scholarship Prize
Anna Michelle Baldasarre
Chad Michael MacLeod

Edwin and Leander M. Zimmerman Senior Prize
Chad Michael MacLeod

Young Alumni Service Award
Kelly Keegan Blavatt ’03

Commendation list Fall 2013

Kimberly Anne Longfellow ‘16
Brandon Scott McTigue ‘15
Alessandra Michele Bonafide ‘16
Wei Ting Li ‘16
Anna Michelle Baldasarre ‘14
Kelsey Anne Marklewicz ‘14
Claire Harberson Moore ‘16
Katherine Marie Patterson ‘15
Jennie Rebecca Gilman ‘15
Katherine Lynn Higgins ‘15
Nadejiah Zakiyyah Towns ‘15
Quadirah Ruth Bell ‘16
Bridget Elizabeth Golato ‘15
Scenes from Jean’s Retirement Party

News from Alumni:

Jess Fernandez ’08 has been accepted at the University of Maryland’s graduate program in "Social, Decision, and Organizational Sciences."
Alex Randi ‘10 has been accepted into Law School at the University of Pennsylvania.

Another Trek....

After three long years of being a campus-nomad, the Sociology Department will be returning to Glatfelter Hall for the Fall Semester to what promises to be our forever home. Please look for us on the first floor in the new semester.

Student Led Discussions

- Is there a sociological theory that really fascinates you? Or a current event you’d love to analyze sociologically? If you are interested in facilitating your own Sociological Discussion, talk to Professor Phua!

Managing Editor:
Miranda Wisor and Andrea Switzer
Supervising Faculty:
Voon Chin Phua and Charles Emmons