FROM THE CHAIR

In 2016, the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington celebrated its Centennial. On a glorious summer afternoon we welcomed many friends and alums back to the Quad to reconnect, reminisce, and recall the many important scientific advances made by our faculty over the past 100 years. And yet at this event it was clear that while we are one of the oldest departments in the nation, in many respects we remain one of the most vibrant. Our current faculty are engaged in exciting and important research on topics ranging from urban inequalities to population projections to the politics of migration, and we are at the center of the data revolution in social science. As good social scientists, we recognize the legacy of our history, and appreciate the ways it has shaped our departmental culture and values: Like those who came before us, we are an intellectually curious and generous bunch, committed to creating a stimulating environment that supports rigorous empirical research on critical social issues.

The department’s vitality is apparent in our undergraduate and graduate programs, which are continually revised and refreshed so they match today’s students’ interests and needs. Our undergraduate program offers a classical liberal arts major that emphasizes the development of analytic skills, critical thinking, and written and verbal communication. Nevertheless, our current course offerings cover a range of topics of contemporary interest, including Surveillance, Health Disparities, Race and Ethnic Relations, and Data and Society, as well as more traditional sociological topics such at The Family, Religion, and Social Stratification. While we teach some (very) large classes, the major also includes small classes and seminars, opportunities to study abroad, and an intensive honors program. Our undergraduate program also offers students a variety of ways to apply their Sociological knowledge, including school-based tutoring programs, internships, and applied research experiences with faculty and community partners.

Our graduate program is small enough for students and faculty to know each other well, yet large enough to sustain intellectual and methodological diversity. While the department definitely has a quantitative bent, we train our students to use a variety of methods that enable them to conduct theoretically driven, independent research, and to communicate with a broad audience. A critical component of the current intellectual life of the department is our culture of informal working groups in which faculty and graduate students present, discuss and critique research and scholarship. These settings provide rich supplements to standard graduate courses, and have been described as the place where the ‘magic’ occurs. Currently active working groups include Contexts, the Gender working group, a Computational Demography Working Group, the Desistance group, CLASS workshops, and a Race, Ethnicity and Immigration group. Working groups are complemented by weekly seminars series offered by several interdisciplinary centers, including the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology, The Center for Statistics in the Social Sciences, the West Coast Poverty Center, the Jackson School, and the eScience Institute. Taken together, these extra-curricular activities create an unusually stimulating and generative intellectual environment for sociological research, the fruits of which are reflected in the important contributions our faculty and students make to our collective understanding of society.

I hope that you will explore our website and learn more about our faculty, students, and programs. Please feel free to contact me at stovel@uw.edu if you have any questions or comments.

Kate Stovel
Professor and Chair