WORKING GROUPS

The Department of Sociology embraces a community-based approach to scholarship and fosters a collaborative and often interdisciplinary research environment. Working groups and other informal collectives play a critical role in sustaining a vibrant academic community among graduate students, postdocs, and faculty. The most institutionalized collaborative communities can be found in our self- or quasi-organized working groups. These groups center around common research interests or methodologies, and typically offer members opportunities to share their work at various stages of development in an encouraging and supportive environment. There are currently six active working groups in the department of sociology: Comparative Law and Society Studies (CLASS) Workshare, Computational Demography Work Group (CDWG); Contexts Working Group, Desistance Working Group; UW Gender Research Cluster, and Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration (REI).

In addition to these working groups, some faculty members hold regular group meetings with their advisees. These advisee meetings allow graduate students at different stages of the program to provide feedback and guidance to each other alongside their faculty advisors.

Finally, from time to time graduate students form small intimate writing groups focused on helping members improve writing skills and make progress on their own research goals through peer editing, active encouragement, setting soft deadlines, and accountability.

These groups all aim to provide support to graduate students and faculty members, and to strengthen the research environment in the department. Below you can read more about each of the six formal working groups and learn how to get involved in them.

COMPARATIVE LAW AND SOCIETY STUDIES (CLASS) WORKSHARE

The CLASS Workshare is a group of socio-legal and human rights scholars that includes graduate students and faculty from a number of different departments. Although most of the participants are Law and Social Justice faculty and CLASS Fellows currently completing their certificate in socio-legal studies, students interested in such topics but not pursuing a certificate (yet!) are welcome to join. During these group meetings, individuals share and receive feedback on a specific piece of work-in-progress that engages socio-legal topics. Papers are distributed in advance of the group meetings and workshare participants read the paper and come with comments, ready to discuss the work. If you are interested in participating in the workshare, please email CLASS Center Director, Katherine Beckett and visit the CLASS Center website to learn about the Center and CLASS certificate.

“The CLASS Workshare series offer students a chance to see how scholarship is evaluated and constructively critiqued in the interdisciplinary world of socio-legal studies. For graduate students who are interested in becoming involved in the Law and Society scholarly community or publishing in socio-legal journals, this is a great opportunity to get a better sense of intellectual norms and standards in this area. I signed up for a Workshare last year, so it forced me to write my first draft of an article drawing from my dissertation research that I’m now readying for publication after getting excellent feedback from a diverse and interdisciplinary group of scholars.” – Anna Reosti (Grad Student)
The Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology (CSDE) organizes informal meetings to discuss topics related to demographic data and computational and statistical methods, share tools students and faculty have developed via demos or tutorials, and to workshop graduate student and faculty research in progress. Prior meetings have covered topics including:

- “Getting Started with APIs” – Sociology Grad Student Connor Gilroy
- “Using Twitter Data to Study Migration Processes” – Geography Grad Student Lee Fiorio
- “Getting Started with Spark for the analysis of large data sets” – Visiting Scientist at the UW Information School Ott Toomet
- “Using Facebook Data for Advertisers for Demographic Research” – CSDE Training Director and Assoc. Prof of Sociology Emilio Zagheni & Sociology Grad Student Kivan Polimis
- “Discussion on data for climate action challenge” Affiliate Assistant Prof of Sociology Afra Mashhadi
- “Using ORCA card data” Sociology Grad Student Victoria Sass
- “A systems biology perspective on biodemography” Prof of UW Medicine Pathology Daniel Promislow

Everyone is welcome to join this working group; typically pizza or light refreshments are served at group meetings. Those interested in receiving regular announcements about these meetings should sign up for our mailing list. For more information, please email Emilio Zagheni.

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“I really appreciate that CDWG provides the opportunity for a deep dive into how people apply the computational methods they use to their substantive work. Often, when people doing novel things present their work publicly, you don’t have the chance to hear the full details of the implementation. In CDWG, we get to see people’s code, to hear what’s worked well and what has been challenging.” – Connor Gilroy (Grad Student)

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The Contexts Working Group (CWG) is an interdisciplinary, student-driven working group that provides an opportunity for graduate students to share and receive feedback on their specific projects, consider specific theoretical and methodological questions, and discuss a variety of professional-development issues. Given that sociology is about the interactions of individuals, groups, and organizations within social and physical contexts, there is really no sociological topic that is out of bounds for the group. The broad set of interests represented by CWG participants is one of the strengths of the group, allowing members to venture out of their substantive echo chambers and learn about new interpretations, literatures, theoretical arguments, methodological approaches that enrich their own work. Every meeting starts off by providing each CWG participant the opportunity to talk about their recent activities and progress on projects. This allows members to catch up on news, identify opportunities for collaboration/help, and identify professional-development discussions that might benefit the group (e.g. how to approach an interview, how to respond to an obstinate journal reviewer, etc.). After weekly updates, the group turns its attention toward a piece of work a graduate student has emailed out to the group for feedback. Graduate students and postdocs have requested feedback on different types of work at various stages of development ranging from a basic idea to a complete working paper. During the group meeting, a volunteer serves as the primary commentator, providing formal feedback and leading the discussion for the rest of the group. The goal is always to give the student presenting work a clear path forward for their project. All graduate students, staff, and faculty are all welcome to participate and should email Kyle Crowder to be added to email list for information about future meetings.
“There are two main things that I really appreciate about his group. First, the opportunity to workshop my work in a low-stakes, safe space, where I feel comfortable showing its weaknesses and asking for help. Second, learning about my colleagues’ research at multiple stages of work, which brings everyone together and creates a sense of collectivity and community. This group has helped me reach my goals by giving me specific feedback on my research and ideas at multiple stages of development and training me in how to give constructive feedback, even if it is about a subject that I am not very familiar with.” --María Vignau Loría (Grad Student)

