

"Not many of us ever try to explain why our parents turned out the way they did. We're too absorbed with ourselves. We may use our parents to explain us, but we don't normally dig much deeper into the past; we don't use ourselves to explain them"  
— Arthur R. Bochner.



## The Clipboard

By Stephen Riggins

Fish feeding duty in Cambodia. The food consists of kitchen scraps, water vegetables, and termite mounds picked from the mountains.  
Photo by Kelly Greenfield.

Professor Liam Swiss has received an Insight Development Grant of approximately \$45,000 from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. His project is titled The Institutionalization of the Global Foreign Aid Network, 1960-2008. Part of these funds will be used to support two Ph.D. students. Liam was also recently elected Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development. His paper "Security Sector Reform and Development Assistance: Explaining the Diffusion of Policy Priorities among Donor Agencies" has appeared in the journal *Qualitative Sociology*.

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For the past two years the MUN Sociology Society has been an inspiration for both faculty and students. Not only have students organized ambitious parties on George Street with live music by a rock band of sociology majors, they have also donated five hundred dollars for the second time to the department's scholarship. This spring the Society organized the first student conference in the history of our department. It was a platform for undergraduate and graduate students to share their work with fellow students and faculty. Keynote speakers were Karen Stanbridge, who gave a lecture about her experiences writing a

textbook in political sociology; and Liam Swiss, who talked about foreign aid.

Speakers in the theory session of the student conference included Danielle Ryder (speaking about concepts of modernity), Ryan Dinn (authenticity in country music), Erin Woolridge (theories of anomie), and Chris Martin (self-expression through tattooing). Participating in the session on socio-economic development were Kelly Greenfield (rural development in Cambodia) and Colin Scott from the MUN department of psychology (the informal economy and development).



Jonathan Price (speaking about the employment-related mobility of rural youth) and Jenna Hawkins (parental leave granted by employers) participated in the session on the sociology of work. The final session, ethnography and methodology, included Ashley Laracy (gamblers' experiences with excessive play on video lottery terminals) and Shalanda Phillips of York University (combustive ethnography for bad anthropologists).

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For their excellence in teaching, research, and service to Memorial University, retired Professors Peter Sinclair and Marilyn Porter have been awarded the title Professor Emeritus.

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Congratulations to Jamie Baker, who has been elected Chair of the Student Issues Subcommittee of the Canadian Sociology Association.

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Mark C. J. Stoddart and David B. Tindall (2011) "Eco-feminism, Hegemonic Masculinity and Environmental Movement Participation in British Columbia, Canada, 1998-2007: 'Women Always Clean up the Mess,'" *Sociological Spectrum* 31(3), 342-368.

J. Scott Kenney (2010 "Pragmatic Constructions of History among Contemporary Freemasons," *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, 1(2), 159-185.

J. Scott Kenney and Jacqueline Slowey (2010) "Illegitimate Pain: Dimensions, Dynamics and Implications," *Deviant Behavior*, 31(6), 477-520.

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Liam Swiss has taken the initiative of recreating the speakers' series in the department of sociology which has been dormant since circa 1990. The first presentation in the series was a paper by Stephen Riggins titled "'You regarded me as Perfectly Safe in the Realm of Experimental Psychology': W. G. Smith, the First Newfoundland-born Sociologist."

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Recently Completed MA Theses and Extended Research Papers

Ryan Dinn, "The Social Authentication of Music Cultures as Process: The Interplay of Perceptive and Adherence Work in Creating Cultural Authenticities."

Katie MacDonald, "Hungry for Change: Framing the Food Movement."

Mandy Nevakshonoff, "Who is the Bearer of Bare Life? Questions of Gender in Giorgio Agamben's 'Homo Sacer.'"

Gloria Nickerson, "Attending to Viewpoint: Integrating Standpoint Theory in Visual Research."

Jonathan Price, "An Intersectional Approach to the Study of Rural Youth Out-Migration."

Jolyne Roy, "Do Leaders Make Movements or do Movements Make Leaders? An Investigation of Leadership Theory."

Danielle Ryder, "Persistent Inequality: The Impact of Student Debt on Educational Attainment."

Jessica Snel, "Standpoint Theory and Social Work: Addressing the Prevalence of Domestic Abuse in Contemporary Aboriginal Populations."

Ryan Webber, "Seeking the Unknown: The Problem of Voluntary Risk-taking in Outdoor 'Risk Sports.'"

