



Think Sociology!

Thoughts from the Head

In this edition of the newsletter we highlight two things – contributions and celebrations. As contributions we include three articles focusing on different aspects of research, teaching, and community service. I explore each in a moment. As celebrations we highlight four amazing awards that people connected to the Department have recently won.

These awards are like the tips of ice bergs. Four people have won some amazing accolades but there are many others not recognized here, who are also doing great work. The four award winners we feature are exemplars of the quality that suffuses Sociology at UBC these days.

Amanda Cheong, a fourth year student and a world class dragon boat racer, won the highest honour offered to students by the Dean of Arts. Read about her profile on page 5. Katherine Lyon, an incoming PhD student and a UBC sociology BA graduate, has won a Bombardier scholarship from SSHRC. This is the most prestigious prize a PhD student can hold, so read about her profile on page 7.

Finally on the celebration front, two faculty colleagues have won recent awards. Dr. Ralph Matthews has won the Outstanding Contribution Award from the Canadian Sociology Association. This highlights his long-standing intellectual contributions to sociology in Canada. Read more about his award on page 7. Professor Phyllis Johnson has also been honoured, this time by the International Section of the National Council on Family Relations'. Her award, for distinguished contributions to cross-cultural

family scholarship, is described on more detail on page 6.

As to contributions, an article by Professor Nathan Lauster showcases a research project he conducted with students in his class and then published in one of the disciplines leading journals, *Social Problems*. The research examines discrimination in the housing market in Vancouver. The results of his research, which are fascinating, were picked up by the media across North America.

Dr. Tom Kemple has also been working with students and doing amazing things. Many readers will remember Tom as one of the most charismatic teachers they encountered at UBC. He is now teaching a course for the Department in Guatemala (May to July 2012). His recounting of last summer's adventure there is well worth reading.

Finally on the contribution front, Professor Neil Gross relates, in another fascinating article, his contribution to political debate. Gross was invited to write an op-ed piece for the *New York Times*, reflecting on the charge that university professors lean to the political left and indoctrinate their students in a particular ideological fashion.

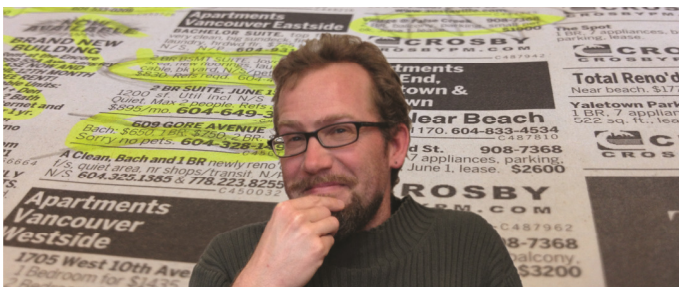
Read on. See what we are celebrating and how we are contributing.



Neil Guppy
Department Head

No Room for New Families?

By Nathanael Lauster



Other times, renters may make an appointment to see a place, only to show up and be told it's already been rented. Given these chaotic circumstances, it's not always easy to tell why a given person gets turned away. Was the apartment really rented out before they got there? Or did the landlord just think their application didn't stack up well to some of the others they re-

Being turned away by a prospective landlord is a pretty normal experience for renters. Most people think nothing of it, especially in a metropolis like Vancouver where the vacancy rates tend to run quite low (usually under 3%). Oftentimes inquiries go unanswered altogether.

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ceived?

Landlords are given a fair amount of leeway to choose their renters. However, the BC Human Rights Code attempts to place certain criteria out of bounds. As a partial list, landlords are not to discriminate between prospective renters based on race, place of origin, religion, sex, disability status, lawful source of income, family status, or sexual orientation.

While there are laws forbidding it, it is notoriously difficult to prove discrimination, or even to study it. Nowadays the evidence is mostly in landlord's heads. Sometimes it is even lodged away in the form of internal biases that landlords themselves can't identify. Nevertheless, the evidence we do have suggests that discrimination is real, and it's a real problem for those on the receiving end.