“I love that there’s a space to get feedback on my work. I learn way more about the craft of research in these workshops than I do in regular classes taught by a teacher. I can get feedback that gives me confidence to submit to a journal, or sufficient comments to go back to the drawing board.” --Mahesh Somashekhar (Postdoc, Joint Appointment in Public Policy and Sociology)

DESISTANCE WORKING GROUP

The Desistance Working Group (DWG) is an interdisciplinary team of faculty and graduate students centered on two main objectives: (1) to foster substantive research into the desistance from crime; and (2) to evaluate and critique existing methods for studying desistance from crime and other dynamic processes and explore better methods. Funded by the National Institute of Justice grant, “Rational Choice, Deterrence, and Identity: Modeling Life Course Transitions and Desistance,” awarded to Ross Matsueda (Sociology) and Elena Erosheva (Statistics and Social Work), the DWG has been exploring a number of distinct substantive and methodological questions including:

- Does the event of becoming a mother or a father increase desistance from crime among residents in inner-city disadvantaged neighborhoods? Does motherhood reduce drug use and crime due to changes in peer groups and criminal identity?
- Do recent advances in statistical methods for analyzing longitudinal data on crime and drug use, including the unimodal curve registration (UCR) approach, yield different results, and if so, which are more accurate under varying conditions?
- Does the threat of arrest deter inner-city youth from drug use?
- Do members of inner-city street gangs remain in gangs longer when the gang is strongly organized and inculcates strong gang identities?
- To what extent are gender differences in violent and property crime explained by differences in empathy across adolescence and young adulthood?

The DWG has been organized around specific projects and papers in progress and typically meets weekly with a seminar format, skyping in out-of-town members. Participating members provide updates of their progress on projects and receive feedback from other members. This working group is open to graduate students in sociology, statistics, and other social sciences who have an interest in statistical methods for modeling desistance from crime. Email Ross Matsueda if interested.

“I most enjoyed working with sociology and biostatisticians/CSS&S faculty and students. The ~50/50 divide meant I didn’t have to be the only sociology voice in the room, but it still pushed me to think outside my own discipline when trouble-shooting and critiquing research. I am better at communicating my goals, viewpoints, and questions - especially with regards to quantitative methods. I started out a bit spooked, but my confidence in that area has greatly improved.” --Kate O’Neill (Grad Student)

“The statistics people have a different way of looking at problems and it helped me gain a wider perspective of both sociology and statistics.” --John Leverso (Grad Student)

UW GENDER RESEARCH CLUSTER

Funded by the Simpson Center for Humanities, the UW Gender Research Cluster originated in the Sociology department and now includes students from five departments across campus. The cluster operates with five overarching goals: 1) to create and maintain space for work-shopping each other’s materials, 2) to foster collaborations between group members, 3) to act as an accountability group for productivity and deadlines for group members, 4) to grow as an intellectual community, and 5) to network with graduate students at
other universities. This cluster is made up of a diverse group of graduate students with a common goal: to create and maintain a supportive intellectual community that encourages a variety of rigorous work related to the topics of gender and sexuality. If you are a graduate student interested in workshopping with the Gender Research Cluster, please email Sarah Diefendorf and visit the UW Gender Research Cluster Facebook page.

“I love that this is a student-run group that runs by community rules. We decide what we want from the group as a collective, and our schedule tends to be responsive to what members need during any given quarter. Generally, the group serves multiple functions. Not only does it bring together scholars with similar substantive interests for feedback and collaboration, but it also encourages a feminist praxis that has been indispensable during my time here in the department. Being in community is important for my mental health, and this group helps to build that base of support that generally boosts my morale. It has also fostered some collaborative work as well as opened me up to broader theoretical conversations.” --Christina Hughes (Grad Student)

"My favorite thing about this group is the sheer diversity of research that we discuss. Both macro and micro sociological research involves questions of gender and sexuality, so I get to hear people talking about a variety of subfields and a variety methods. This group has helped me reach my goals by providing a community of people who are there to help. It is a collaborative group providing personal and professional support for those interested in the sociology of gender and sexuality. --Daniel Nolan IV (Grad Student)

RACE, ETHNIC, AND IMMIGRATION (REI)

The primary goal of the Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration (REI) workshop is to provide faculty members and graduate students with an intellectual home in which they can share their works in progress from other REI scholars and receive critical feedback. A second goal of the workshop is to help REI graduate students acquire valuable skills to become successful professional sociologists and to become better prepared for the academic job market. Interested students should email René Flores for more information.

“I love this working group because it not only offers a home where I can share my research ideas in their infant stages, but it provides a space where grad students can have real conversations and ask questions about the process of transitioning from graduate student to professional sociologist and get guidance on professional development topics such as networking, developing a strong CV, and securing fellowships.” -- Michele Cadigan (Grad Student)