Participants in the 2011 MUN Sociology Student Conference.  
 Front row: Chris Martin, Dean Doyle, Colin Scott, Jon Price.  
 Back row: Jennifer Will, Karen Stanbridge, Liam Swiss, Ashley Laracy, Jenna Hawkins, Erin Woolridge, and Danielle Ryder.



## Nobody ever told me field research would be so hard

By Kelly Greenfield

I wasn't expecting my Ph.D. thesis research to be easy. Actually, I was looking forward to the challenge. I had prepared myself as best as I could, so I thought. Then I got off the plane. The heat, the smells, the sounds, the trees, the traffic, the crowds, the pollution; all of it was foreign to me, especially in my jet-lagged and anxious state.

My research was situated in southern Cambodia at O'Saray commune located in the Tram Kak District of Takeo province. The Fisheries and Marine Institute of Memorial University has partnered with the Prek Leap National School of Agriculture in Phnom Penh for the Sustainable Rice Fish Integration (SRFI) Project, which has been designed to reduce poverty in Cambodia. Through connections I had made at the Marine Institute, I was invited to conduct my field research in association with the SRFI Project at the field site in Takeo province, where I was able to observe and participate in the integrated rice-fish agricultural/aquacultural practices at the most local level. Through my ethnographic efforts, I spent 10 months deeply immersed in the research setting in order to grasp what local people experience as meaningful and important.

Ranked 136<sup>th</sup> out of 179 on the United Nations' Human Development Index, Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world. The symptoms of poverty slapped me in the face. Fiercely. For me,



Kelly Greenfield is a Ph.D. Candidate in the department of sociology. From August 2009 to May 2010 she was engaged in studying the implications of new aquacultural technologies for rice farmers in rural Cambodia.

Harvest time in the Takeo province of Cambodia. Photo by Kelly Greenfield.

that was the hardest part. Poverty in Cambodia is overwhelmingly rural. There was no running water or electricity at my field site. There wasn't even a toilet. The rice fields were the toilet. Most people didn't even have shoes.

I arrived in the wet season so the rice paddies were flooded, the fishponds were overflowing, and the household water pots were full. Every family I visited graciously offered me a scoop of their precious water, but I refrained. Despite the fact that I had received all of my required immunizations before departing Canada, their drinking water was green, and covered with floating bugs, and I had been warned to drink only bottled water.

Instead they would send out a group of kids to fetch me a coconut from the nearest tree. It became routine. Every time I arrived I was greeted by a swarm of giggling children yelling "hello, hello" until they were sent off on a coconut hunt. As far as the eye could see, it was rice paddy after rice paddy, occasionally interrupted by a towering coconut tree. After running at full speed, the coconut hunters would arrive back about 15 minutes later, soaking wet, with a big, green coconut and pass it off to the machete-wielding grandmother, who would hack off the top and pass it to me to drink the warm water. (Continued on page 4)

Professor Piché has conducted studies in three related areas: 1) the normalization and proliferation of imprisonment inside and outside the penal system; 2) alternatives to incarceration; 3) cultural representations of confinement and punishment. He is Co-managing Editor of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* ([www.jpopp.org](http://www.jpopp.org)).

## How I arrived at teaching, research, and action in the midst of a carceral binge

By Justin Piché

Students enter university with a variety of aspirations in mind, ranging from a desire to learn more about a particular topic to career-oriented objectives. As an avid viewer of the (recently cancelled) television series *Law & Order* during high school, I enrolled in the criminology program at the University of Ottawa to learn about what is commonly called "crime" and the "criminal justice system." This was to be a stepping-stone to

law school to become a Crown Attorney who would put the "bad guys" behind bars where "they belong" in the name of protecting society.

For me, studying at the undergraduate level was a transformative experience. Expecting a multi-year crash course on the causes, consequences and responses to "criminality" – in keeping with criminology's dominant positivist and state-subservient research and pedagogical agenda – I took a number of courses that dramatically changed how I viewed "crime" and the role of the penal system in Canadian society and the world more broadly. (Continued on Page 4)

## Nobody ever told me field research would be so hard Continued

At first, we mostly just sat around smiling at each other, but they never took their eyes off me. The first question I was asked was “are you married?” followed by “how many children do you have?” They showed me their fish ponds, how they fed the fish, they taught me Khmer, they taught me how to play games, how to dance Khmer-style, how to stay cool, and how to laugh at everything. They would feel my legs and laugh at how prickly they were. They would lift up my arms to discover stubble and laugh as if it was the funniest thing they had ever seen. They would laugh at my pronunciation, and that I would always mix up my numbers and colours. They would ask when I was coming back.