Before legislation preventing it was passed, much discrimination used to be relatively common and out in the open. Restrictive covenants were often attached to houses, forbidding their sale to minorities. Real estate agents and landlords openly steered prospective tenants away from many neighbourhoods as a way of enforcing their exclusivity. After anti-discrimination legislation was passed, it became much more difficult to determine when discrimination had occurred, though patterns of segregation seemed to suggest it remained a force. Researchers came up with a relatively ingenious solution. They hired actors. These actors were trained to present themselves to landlords as alike in all ways except for one. Most often, they differed in some way deemed visible to landlords, as in skin color or other racialized characteristics. Two matched actors would each apply to the same advertised apartment. Because actors were usually alike in all ways except one, differences in treatment would usually be attributed to discrimination based on that one distinguishing characteristic.

This method of research, known as an "audit study," produced a lot of relatively straightforward evidence of discrimination on the part of landlords. But this sort of research was quite expensive. There were also a couple of lingering ways the studies could go wrong. For instance, keeping everything the same excepting for one defining characteristic is not an easy task. Different people just interact with one another differently, and it's not clear how well this can be trained away.

Most North American audit studies examined racial discrimination. Relatively few have explored other forms of discrimination. This gap prompted our own study.

It isn't very difficult to find evidence of the dramatic changes that have been taking place in how people form (and dissolve) families in North America. While we should be wary of making too much of "family structure" as a defining feature of families, in certain cases, such structures become visible to others. People are associated with their immediate families. As a result, what their families look like can

become the basis for discrimination – especially rental discrimination. Two sorts of household that have risen in visibility recently are single parent households and same-sex couple households. Human rights codes in Canada explicitly forbid discrimination against these sorts of families relative to others (e.g., heterosexual couples). But we know very little about the experiences of these "brave new households." Just how much discrimination, if any, do they face?

Considering this question, I worked with a PhD student, Adam Easterbrook, and all of the students in my SOCI 364: Built Environments class, to find some answers. Together, we planned a study that would bring the audit study into the 21st century. We divided up into teams, each tracking distinct areas within the greater Vancouver rental market. We followed the listings for apartments for rent showing in these areas on a popular local website. Instead of calling or meeting with landlords face-to-face, we sent them e-mails. This had two advantages: 1) we could do it very cheaply, and 2) we could tailor our e-mails to be *exactly* alike, save for the one detail we wanted to investigate. In this case, that detail was just who the inquirer listed as the other member of their two-person family.

The standard e-mail went something like this:

Hi, my name is Matt, and my partner and I saw your listing for a 2 bedroom apartment on [online website]. We are non-smokers and don't have any pets or kids. I'm a teacher and she's enrolled in a professional program. Please let us know if the apartment is still available and if we can view it.
Thanks,
Matt and Kate

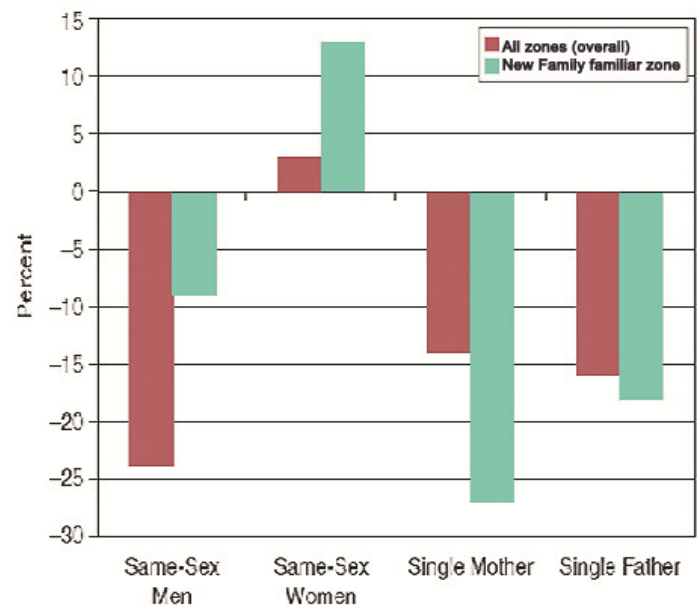


Figure 1: Percent Difference from Heterosexual Couple in Model Estimated Likelihood of a Positive Response, Overall and by Zone of Familiarity (Estimated for Median Priced 2BR Apartment)

For comparison purposes, we turned Matt into Melissa or Kate into Kevin. We also turned Matt into Kate or Kevin's son, enrolled in the third grade. This provided us with five scenarios, comparing a heterosexual couple to two same-sex couples, one of each gender, and two single parents, a single mother and a single father. Otherwise, all details remained the same.

