

THE NORTH CENTRAL SOCIOLOGIST

The Official Newsletter of the NCSA

A Virtual 2021 NCSA Conference



2021 NCSA MEETING GOES VIRTUAL

Call it what you will...an online occasion, a web-based wingding, a streaming soiree, or perhaps even a virtual vivification of our vocation. Regardless of the nomenclature attached, this year’s conference **IS** happening. However, like many other social gatherings as of late, it has transitioned into an online format. Nonetheless, the decision to move to a virtual format, while disappointing, particularly for those of us who usually reunite with old friends/colleagues during the annual meeting, was a difficult one, undertaken with care and concern for the health of our members. Rest assured that the 2021 spring conference will be far more robust than the last-minute transition to an online format last spring. So, no need to fret; we have vastly improved our tech game, and planned for just such an outcome. We surmise that you likely did so as well!

“The process of scientific discovery is, in effect, a continual flight from wonder.”
~Albert Einstein

The ever so prescient theme of the 2021 North Central Sociological Association’s Annual meeting, *Doing Sociology That Matters*, examines our collective and individual journeys in discovering what is meaningful, focusing the spotlight on the work we all do in the areas of research, teaching, mentoring, activism, and service. Join us next year, *virtually*, as we refocus the lens introspectively, with an eye on what matters.

While proposals that are directly aligned with the conference theme are encouraged, submissions outside of the theme are also welcomed. To submit a proposal for a closed session, or an abstract of a paper, please visit the [NCSA website](#). The deadline in the online submission system has been extended. It will now close on **December 18th**, so please don’t forget to submit.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

The NCSA values undergraduate participation in the annual conference. Undergraduates wishing to participate in roundtables, poster sessions, or in the undergraduate paper sessions should contact Mellisa Holtzman, Chair of the Undergraduate Student Division, and organizer of undergraduate student sessions for the conference at mkholtzman@bsu.edu. The online format is the perfect setting for you to add to your virtual presentation repertoire and hone your skills.

STUDENT PAPER COMPETITIONS

Undergraduate and graduate students are encouraged to submit papers for the student paper competitions. The first-place paper in the graduate division will be considered for publication in *Sociological Focus*, the official journal of the NCSA. To be eligible, both undergraduate and graduate students must submit **full** papers by **January 10th, 2021**. Graduate students must also submit an abstract of their paper to present via the conference portal by **December 18th, 2020**. More information on the graduate student paper competition can be found [here](#). Undergraduates interested in submitting a paper for consideration should visit [here](#) for more information. Remember to complete a conference submission and register before the deadline to be considered eligible for the awards.

THE BUTLER A. JONES AWARD

The Butler A. Jones Award, which recognizes one promising African American student who honors the intellectual traditions of the work of Butler A. Jones will not be awarded this year. Unfortunately, because the conference has been transitioned to an online format, and the goal of the fund is to support conference travel and remove the financial barriers associated with conference attendance, NCSA will be suspending the award for the 2021 conference cycle.



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2021 CONFERENCE SUBMISSIONS

There's Still Time to Submit for the 2021 NCSA Annual Meeting!

Submission Guidelines at: <https://www.ncsanet.org/annual-meeting/2021mtg/>

INDIVIDUAL PAPERS/PRESENTATIONS – RESEARCH

If you are interested in presenting a research project you are engaged in (or even simply a portion of a larger endeavor), please submit it as an individual research paper. The program committee will organize the individual submissions into coherent sessions based on theme, methodology, theory, etc. You are only required to submit a title and a brief abstract (no more than 150 words) to be considered for the conference. Please indicate the general topic that best fits your submission (see list online). If your submission does not fit any of the general research topics, you can choose the “RESEARCH: other” option. Include author information for others who will be included on the program. For questions or more information, please contact Geoffrey Wood at geoff.wood@pitt.edu.

INDIVIDUAL PAPERS/PRESENTATIONS – TEACHING

If you would like to give a presentation on a particular teaching-related topic then please submit it as an individual teaching paper. The program committee will organize the individual teaching presentations into coherent sessions based on theme, methodology, theory, etc. You will need to submit a title and a brief abstract (no more than 150 words). Please note the general topics that might fit your submission (see list online). However, if your submission does not fit any of the general teaching topics, you can select the “TEACHING: other” option. For questions or more information please contact Tamika Odum at odumtc@ucmail.uc.edu.