My comprehensive exam readings duly informed me about gaining entry, establishing rapport, building trust and managing myself in the field. They didn’t, nor could they have conveyed to me the emotionally charged, yet internalized reaction I would have towards extreme corruption, or the blatant sex trade, especially of young girls, or genocide, or the Killing Fields, or the fact that I didn’t see many elderly Khmers. I knew there would be guns, but they were everywhere and in plain sight, except in the swanky Phnom Penh clubs, where guns and bodyguards were prohibited. I knew there were landmines scattered across the country, but I wasn’t prepared to see so many victims of landmines. Nor was I prepared to see so many victims of acid attacks, or disease, or development. I was definitely not prepared for the relentless, thick, stifling heat, of which I rarely had any reprieve. And I was not prepared for the water-born intestinal parasites. Either time. And I certainly didn’t mean to bring them home with me.

What I really wanted to bring home was Chou. Chou is the 8-year-old daughter of Leang, a staff member at the guesthouse where I stayed when in Phnom Penh. I was told that Chou was born with a thick tongue, and that was why she did not speak or behave properly. After several long-term residents of the guesthouse got together enough donations to send Chou to school, they realized that she was deaf in one ear. We got her a hearing aid, a new school uniform, a book bag, and sent her off to Khmer school. I have spoken to Chou via Skype twice since I have been home, but the best part was that she spoke to me.

I made so many friends during my 10 months in Cambodia, and I miss them all dearly. I never got the chance to hold Darin and Sovy’s son, Sovimean, who just celebrated his first birthday. I was the first person that Darin told she was pregnant. I never got the chance to hold Dara Somnang, my beautiful godson. I never got the chance to say goodbye to Daroe’s sister, who died in the stampede on the bridge during the Water Festival.

The last day at my field site was also the last day of my interviews. Needless to say, I was a bit emotional. They had given me so much; their time, their energy, their friendship, their coconuts! I didn’t know when, or if, I would ever see them again. I arrived at the farm soaking wet with my translator, my pen and paper, and my digital recorder, ready to conduct my final interview. There had not been rain in months, there was no water anywhere, all the ponds were dried up and

the fields were bare. It was dangerously hot and dry, yet ridiculously humid. We set ourselves up, I pressed record, and we started the interview. We were about half way through when it happened. Thunder, like I have never heard before. I had been told that if you hear thunder, you must immediately take cover because so many people start shooting their guns up at the sky to scare the thunder away, and when a bullet goes up, it must come down! But in this case, because the rain had been delayed so long, it was a celebration. Then the rain came. It was incredible rain. Kids were singing, dancing and sliding through the mud. Everyone was so excited, and happy. The farmer that I had been interviewing approached me with a very respectful bow, saying “aw kuhn, aw kuhn,” over and over again. I knew that meant “thank you,” but that was all I understood because he was speaking so fast. Sorany, my translator, told me he was thanking me for bringing the rain. Shortly after, one of his kids starting yelling “j’rook, j’rook,” which means pig in Khmer. It turns out that their pig was giving birth, 14 piglets in total. Then I was thanked for bringing the piglets! I know that I had nothing to do with the rain, or the pigs, but they were thanking me for bringing such good luck to them.

One week later I was back in Canada. I had read about reverse culture shock. Then I got off the plane.

Nobody told me about the overwhelmingly emotional departure. When we “leave the field,” it is not just a matter of wrapping up a study. The object of our study is often people, who may become attached to us, or us to them.

In this case, let’s just say, nobody ever told me it would be so hard.

## How I arrived at teaching, research, and action in the midst of a carceral binge Continued

As I read scholarly literature, listened to the lectures of my professors and engaged in discussions with my peers, I learned that “crime” is not a natural phenomenon that exists as an object of analysis and intervention, but rather it is the product of a criminalization process in which certain acts and statuses are deemed to be “criminal.” I learned that interventions from policing, judicial, prison and parole authorities that comprise the penal system, as well as their corollaries in the private sector, are most often directed at the most marginalized in society. I learned that the penal system’s appropriation of certain conflicts and harms often precludes the investigation, apprehension, prosecution, conviction, and incarceration of state officials and wealthy corporate actors who authorize human plundering, environmental degradation, and other atrocities in the name of economic gain. I also learned that the dominant punitive approach to “justice” perpetuates victimization by leaving the needs of those most impacted largely unmet, while inflicting additional violence, often in the form of tremendously expensive incarceration that has proven to not enhance safety in our communities.