We avoided, as best we could, sending any landlords more than one inquiry. This allowed us to keep the formatting of inquiries identical (except for family status) without raising any suspicions. It also meant we couldn't usually tell anything about an individual landlord and whether or not they demonstrated any prejudice. But summing responses altogether across the 1,669 inquiries made allowed us some insight into the overall level of discrimination facing same-sex couples and single parents relative to heterosexual couples. We could explore this both for the metropolitan area as a whole, and across major markets within the metro area.

Our findings? Overall, same-sex couples made up of men faced the greatest discriminatory treatment, and were nearly 25% less likely to receive a favorable response than heterosexual couples. Single parents of both genders also faced discrimination, and were about 15% less likely to be invited to see the apartment. Same-sex couples made up of women were treated roughly the same as heterosexual couples, and were even slightly more likely to receive a positive response in the sample, though the differences weren't statistically significant.

We wanted to investigate a little further to see if the results varied by where each family type was most represented. In particular, we wanted to see if neighbourhood features, like the large gay enclave in the West End, actually mattered to how different new families were received. So we divided up the metropolitan area of Vancouver into "zones of familiarity," denoting where new families were best represented. As we expected, in the Downtown and West Side of Vancouver (grouped together for statistical reasons), same-sex couples made up of men were less discriminated against than elsewhere in the metro area. We were more surprised by the results for single mothers. In the parts of the metropolis where they were most well represented (the East Side of Vancouver, Burnaby, and New Westminster), they actually faced greater discrimination rather than less. What could be going on there?

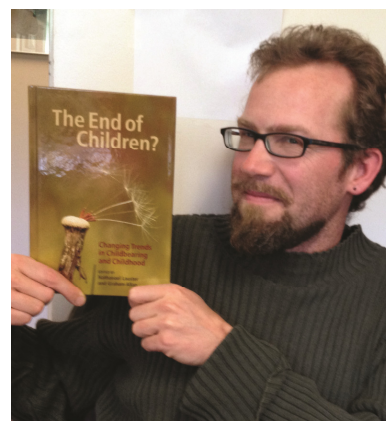
More research is needed to better address this question. But the data we have is suggestive of a possible answer. Over the years, less and less support has been available to single parents in BC, especially single mothers. As a result, their economic position as a group has tended to deteriorate. Landlords with more experience with single mother tenants may have actually experienced a rise in single mothers being unable to pay their rents. In this sense, discrimination against single mothers may be getting worse over time in response to the increasing difficulty they might be having paying rent.

Our results suggest that anti-discrimination laws covering family status and sexual orientation still have an important role to play, insofar as new families continue to experience discrimination in the rental market. The long-standing "contact hypothesis," predicting that landlords are less likely to discriminate against groups the more likely they are to know someone in that group, seems to be working well for same-sex couples. As more people come to know gay and bi-sexual men, they are less likely to face discrimination. But it doesn't seem to work well for single parents, especially single mothers. In order to counter discrimination for these new families, we need to insure not just that discrimination against them is made illegal, but also that everyone is able to make their rent payments. This suggests that there's also a role to play for policies that would improve the economic position of single parents, or find other means of boosting their housing security, for instance by encouraging cooperatives and boosting the supply of social housing.

Engaging UBC undergraduate students in this research has been one of the most fulfilling and exciting experiences of my career to date. Together we helped pioneer a new, and relatively low cost means of investigating rental discrimination, and I thank them for their excellent work on the project. They did good!

The full study is available at:

Lauster, N. & A. Easterbrook (2011) No Room for New Families? A Field Experiment Measuring Rental Discrimination against Same-Sex Couples and Single Parents. *Social Problems* 58(3): 389-409.



Nathan Lauster with his new book, *The End of Children? Changing Trends in Childbearing and Childhood*, co-edited with Graham Allan, published by UBC Press

Teaching, Living, and Learning Social Theory in Guatemala

By Tom Kemple



Tom Kemple with Kevin Jimenez at the Nueva Alianza Coffee Cooperative, on the bridge they built.