ROUNDTABLE TOPIC – RESEARCH OR TEACHING

Roundtable discussions center on a specific topic of interest introduced by the table facilitator. The facilitator briefly introduces the baseline idea or issue they wish to explore at the table (for this year it is a metaphorical table), and then opens discussion to the “audience” who act as participants in the session. Table topics are **NOT** formal presentations. Rather, roundtables are intended to foster the exchange of ideas among participants. This less formal and smaller session type is appropriate for discussion of research proposals, works in progress, or topics of special interest related to pedagogy. A roundtable can involve mini presentations or conversation on shared interests. Conference organizers will schedule similar table topics into a virtual session. For questions and more information please contact Geoff Wood at Geoff.wood@pitt.edu.

CLOSED SESSIONS – RESEARCH OR TEACHING

Closed sessions are considered complete sessions insofar as the presider over the session is required to recruit individual speakers to participate in the session. Organizers should submit the title of the session, a brief abstract for the session (no more than 150 words), and the *names* and *emails* of **all** the participants. Ideally, a closed session will have 3 to 5 participants. If the session consists of papers, you will also need to submit the titles of each individual presentations and a brief abstract for each presentation (no more than 150 words). For questions or more information on Closed Sessions, please contact Geoff Wood at geoff.wood@pitt.edu for research sessions, and Tamika Odum at odumtc@ucmail.uc.edu for teaching sessions.

WORKSHOP – RESEARCH OR TEACHING

Workshops are similar to roundtables insofar as they are interactive, and less formal than a standard paper presentation. Workshops offer participants the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise in applied and practical ways. Similarly, this format is meant to allow participants to develop skills, by delving deeply into a tool, method, process, etc. that is of interest to the work of sociologists. The audience actively participates in the session, and comes away from their time with ideas, tips, or materials they can apply to their own work. Contact the Conference Program Chair, Geoff Wood at geoff.wood@pitt.edu, as early as possible if you are interested in hosting a workshop and sharing your research, teaching, activism, or any other part of sociology that matters to you with a small group of engaged conference goers.

WHERE YOUR TALENTS AND THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD CROSS; THERE LIES YOUR VOCATION.

~ARISTOTLE

YOUR OFFICE, LIVING ROOM, OR DINING ROOM?



In the initial draft of this newsletter, an overview of Grand Rapids resided here, as did a charming photo collage of local haunts I snapped during a visit to the city. The accompanying text was replete with descriptions of local dining options, gardens to visit, live entertainment venues, and modern art installments to check out *in and around town*. With the shift to a virtual meeting, however, you likely already know what is *in and around your home*. Moreover, during the online conference, you may never stray from your couch, your kitchen table, or your office for more than mere minutes. So, what goes here? Some tips on being a star presenter in online formats of course!

YOUR “BACKGROUND”

As I am sure you know by now, presenting in a virtual format, like teaching online (from home or office), requires consideration of your immediate physical environment. You’ll note three of my favorite Zoom spots pictured above, along with a candid shot of an expert photobomber, classically trained in the art of disruption.

But, what is your background? Do you like what you see? Consider what is in the background to be as visually important as the foreground; your viewers are staring right at it. The standard bookshelf works well, as does a curio cabinet if it is not too busy (this is my challenge). Try moving around the house with whatever virtual meeting software you use and find out what works for you. Aim to carve out multiple locations for yourself. Although you may only use one for the conference, if you continue any form of remote work, the option to change spaces easily is life changing.

Consider your lighting. Spend some time looking at the level of illumination in your room(s) at different points during the day. Focus on your front lighting (pointed at your face) and if your room is lacking natural light, consider additional lighting during presentations. And, if you have yet to purchase a bulb marked “daylight,” look into it. It makes a world of difference in a poorly lit, internal room, or one that has a yellow cast in photos and video. A ring light is also a useful supplement for a dim room, but a swing arm lamp works almost as well if you have one. Think spotlight...just in time for your polished performance!

