

*The Department of  
Sociology and Anthropology at*  
**MUHLENBERG**  
COLLEGE

*presents*

*The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Senior Research Symposium*



Tuesday, April 30, 2012  
4:30 pm



*The Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
Welcomes You!*

*Dr. J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat, Associate Professor of Anthropology  
& Acting Chair*

*Dr. Krista Bywater, Assistant Professor of Sociology*

*Dr. Benjamin Carter, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology*

*Dr. Janine Chi, Associate Professor of Sociology*

*Dr. Amy Cooper, Assistant Professor of Anthropology*

*Dr. Anne Esacove, Assistant Professor of Sociology*

*Dr. Neda Maghbouleh, Consortium for Faculty Diversity Fellow*

*Ms. Tracy Kline, Department Secretary*



## *Schedule of Events*

### Introductory Remarks

Dr. Benjamin Carter

### Posters

- ◇ **The Deal Breakers: Muhlenberg Students' Response to Natural Disaster**  
Sarah Rathbun (Sociology)
- ◇ **Spanked or Tied?: Dominant-Submissive Relationship Dynamics**  
Erica M. Thomke (Anthropology)

### Presentations

- ◇ **A Web of Injustice: Environmental Racism in Chester, Pennsylvania**  
Brianna Brown (Sociology)
- ◇ **“Living Politics”: Views of the Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement on Restructuring South African Society**  
Nicole McVinua (Sociology)
- ◇ **Challenging the Presumption of Poverty: An Archaeological Perspective on the Relative Wealth of Pioneers in Downeast Maine, 1760-1820**  
Megan Postemski (Anthropology)

### Concluding Remarks

Dr. Anne Esacove

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## COLLEGE

Welcome to the Ninth Annual Senior Symposium in Sociology and Anthropology.

We are exceptionally proud of the students presenting their research today. They have spent many hours reading, interlibrary loaning books, writing IRB requests, collecting data - in internet chatrooms, foreign countries, local communities, and archaeological sites - writing up and preparing to present their results. They have persevered through many a quandary, such as a missing page of historical data, finding a truly private email service (Gmail is NOT!), and completing a random sample. Yet, they are lucky - even if they didn't always feel that way. Although they have felt the anxiety and the exhaustion of research, they have also experienced the pleasure of deepening their own knowledge and contributing to academic research and, finally, the elation of finishing.

We thank family, friends, students, faculty and administration for joining us tonight.

Drs. Esacove and Carter



## *Honors Presentations*



**Brianna Brown (Sociology)**

### ***A Web of Injustice: Environmental Racism in Chester, Pennsylvania***

Abstract: Residents in Chester, Pennsylvania, have suffered from environmental racism since the 1960s when the city's manufacturing industry began to collapse. Environmental racism is the targeting of minority neighborhoods with toxic waste facilities and exposure to pollutants (Macarenhas 2009). Since it's recognition as an area experiencing environmental racism there have been several studies, Environmental Protection Agency assessments, and grassroots initiatives that have been developed to try to improve the environment of Chester. However, based on interviews of 11 community members I found environmental justice initiatives have not adequately improved the health of the environment. Years of residential segregation and racist policy have weakened the City's ability to control and regulate what enters Chester. As a result the proliferation of the waste industry has clustered within the City. In this paper I posit that the continuous systemic racism that the City has been exposed to has contributed to the label of Chester as a place to dump waste. Until the underlying structural challenges are recognized, the City will struggle to improve their environment. I argue that Chester needs to end its dependency on the waste industry to redefine and improve the use of the local environment.

Advice to Rising Seniors: To those who are starting senior seminar next year I would strongly suggest thinking about your project before the beginning of the semester. I found it very helpful to have collected all of my data and have some preliminary analysis completed before the class started. I would also recommend creating outlines and timelines for how and when you need to have things completed. This will help you stay organized and on top of what is probably the largest project you have had to complete in College. Lastly, make sure you choose to research something you are passionate about. It is essential to making the project worthwhile. Good luck!



## *Honors Presentations*



**Nicole McVinua**

***“Living Politics”: Views of the Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement on Restructuring South African Society***

Abstract: Abahlali baseMjondolo (the Shack Dwellers’ Movement) is a current South African social movement formed in 2005 with the mission to “improve the lives and living conditions of shack dwellers...” This study analyzes the discourse of the movement in order to reveal its vision of a “good” society, using sixty-two documents written by movement members surrounding six major events from the movement’s history, four interviews with movement leaders, and participatory observations. Drawing from the basis of collective action framing theory, this study shows that the movement’s ideal society consists of a “living politic”: a government run through bottom up participation that considers reality and allows for a “complete” democracy. In order to reach this ideal structure, the movement poses that there must be equal access to resources through a redistribution of wealth, full political representation and meaningful participation of all people, and a consideration of humanity. Ultimately, this study concludes that Abahlali baseMjondolo frames their oppression as solely based on class, using aspects of a Marxist perspective to present their views of South African society’s problems and potential solutions.

Advice to Rising Juniors: Completing a senior thesis has been one of the most challenging experiences of my college career; it has also been one of the most rewarding. Participating in Senior Seminar has been the ultimate culmination of my Muhlenberg education and time in the Sociology department. It has not only allowed me to use everything I have learned and apply it to something that I am truly interested in, but it has given me the opportunity to create knowledge, not simply reproduce it (as we are so often asked to do). This experience, of finding new meaning and creating new understanding, has been the most rewarding part of this process. Although not easy, I have felt supported every step of the way, both by the faculty and by my fellow seniors. To the rising seniors that are considering embarking on this journey, I recommend that you do; and that you jump into a project with confidence that you will produce something new and exciting on the other end.