Despite having developed an increasingly critical outlook towards the penal system, my inclination was to seek opportunities to participate in its transformation. As part of my undergraduate journey, I worked as the founding Toolbox Project Coordinator for deal.org, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) youth website. The job involved overseeing the creation of presentations and workshops focusing on issues faced by youth for police officers to use in classroom settings. The broader objective of the initiative was to enhance relations between youth and the police that are often strained.

In the beginning, I was hopeful about what could be accomplished inside the RCMP as presentations and workshops on bullying, impaired driving and Internet awareness were approved for publication. However, my enthusiasm for reform waned considerably as a series on drug awareness, featuring among other things a discussion about harm reduction based on academic evidence, was not approved because it contradicted the agency's zero-tolerance position on criminalized substance use. I subsequently resigned from the RCMP.

An undergraduate field placement with the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) Restorative Justice and Dispute Resolution Branch was a second practical encounter with the limits of reform within the penal system. As part of my position as a Student Project Officer, I learned about the initiatives developed by the branch that attempted to provide opportunities for restorative justice encounters to those affected by criminalized conflict and harm, including CSC prisoners. It should be noted that restorative justice was originally conceived not only as an alternative to prison, but also to the penal process itself by bringing stakeholders together to collectively reflect upon and decide how to best meet the needs that a given criminalized conflict or harm engendered. This being the case, when I finished my semester at CSC I gained an appreciation of what individuals in the branch were trying to accomplish within an agency responsible for the punitive practice of incarceration, but wondered whether the introduction of restorative justice in federal penitentiaries was transforming the penal system or vice-versa.

As I pursued a Master's in criminology, also at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Professor Robert Gaucher this lingering question became the topic of my thesis work. Focusing specifically on the Restorative Justice Unit, a program based out of the Grande Cache Institution in Alberta, I learned through published and unpublished reports produced by CSC officials on the ground that restorative encounters were not taking place as intended through this particular initiative. Perhaps more importantly, core values and principles of restorative justice such as "taking responsibility" were used to place the onus of conflict and societal integration uniquely on the backs of prisoners in a manner that justified additional controls placed on them when their actions came into conflict with CSC programming expectations, institutional rules, as well as staff and fellow prisoners. Restorative justice was transformed into another tool used in the individualizing pursuit of docile bodies, instead of a collective approach to conflict resolution. As such, my thesis concluded that restorative justice was the latest in a long series of tropes (e.g., deterrence, incapacitation, justice, reformation, rehabilitation, reintegration and so on) used by proponents of incarceration to reproduce the idea that the prison is a necessary social institution in the Canadian context.

With the intention of not wanting to contribute to the reproduction of the prison idea as a dominant response to what we call "crime," I pursued my doctoral studies in sociology at Carleton University under the supervision of Professor Aaron Doyle. During these last five years I developed a research program which is oriented towards understanding and contesting the persistent prison and its appendages.

A major component of this work, which is the focus of my dissertation, was to identify the scope of recent prison construction in Canada and examine the justifications marshaled in support of the development of this new penal infrastructure. This project was intended to inform the development of arguments I advanced in the blog posts, the news media and other forums to undermine ongoing attempts to increase the use of imprisonment in this country.

Through an online content search, informal information requests with prison authorities by email and phone,

and access to information requests to obtain unpublished documents, I learned that the provinces and territories were in the process of establishing 22 new prisons and 17 additions to existing facilities that would add approximately 7,380 new prisoner beds. Surprisingly, the rationales that underpinned decisions to build these prison spaces were often not associated with an expected increase in penal institution populations at the provincial-territorial level resulting from the introduction of recent federal sentencing measures. Instead, my analysis of published and unpublished documents found that officials cited persistent overcrowding associated with rapid increases in the number of individuals awaiting trial and sentencing inside prisons, along with the existence of aging facilities said to be inconducive to the provision of security and meeting the programming needs of a prisoner population composed of an increasing number of persons identified as having mental health and substance abuse issues, aboriginal peoples and women that find themselves incarcerated as reasons to expand the use of imprisonment.