An ill conceived renovation project back in March left few uncluttered, undemolished spaces in my home for *Zooming*. Luckily, or unluckily, my camera lacks a 360-degree view, so proper camera positioning avoids the chaos around me. If you cannot find a space you love, or your background has devolved into a dreaded colorless wall, you may want to entertain the idea of faking it!

THE GREEN SCREEN

Enter the green screen. It is a game changer. If you want to avoid spending the money on a full set up like photographers or gamers might use, cheap green screen options exist and they can

modify your environment (at least for the virtual viewer) in seconds. You can buy small foldable green screens that attach to an office chair, or you can buy a green bedsheet. But, the cheapest way to set it up is to head to a fabric store, or order the least wearable shade of green you can find from an online supplier, and hang it on whatever is behind you using clothespins or adhesive hooks (thus avoiding wall damage). The flatter the surface and the better the lighting, the more realistic the image.

The specific color of green on the pantone color system is 354C if you are concerned about an exact match. Just make sure to choose a fabric that has a low sheen and is wrinkle resistant. Clearly, you should also avoid wearing green. If you search Amazon for *Chromakey Fabric*, there are ample options. With your fabric in place, you can use the embedded backgrounds, or grab your own high quality images, upload them to the video conferencing system, and select green screen. You can also find virtual backgrounds online (free) from Starbucks, Zoom, West Elm, MyDomaine, and likely innumerable other retailers and websites capitalizing on virtual work trends.

TO SIT, STAND, OR MOVE?

Most of us sit down while actively using a desktop or laptop. While standing during a videoconference may seem awkward, it expands your vocal range, allows you to move freely, and gives the viewer something to look at. A wireless headset combined with movement can mimic some of the energy of being live, which is frequently lost in videoconferencing. However, be mindful of the frame, and the sound quality as you move. Unless you have multiple cameras wired in the room, you can easily walk out of frame, or be plagued by bad sound. If you do an asynchronous presentation, you can move to different locations, editing the talk to create transitions on your virtual stage.

PETS, CHILDREN, & OTHER “DISTRACTIONS”

Although sometimes pets and children running behind you as you livestream can be a massive distraction, other times it adds to your presentation or class for that matter. Maybe you bristled at the BBC interview with interruptions from adorable children, but the rest of the world uttered a collective “Awwwww” as it achieved viral status. Embrace the chaos.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

While we cannot physically connect in 2021, there are ways to virtually connect with your audience. Try to include interactive elements (when appropriate) by using features like polling or chat. Although some of these are difficult to operate while in the midst of presenting, you can enlist the help of a colleague, or use the moderator of your session to organize questions/comments if one is assigned to yours. Finally, be conversational with attendees as they enter your room. A welcoming environment is one of the best features of NCSA. Just like old friends.

2021 CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

“You can only become truly accomplished at something you love.”

~Maya Angelou

The John F. Schnabel Address



The 2021 Schnabel address will be delivered by Dr. Gregory T. Kordsmeier, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Associate Professor of Sociology at Indiana University Southeast, and current editor of TRAILS, the American Sociological Association’s Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology. His address, entitled “Practicing What We Preach: Inclusive Pedagogy and the Sociology Classroom,” considers how to merge what we *know* as sociologists with what we actually *do* as sociologists within our courses.

In his own words...As sociologists, inequality and difference are at the core of what we study as a discipline. At the same time, the college classroom can often be a site that reproduces and reinforces those same inequalities. Inclusive pedagogy offers sociology instructors tools that will allow them to put sociological theory and empirical research into practice in their teaching, to better live their values by disrupting inequalities in their classrooms, and to offer all students greater opportunities for success. While sociologists can and must do more outside of the classroom to create a more equitable and just system of higher education, inclusive pedagogy offers instructors a place to start in their endeavors to serve all students, regardless of background.

The Ruth & John Useem Plenary Address

The 2021 Useem Plenary Address features Dr. John M. Eason, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Justice Lab. Dr. Eason’s [work](#) explores the intricacies of justice and injustice across a variety of social institutions. In his 2017 book, “Big House on the Prairie: Rise of the Rural Ghetto & Prison Proliferation,” he investigates the prison construction boom in rural America over the past fifty years. As small towns and rural areas struggle to remain economically viable, prisons, ironically, offer hope. And yet, he asserts, they represent the intersection of complex issues related to poverty, race, rural identity, stigma, ghettoization, politics (local, state, and federal), and criminal justice. This is the prison town in America.