The first time I arrived in Guatemala City in May 2010 to teach as part of the grandly named 'Go Citizenship Term Abroad' (GCTA), a young man with no legs on a skateboard approached me from a small crowd outside the airport to sell me magic markers. 'Maybe I should get some for the whiteboard we've been promised for our classes at the coffee co-op,' I remember thinking. But instead of negotiating a sale, I was quickly whisked away by my colleague and organizer of the program, Sylvia Berryman, who was accompanied by a couple of students who had arrived early, and Byron, our driver and the manager of the nearby hostel where we were staying that night before heading to the highlands. When I flew in for my second trip last summer, an even larger crowd was gathered outside, along with Sylvia and Byron, but this time our short drive to the hostel entailed passing through two security gates, since the neighbourhood was now completely blocked off from the gang violence which had been escalating over the past year in the surrounding streets; and within a few hours I was as miserably sick as I'd been in years. Perhaps it was just 'weak character', my partner joked on the phone, but to the students the next day I explained my bad mood in other terms: 'when you enter Guatemala, a lot of what you bring with you inevitably comes out in one way or another.' This summer Sylvia and I will return with a fresh group of 20 upper-level students in Sociology, Philosophy, and related disciplines for another six weeks of afternoon seminars, late night debates, bumpy bus rides, uncomfortable field trips, sweaty volunteer

work, and awkward personal encounters.

My initial impressions of Guatemala illustrate the challenge of bringing the UBC classroom into a very remote and complex environment, and of opening up the classroom to experiences which are very far from my own and those of my students. SOCI 430, the intensive 6-week course which I teach on themes relating to issues of global capitalism, cosmopolitanism, and civil society, is designed specially for this ad hoc undergraduate group study abroad, with the support of UBC's Go Global, and in collaboration with my colleague Sylvia Berryman in Philosophy, who developed the program and whose own course focuses on power and oppression. Both last year and this year we received a large competitive grant from a private donor and some UBC Mix money to expand several key aspects of the program, particularly student scholarships and salaries for student assistants, as well as honoraria for guest lectures, funding for weekend field-trips, and training for Sylvia and me in tropical first aid. Our objective for studying Guatemala, which is anchored in the coordination of our two intensive upper-level theory seminars, is to integrate experiential learning and coursework while broadening student perspectives on the ethical demands of extreme poverty, global disparities, justice, transnational civil society, and cross-cultural communication. The program thus presents both students and faculty with the ultimate challenge: not just to bring the world into the classroom but also to bring the classroom into the world.



Sylvia Berryman teaching her Philosophy of Power and Oppression Course at the Nueva Alianza coffee cooperative

Neither Sylvia nor I are area experts in Guatemalan politics, culture, and society and our course readings do not directly address the local context. Sylvia's specialty is ancient Greek philosophies of science and technology and contemporary ethical theories, and mine is classical sociological thought with a focus on 19th and early 20th social theorists and later critiques of applications of their ideas. In fact, our Guatemala seminars are designed and conducted very much as they would be on the UBC campus: we read Hobbes, Kant, Tocqueville, Marx, and Gramsci (the 'classics'), for example, in conjunction with Foucault, Marcuse, Arendt, Wallerstein, and Beck (among other recent thinkers). At the same time, students have access to a substantial but small library of academic books and articles dealing with Guatemalan politics and culture since the official end of the civil war in 1996, which they can draw upon for assignments, essays, exams, and research presentations. Apart from the class, they can also hear community leaders ('organic intellectuals', in Gramsci's terms) talk about life from the other side of the colonial divide; tell first-hand stories of massacres and floods that have devastated a resilient village or of peasants successfully claiming the land they have worked on for generations from a delinquent landlord; or describe the process of exhuming bones from mass graves from the civil war and of ritually reburialing them. Every day we are confronted with perplexing realities which call out for reflection and interpretation: stores which hawk 'ropa americana' -- cheap second-hand clothes dumped on the south from the north; children without shoes in mud-floored shacks breathing smoke from an open fire pit; or the bland food and instant coffee served to us on a soil-rich coffee plantation ... not to mention the occasional stomach viruses, squabbles between students, and our baffling interactions in the local markets. In my course, students are encouraged to read, think, and talk 'theory' from their own experiences in the field, drawing on a variety of difficult texts, intense class discussions, and their own first-hand observations of a society heavily dependent on transnational non-governmental organizations and small-scale civil society initiatives, including those which host, house, and feed us. As one student put it, the courses we teach 'have nothing to do with Guatemala, and everything to do with Guatemala.'