During the primary data collection phase of my dissertation in 2009, CSC refused to disclose their penal infrastructure plans. While not ideal, I used the experience to highlight the minority Conservative Government of Canada's lack of transparency on the implications of their penal policy agenda, which included numerous pieces of sentencing legislation. As other more prominent voices expressed similar concerns, including members of the opposition and the Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page, CSC eventually disclosed their short-term accommodation strategy. To date, the construction of 34 additions to be located on the grounds of existing penitentiaries that will add 2,552 new prisoner beds have been announced. The need to develop capacity to absorb the influx of more prisoners, serving longer sentences, with fewer chances of release has been cited as a primary justification for these projects. It needs to be noted that CSC's long-term accommodation, which was to be submitted to the Minister of Public Safety in March 2011, has yet to be made public and will likely remain buried for some time with the election of a majority Conservative Government this past May, thus frustrating attempts to understand and resist the further entrenchment of imprisonment.

As the reproduction of the prison idea does not take place only within the halls of government, Professor Kevin Walby (University of Victoria) and I began work on a project as doctoral students involving an analysis of the cultural representations of confinement and punishment. The first phase of our collaboration focused on the narratives communicated in federal penitentiary tour regulations and scripts about the realities of incarceration. The second phase of the project examined how the idea of penal reform that legitimates current prison conditions by contrasting them with caricatures of a more barbaric past is central to the meanings communicated about punishment in Ontario's prison museums. In the next phase of this research project we will examine the emergence of prison museums across Canada as historical sites and tourist attractions, how and what narratives about confinement and punishment are communicated to visitors, and how visitors interpret the messages they encounter.

With imprisonment and other forms of carceral control becoming increasingly normal aspects of everyday life, coupled with their proliferation beyond the penal system into other sectors such as immigration and health, I also collaborated with Professor Mike Larsen (Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Vancouver) on a number of projects during our time as graduate students. Among the projects that we have undertaken is the examination of the governance and operational frameworks of the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre (established in 2006), the first immigration detention centre ever located on the grounds of a Canadian federal penitentiary. An article from this particular project that appeared in the Canadian Journal of Law & Society in 2009 was awarded the 2010 Canadian Law & Society Association's English Article Prize. With the continued use of prison spaces outside the realm of penalty, such as the recent incarceration of Tamil refugees in facilities managed and operated by British Columbia Corrections, future research projects will examine the phenomenon of carceral retasking both in the contemporary context and historically.

Another experience that has shaped my understanding of incarceration, and particularly how continuities and shifts in

the stated purposes of prisons have impacted prisoners themselves, is as Co-managing Editor of the Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP). The JPP ([www.jpp.org](http://www.jpp.org)) is a prisoner written, academically oriented and peer reviewed, non-profit journal published by the University of Ottawa Press. Through this forum, current and former prisoners provide ethnographic accounts and analyses of the socio-politics of incarceration as a means of challenging mainstream discourses produced by academics, media outlets, politicians and others who have a vested interest in the perpetuation and expansion of imprisonment.

In future research I will focus on contributing to the knowledge of the history and geography of punishment in Canada beginning with a study that will examine how Kingston, Ontario, has become home to nine federal penitentiaries since Confederation. In working towards a social geography of these prisons, I will also examine the architecture and spatial practices that shape interactions within these facilities, explore how staff and prisoners resist these structures that aim to control their lived geographies, and investigate how these institutions are depicted in local culture and contribute to the formation of the region's identity. In the context of what my Master's supervisor calls a "carceral binge," this study aims to provide a timely contribution regarding how the location and spatial organization of these facilities – concrete manifestations of the reproduction of the prison idea – have very important social ramifications inside and outside these institutions.

As part of my scholarship I have sought to expose others to findings that point to the problems associated with addressing conflicts and harms through the penal process and to open up space for the discussion of alternative approaches. I have attempted to do this through blogging on Tracking the Politics of "Crime" and Punishment in Canada ([www.tpcp-canada.blogspot.com](http://www.tpcp-canada.blogspot.com)), offering commentary in the news media related to my research when appropriate, submitting policy briefs to politicians and penal system administrators, as well as organizing and participating in community forums across the country. The sensitivity to other ways of conceptualizing and responding to what is commonly called "crime" that guides my

Members of the 2011 Sociology Society donating \$500 to the sociology scholarship. Anthony Micucci, Erin Woolridge, Jenna Hawkins, Danielle Ryder, Ryan Dinn, Chris Martin, Dean Doyle.



research and related action also informs my teaching, and I look forward to the opportunity of facilitating discussion as well as gaining knowledge from students in a part of the country which is unfamiliar to me.