Dr. Eason’s background as a former community organizer attending to issues in the criminal justice system and the lack of affordable housing, as well as his time as a political organizer for former Illinois State Senator and President Barack Obama have informed the development of his prolific research agenda and unique approach to multifaceted issues. Combining the macro and the micro, and offering new theoretical approaches to persistent social problems, Eason’s work is the embodiment of how to do sociology that matters, for people, for towns and cities, for social policy, and for his pedagogy.

The NCSA Presidential Address



Dr. Rachel Stein, current NCSA President and Director of Graduate Studies at West Virginia University, will deliver the 2021 NCSA Presidential Address virtually. Thematically, her talk parallels the overall motif for the conference, exploring the way in which sociology matters, not only in her own work, but for sociologists more broadly. In answering this question, Dr. Stein’s talk explores three dimensions of meaning and mattering. First, she addresses how the sociology we do should matter to us individually. In other words, we should be pursuing something we care about. While what interests us and what we care about inevitably evolves over the life course, finding meaning and value in teaching or research should, ideally, be motivational and serve a central purpose in our lives.

To learn. To analyze. To write. To grow, as sociologists. Second, the sociology we do should matter for the people we study and/or the people we teach. Are we advocating for change? For understanding? How does our research or teaching impact the people around us? Third, and finally, she discusses the implications of our research or teaching for the broader field of sociology. How do our specific contributions matter, and how do our individual and collective roles in this venture move us forward as a discipline? Join us for a stimulating NCSA Presidential Address dedicated to establishing the import of and identifying the significance in our work.

Alpha Kappa Delta

Happy Birthday to Alpha Kappa Delta! The International Sociological Honor Society recently celebrated their centennial anniversary with a virtual party. The role of Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) is to “acknowledge and promote excellence in scholarship of the study of social problems, sociology, and intellectual activities that lead to the improvement in the human condition.” AKD is a proud sponsor of the NCSA conference, and in previous conference years, NCSA has partnered with the esteemed organization to offer half-day workshops the day prior to the official conference start date. Given the transition to a virtual format, we are working with AKD to assess the feasibility of a virtual workshop. *Additional details will be posted on the NCSA conference website in the coming weeks.* For more information on Alpha Kappa Delta or to start a chapter at your university, click [here](#).



Alpha
Kappa
Delta

Sociological Focus

Consider submitting your manuscript to Sociological Focus, the official publication of the North Central Sociological Association (NCSA). Published continuously since 1968, the quarterly journal is international in scope, covering a full range of topics of current interest to sociology and related social science disciplines. Sociological Focus is peer reviewed and committed to publishing high quality research on substantive issues of importance to the study of society.

The journal's mission is broad in scope, encompassing empirical works (both quantitative and qualitative in nature), as well as manuscripts presenting up to date literature review of any field of sociology. Look for upcoming issues focused on a specific theme, and dedicated to timely topics. Current author and submission guidelines available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/usfo20#.VE-62fldWTM>

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NCSA Equity Statement

Our country has become the epicenter of concern. Mortalities, racial violence, murder, and COVID-19 incidence rates disproportionately impact Black communities. The NCSA recognizes that racism is a form of trauma. A culturally specific stressor. It is an active systemic vehicle for oppression, harshly relived and experienced, in the lives of Black people in America. At the same time voluminous, articulate statements have been issued across every public sector, industry and discipline with good intent. At the NCSA we are asking tough questions through an equity obsessed lens, How will we operationalize good intent? What does it mean for Black lives to matter in academia? How is progress evaluated and perpetuated? Our statement is a commitment. We are committed to the inconvenient, arduous work of cultural change, representation, education and equity in our organization. We ask that you join us in doing the same.

On Teaching

“The best thing about being a teacher is that it matters. The hardest thing about being a teacher is that it matters every day.”

~Todd Whitaker, Author of *What Great Teachers Do Differently*