I once remarked to Sylvia that the professional choreography of teaching here is very different from back home, to say the least: I can't avoid the gaze of students watching me get sick, struggling to communicate with someone in my stilted Spanish, or puzzling over what to do when the bus is late. By the same token, I can't ignore their desire to break out from the group in ways that might endanger themselves or others, and or as they make their way to the shower, grumble over stomach aches, and approach me for 'office hours' while I'm washing my socks. We are

'philosophers with knapsacks', Sylvia likes to say, and though I'm flattered to be considered a member of her discipline (as she is of ours, with a BA in Sociology from UBC), I still don't feel comfortable lugging my suitcase and books around the cobbled streets of Xela. Teaching in Guatemala forces us and the students to confront our high-minded cynicism -- over the complicity of global tourism and western imperialism, for instance -- with the realization that a little cultural, interpersonal, and financial exchange, however unequal, can open eager minds and improve impoverished lives. When Diogenes, the original 'cynical' philosopher with a knapsack, was asked what he got from his philosophizing and theorizing on the streets of ancient Athens, he replied, 'to be prepared for every fortune'; and when he was asked where he came from, he said, 'I am a citizen of the world.' For us, the lesson of our training in 'global citizenship' must involve recognizing our interdependencies and the risks and responsibilities they entail.

The Department is proud to congratulate Sociology student **Amanda Cheong**, on her winning the **Dean of Arts Outstanding Leadership Award**



During her time at UBC, Amanda has successfully connected her leadership experiences to her discipline and research, as evidenced by a working paper she co-authored with Dr. Jennifer Chun for Metropolis BC on the consequences of low-paid work for immigrants. Amanda, besides being a world class dragon boat racer and a UBC Wesbrook Scholar, is just stepping down as the Sociology Students' Association Co-President.

Professors, Politics & the U.S. Election

By Neil Gross



In February of this year, Rick Santorum, the former U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania seeking the Republican Party nomination for the presidency, gave a speech in which he called President Barack Obama a “snob” for wanting more Americans to gain access to higher education. Not everyone needs to go to college, Santorum asserted, and the belief that they do is elitist. What’s more, Santorum claimed, Obama’s higher education policy reflected a hidden agenda. Colleges and universities, said Santorum, are “indoctrination mills” for the left, places where faculty members spend their time trying to convert students to their secular, liberal way of thinking. No wonder Obama was interested in getting more Americans to walk

through the campus gates!

Santorum’s college comments made headlines around the U.S., with reverberations here in Canada as well. Liberals and moderates took them as evidence that Santorum was given to far-fetched conspiracy theories, and so committed to social conservatism that in its name he would roll back educational gains essential to keeping America competitive in today’s knowledge economy. Many conservatives, for their part, wished that Santorum had chosen his words more carefully, but defended the underlying idea that college may not be for all.

Santorum’s remarks had a familiar air. For the past seven years, I have been studying the contentious issue of professors and their politics in the U.S. Like many observers of American higher education, I saw the “indoctrination mills” claim as merely the latest in a long string of complaints by conservatives about the higher education enterprise, and about the activities of liberal professors specifically.

My book on the subject, which will come out next spring, is titled *Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?* The book is based on a wide range of empirical material: a nationally-representative survey of the politics of American professors; in-depth follow-up interviews with 57 survey respondents; an opinion poll examining American’s views on the



Dr. Phyllis J. Johnson is the recipient of the **2011 National Council on Family Relations’ International Section Jan Trost Award**.

This award recognizes Dr. Johnson’s significant and career-long contributions to cross-cultural family scholarship. Readers familiar with the newsletter will recall that among Phyllis’s recent research is work on family dynamics among astronauts who are often away, and indeed in outer space, for long durations.

controversy over “liberal bias” in higher education; interviews with residents of two states, Colorado and Wisconsin, where the issue has flared up in recent years; several studies analyzing other relevant survey data; a good deal of historical investigation; and interviews with conservative activists and journalists.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part I consider whether American professors really do tend to be liberals. (They do.) I then evaluate a number of competing explanations for professors’ politics, and argue that the best one focuses on self-selection into the academic profession. For idiosyncratic historical reasons, academe has developed a strong reputation as a liberal occupation, and this means that smart liberal students are apt to think of it as a good fit, while smart conservatives steer clear.