Looking back at the moment eleven years ago when I set out on the road from Barrie, Ontario, to Ottawa with one destination in mind, it is hard to believe that I now find myself teaching and researching in the fields of criminology and sociology at Memorial University in St. John's. With over a decade of university behind me where my ideas and conceptions were continually challenged, deconstructed and reconstructed, I look forward to this process continuing in the years ahead with students and colleagues as we try to make sense of the world in which we live and the institutions that shape our lives.

## Who's the best professor? Reflections on student evaluations of teachers

By Linda Cohen

This year Memorial University can anticipate a review of the course evaluation process. The faculty association has argued that such job "evaluations" should not be made public, while students and university administrators maintain that they have the right to know if a professor is doing an adequate job.

To contribute to this review, I offer a small excerpt from my study on the work insecurity and health of contractual faculty. These excerpts include notes from the literature on the role of performance audits in the restructuring of faculty work under neo-liberal management strategies, and reflections from my Atlantic Canadian respondents for whom contractual university teaching was their primary source of income. Interviewees were asked to describe a positive or negative "critical incident" at work, the conditions surrounding it, their reactions, and how they coped with the situation. Among the 27 participants, 13 cited teaching evaluations by students as one of their critical incidents. For most, the experience seesawed between the positive and the negative. These interview data provide an indication of the impact of such "performance audits" on contractual faculty in general.

In an increasingly money-conscious university, students are positioned as consumers or clients. Teaching or performance evaluations are thus likened to consumer satisfaction surveys. The implication is that teaching has a market value which can be objectified. Teachers become more "cost effective" and accountable for student outcomes, but this adds to teacher workloads without truly enhancing the quality of teaching. Indeed, intellectual standards deteriorate: faculty members think they must tone down any controversial (e.g., feminist) content in their courses to appeal to the growing conservatism of students and university administrators. "Performance audits" constrict student-teacher interaction. Critics further argue that the publication of professors' performance audits is framed as giving students "choice," but this is more rhetorical than real when departmental budgets dwindle. Publication of what is essentially a job evaluation can easily morph into a surveillance tool in an "information panopticon," threatening academic freedom and tenure by stifling criticism.

There is also speculation that teaching evaluations and their publication might have greater consequences for the more vulnerable contractual and tenure-track faculty. This literature implicitly draws on Bourdieu's concept of academic capital, in which faculty power and control diverge with status and rank. Contractual faculty members have fewer institutionalized protections. They cannot negotiate hiring, scheduling, or work conditions and their work insecurity makes them more vulnerable to the publication of their performance evaluation results. They may feel greater pressures to adapt teaching practices, such as turning into "Miss Congeniality," to garner student support and get rehired. In many occupational health studies, performance evaluations for workers at all levels of the workplace hierarchy were correlated with "increased stress, decreased job satisfaction, increased feelings of social isolation, and an increased tendency to believe that the quantity of work is more important than its quality.... [It] decreases performance on more complex tasks while it can increase performance on very simple tasks" (Jeffrey Pfeffer, *New Directions for Organizational Theory*, p. 115).

Despite these critiques, some analysts show that performance audits can have

positive consequences for contingent faculty. They can undermine the traditional control of "old boys' networks" in the academic hierarchy by enhancing accountability in teaching. For marginalized workers with few other standards for comparison, teaching evaluations provide information on which practices to keep or improve. The implications of teaching evaluations or performance audits for health is that they might offer contractual reassurance and even a sense of professional and career identity that is crucial to self-esteem.

### *The Reflections of Contractual Teachers*

With questions arising from this literature, I searched through my interview transcripts to see if my interviewees expressed such concerns. Again, that is 13 – 3 men and 10 women – identified their teaching evaluations by students as one critical incident. All 13 used their evaluations as comparative standards and feedback from students to improve their teaching. Several complained that these were, in fact, the only form of feedback on their teaching that they were getting.

With any other job that I've been in, there's always been an evaluation – whether it be after your probationary period or yearly – something to let you know if there are any areas that you need to improve, and then give you a chance to do it. But that's not in place here. I don't know how they would be able to evaluate teaching ... [except through] your course evaluations, but that's the opinion of the students, not the opinion of colleagues. If the [department] is having issues with me, like I'm not meeting the standards or my job description, which were not communicated to me in the beginning anyway, what can I do?

Newly hired, this person had administered an unofficial midterm evaluation of her course to validate students' opinions and make any necessary adjustments to her teaching.