## *Honors Presentations*



**Megan Postemski**

***Challenging the Presumption of Poverty:  
An Archaeological Perspective on the  
Relative Wealth of Pioneers in Downeast  
Maine, 1760-1820***

Abstract: Historians typically portray settlers of Downeast Maine as living harsh, uncomfortable and impoverished lives in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There is a presumed disparity in wealth between settlers in Maine, a province of Massachusetts at the time, and well-established residents of Massachusetts proper. Despite the prevalence of this "presumption of poverty," I hypothesize that life in Downeast Maine was not as difficult as previously thought. To test this hypothesis, I analyzed archaeological and historical data. The ceramic assemblage from the Joy/Flood archeological site (c. 1773-1811) in Surry, Maine indicates settlers likely owned more refined white than coarse red earthenware. Compared to the highly utilitarian red earthenware, white earthenware cost more and was intended mainly for show, so its high concentration at the Joy/Flood site suggests settlers had sufficient wealth to purchase these wares. Historical tax valuations illustrate how settlers improved larger tracts of land Downeast in a short amount of time, increasing their landed wealth more rapidly than their Massachusetts counterparts. Overall, I propose settlers of Downeast Maine were able to profit in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries due to their use of privately-held terrestrial and commonly-held marine resources.

Advice to Rising Seniors: A senior thesis is nothing if not a challenge. While it was certainly overwhelming at times, I would say researching my thesis was easily the most rewarding academic experience I've had at Muhlenberg. Writing a senior thesis was such a valuable experience because I could study my topic in depth. Senior seminar made me appreciate how collaborative research can be. I cannot emphasize enough how working with my peers and the anthropology professors, especially Dr. Carter, helped my thesis and research skills develop. In short, my advice to students considering senior research is to relish the challenge. Granted, it may be daunting, but when else can you collaborate with students and amazingly supportive faculty on an in-depth research project of your choosing?



## Senior Thesis Presentations



**Sarah Rathbun**

### ***The Deal Breakers: Muhlenberg Students' Response to Natural Disaster***

Abstract: College campuses are ripe with volunteer opportunities, and Muhlenberg students appear to be especially involved in community service and civic engagement during their college careers. Much of the existing research on volunteerism among college students focuses on why students choose to participate in organizations that meet and volunteer on a regular basis. However, motivations among college students to participate in disaster relief efforts in particular have not been as widely studied. Based on 94 surveys distributed to Muhlenberg students, motivations to participate in general volunteerism were consistent with those found among other college students. In addition, I found that when it comes to natural disaster aid, the most significant reasons that students did not participate were that service opportunities were either unknown to the students or were otherwise perceived as inconvenient, and that students did not feel a personal connection to the natural disasters. Because the college acknowledges its responsibility to people outside our community and recognizes the value of volunteerism, it is necessary that volunteerism on campus reflects this ideal of global citizenship by supporting programs and organizations that serve those in need both in our own backyards and beyond.

Advice to Rising Juniors: Senior seminar has been one of the most challenging experiences of my undergraduate career, in the best way possible! It has allowed me the freedom to pursue a topic of interest to me while getting a chance to pull together the skills I have learned through my sociology major, and to have something to show for it that may actually help to make a difference in the Muhlenberg community (my research was a case study on Muhlenberg students that allowed me to make suggestions to the school administration). The availability of help through both Dr. Esacove and my fellow classmates made the experience run a lot more smoothly. I would highly recommend this course if you are interested in having a culminating project for your major.





## Senior Thesis Presentations



**Erica M. Thomke**

### ***Spanked or Tied?: Dominant-Submissive Relationship Dynamics***

Abstract: *Fifty Shades of Grey* got it wrong. In the field of human sexuality, research into Bondage/Discipline, Dominance/Submission, and Sadism/Masochism (BDSM) often tends to overlook the intricacies of the Dominant/submissive relationship. Dominance and submission encompasses the consensual power imbalance that often constructs all other BDSM acts and behaviors. Through nine semi-structured email interviews of real-life Dominants and submissives, I sought to understand the nature of the relationship organizing interactions within a sexual subculture. In listening to voices of this understudied and misunderstood group, I discovered how a highly structured sexual encounter creates a platform for communication and trust. Furthermore, the findings emphasized the importance of sexual compatibility in romantic relationships. This research has implications for all human sexualities, as well as highlights the misconceptions and misrepresentations of BDSM.

Advice to Rising Seniors: Find your passion. (Ironic, right?) When it comes to semester-long research, invest your time in something you can be passionate about. Perhaps something that intrigues you, with which you're not fully familiar. Get controversial! Topic is key, because even if you think it's irrelevant in the grand scheme of academia, or you think it has nothing to do with anything you've studied so far, your passion for the idea makes it interesting. Passion will propel you through roadblocks and deadlines. It is the only thing that will make this investment of time and energy worthwhile. Because when you look back on senior year, and you remember the amount of blood, sweat, and tears devoted to research, you don't want to remember it as a waste of time. If you enjoy it, it will never be a waste. Take senior seminar, challenge yourself to find passion! And who knows, maybe you'll discover a whole new world.



*Special Thanks to:*

Ariela Weinberger  
Tiffany Kreider  
Stephen Moore

Tracy Kline, Department Secretary