Santorum’s comments reflect concerns taken up more directly in the second part of the book. Why are conservatives so up in arms about the liberal professoriate? While some conservatives really do fear indoctrination, more important, I argue, is that attacking professors as elitist snobs—something American conservatives have been doing for the last sixty years—serves a vital rhetorical purpose for the conservative movement: it helps to position it as a form of populism in which ordinary Americans band together to resist the depredations of a corrupt elite. As much as anything, that is what Santorum was doing in taking a

swipe at liberal professors, and at Obama (a former instructor at the University of Chicago Law School): he was stoking the fires of conservative populism.

My previous work, which has mostly been about intellectuals and sociological theory, never connected me up with what was happening in the news. When the Santorum story broke, however, it seemed important to share my expertise. Part of UBC’s mission is to bring research into the public sphere. So I wrote an op-ed piece for the *New York Times* titled “The Indoctrination Myth” (March 3, 2012, Sunday Review). For the article I briefly reviewed several recent social science studies showing that, contrary to popular opinion—and to Santorum’s views—going to university does not make students substantially more liberal. And I very briefly made the point about populism.

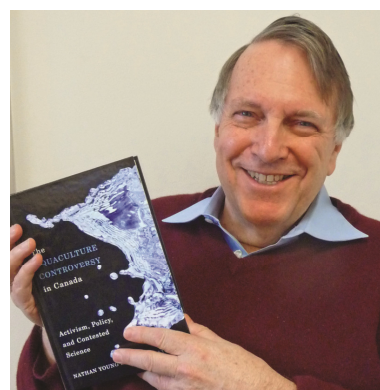
Not long after, Santorum dropped out the race. In the end, his organization was no match for Mitt Romney’s. Also, the Republican establishment appeared to conclude that his views were simply too strident to garner him moderate votes in the general election. Be that as it may, it was rewarding to watch social science done here at UBC speak to issues on the American national stage.

Katherine Lyon has won the *Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship* from SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council).



This is the most prestigious award doctoral students can win and very few are distributed each year. At the PhD level Katherine intends to continue her research focus on issues of gender, sexuality, and sex education.

Congratulations to **Professor Ralph Matthews**, winner of the 2012 “*Outstanding Contribution Award*,” given by the **Canadian Sociological Association**.

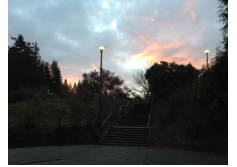


The award recognizes contributors to Canadian sociology who have exhibited “exceptional scholarly merit.” The award highlights scholars who have “a well-established record of multiple contributions throughout his or her career.” Matthews most recent book, *The Aquaculture Controversy in Canada*, won the best book of the year award from UBC press.

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Think Sociology!

Support Students!

Donations from Sociology alumni have had a positive impact for many deserving undergraduate and graduate students. Financial support enables students to excel within the Department and ensure they have access to the resources that give them the best education possible. We invite alumni and friends to support students by making a gift to one of the following funds:

Sociology Excellence Fund - This fund was established to support the advancement of excellence in the Department. Donations provide for visiting professors, support for publications, graduate and undergraduate student support, seed money for research collaboration and other initiatives.

Kaspar Naegele Memorial Prize in Sociology - This \$1,300 prize has been endowed by Robert (BA '60) and Judith Doll (MA '94) and former students, friends, and colleagues in memory of Dr. Kaspar Naegele, a caring and inspirational teacher and renowned scholar who served as Professor of Sociology from 1954 to 1965 and the Dean of Arts (1964 - 1965). The award is offered to an undergraduate student in the honours or majors program in Sociology.

If you are interested in making a gift, please visit www.startanevolution.ca and click on “Donate.” Search for the Department of Sociology’s funds in the Faculty of Arts at the UBC Vancouver campus. Thank you.

Sociology Alumni!

- Prefer to receive this electronically? ● Would you like to receive emails about departmental events such as the Seminar Series?
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