All 13 participants had good results in their teaching evaluations overall, but 11 were still "highly stressed," "anxious," and even "panicked" during the distribution of the surveys to students and when they looked at the results afterwards. They included both newer and seasoned contractual teachers who conceded that they might have been focusing too heavily on the few negative remarks in the "other comments" area which appeared among the many accolades or lack of responses. Four

women attributed this to gender, speculating that women are more concerned about “how others feel about us.” Only the men tempered their reflections on upsetting student criticisms with “you can’t please everyone.” “They may not like me but I don’t think any of them hate me. The problem is that the [students are] not in class long enough to know what you’re doing or to evaluate your teaching.” None of the 8 women blamed students for poor assessments but all thought their contractual status might have affected the results:

I’d have to look back and see what the actual scores were – I think they were okay overall, but it was the comments themselves that were the most upsetting ... This is my first semester and I’m contractual. I don’t have “doctor” in front of my name. I’m young, I’m female, I’m new; I tried to be professional and not have them think of me as their peer instead of their teacher. I didn’t want to come off that way – I tried to be as professional as I could! But it may have translated into them thinking that I was just more detached and didn’t care what was going on with them. They said I “wasn’t approachable” or “wasn’t friendly,” and I’m thinking, are they talking about me in these course evaluations? That really wasn’t me ... but I guess that’s just how I came off to them. And I did have a lot going on last term. It was a lot busier because it was my first time ... I was really upset because some of the things they said seemed so personal to me.

Only 3 of the 13, all women, felt they deserved the students’ criticism but they too attributed this to being compromised as contractuales, either in co-teaching relationships, not having enough institutional support, or by having to work elsewhere in addition to their university teaching.

Oh, bless my students ... but some of the feedback was true! I mean, there was a time five years ago when I was too busy to

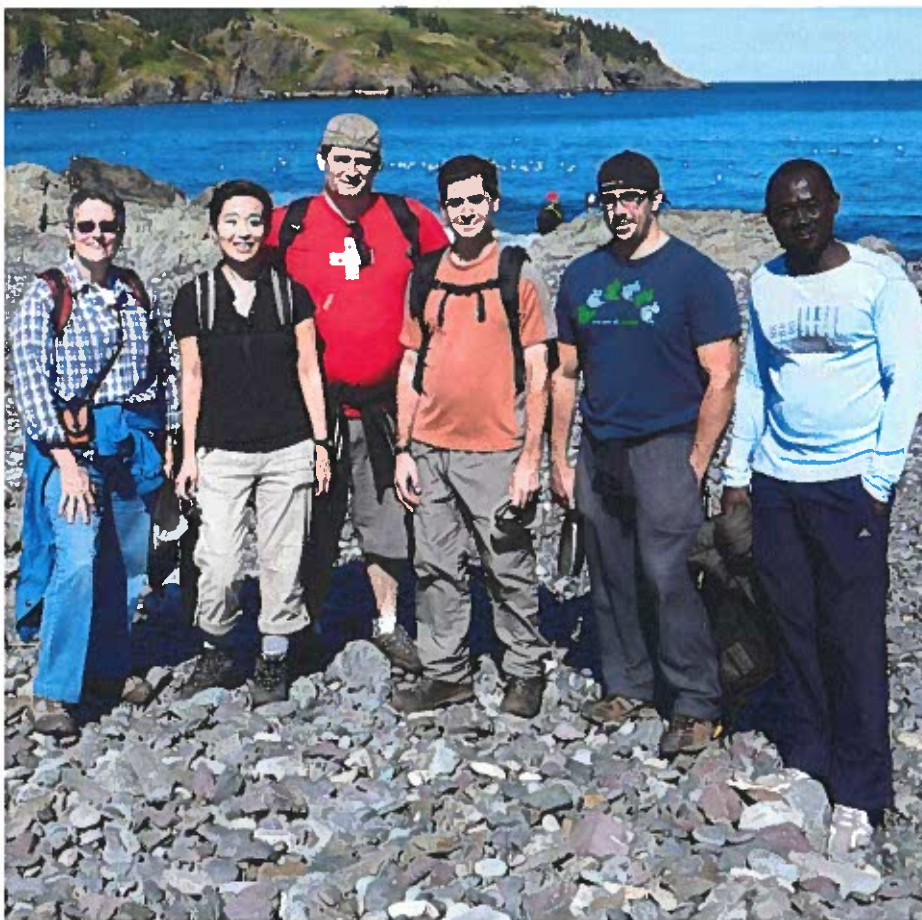
teach, and one student said “well that’s not your real career, you’re just doing this part-time and you’re not even taking this seriously.” Which got me thinking about how [contractual teaching] is perceived by students.

It’s really hard with the student evaluations, or whatever you call them, because you don’t have time [as a contractual] to iron out things. Every time I move to a different university, I have to learn the local terminology and rules for everything. Like, do students call them grades or marks? Or when’s the drop date? I never know cause I’m never anywhere long enough, and I don’t really have any incentive to learn it, other than to be able to help students. And that comes out in the course evaluations.

Many of these 13 contractuales were skeptical about the validity of teaching evaluations because they were distributed near the end of term when attendance drops off and often failed to achieve statistical significance. A few objected to the intradepartmental comparisons of their evaluations, contrasting mini-theatre classes of 110 first-year students with evaluations of seminars of 15 fourth-year majors, “where [the professor] can pay attention to each of them.” Hence, the practice of consulting [ratemyprofessors.com](http://ratemyprofessors.com) for comparisons.

Without using the term, a few interviewees speculated about how academic capital could ease the impact of teaching evaluations for tenured faculty who “don’t stress out about what students think – they [don’t have to] because they’re tenured.” Tenure-track faculty are, like contractuales, more vulnerable to bad course evaluations but they may be better able to effectively mitigate the circumstances – for example, by avoiding the teaching of night classes when “students give you really bad evaluations.”

Sociologists at the start of the Father Troy Trail from Flat Rock to Torbay. Photograph by Stephen Riggins, who also completed the trail.  
From left: Linda Cullum, Lisa Kaida, Liam Swiss, Mark Stoddart, Justin Piché, Eric Tenkorang





Only two participants in this study discussed strategies for getting better results on their performance evaluations. I suspect this is common among all ranks of faculty but generally remains unspoken:

The [teaching evaluations], well, I'll give them on the day when I know students are 'up' ... because I know that's when they are in the best mood - [those surveys] are very much influenced by the mood of the day and by the mood of the class going in. I'm very careful to set it up so that I can get the best results possible. I don't feel that they are very good reflections of my teaching, to tell the truth, so I may as well set it up to get my best foot forward. I'm probably being a little silly... But I'm very cognizant that if the administration wanted to, they could use the [results] in some way to get rid of me. I think if they didn't want to have that option, the [teaching evaluations] wouldn't really matter to them at all... I have a very cynical view of these things.

This begs the question of whether contractuales pander to students more often than tenured or tenure-track faculty. Several participants referred to insinuations from colleagues that they were inflating grades, lowering academic standards, and generally lacking in professionalism. Only 3 of the 27 interviewees, however, admitted to “bumping up the grades to keep the students coming.” All 3 were paid on the basis of enrolment rather than per course or per term. Most of the others, who include both per-course and per-term contractuales, were adamant that they would not lower their standards regardless of the pressure from students or administrators. One person qualified the comment “you’re only here to teach and you don’t want complaints” with the comment “I teach more or less what I want as I think it should be taught.” A few identified this as an aspect of academic professionalism: “Who would want to hire me if I teach like it’s a popularity contest?” and “My department Head would hire me over someone who drops the level.... It’s not good to make it easier. There’s no ‘easier’ after university!”

A significant part of the stress induced by teaching evaluations was the online publication of the results to potentially thousands of students and other faculty. In 2008, per-course contractuales were in the unenviable position of having no control at all over the publication of their teaching evaluations but per-term contractuales, like tenured and tenure-track faculty, could withdraw permission for such publication as temporary members of the faculty association. One woman found this decision difficult because the teaching evaluations by her larger classes appeared to be a better measure of her teaching than the online rating websites, where the evaluation is done by self-selected students and possibly by people who had not even taken her courses. All 13 participants agreed that the public access to what was essentially their job evaluation was grossly unfair and further heightened their experience of work insecurity. In this sense, teaching evaluations were, indeed, “consumer satisfaction” surveys with arbitrary and potentially stressful repercussions for those being audited.

Despite these problems, most of the 13 contractuales who spoke of teaching evaluations in this study appreciated feedback from students and the documentation of their teaching that they could use when reapplying for their jobs in the following years. When the results were good – as they were for most of these contractuales – teaching evaluations were gratifying and became a benchmark for professional identity and social comparison, both significant elements in good mental health.

The new layouts for “Sociology on the Rock” (online and PDF) were designed by Stephen Riggins and John McLevey.

