

Valdosta State University Anthropology and Sociology Program

Editor's Note: Recently, the **Anthropology and Sociology Program** solicited career updates from some of our alumni in hopes of inspiring our current students to persevere in their studies. The response was great, and we plan to share these hopeful alumni stories with former and current students in a bi-monthly newsletter, beginning with this first edition, compiled and edited by Dr. Matthew Richard. Look for our next edition in early February, and if you would like to be featured in future editions, or if you would like to nominate someone, please contact Dr. Richard at mjrichar@valdosta.edu

Our Illustrious Alums



Erica Almond (Sociology)

I obtained my Master's in 2018 while simultaneously working as a Graduate Assistant Advisor in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. Following graduation, I began my current position as an Academic Advisor in the College of Science and Mathematics Advising Center. The most rewarding part of my job is providing students with support and guidance, for I strongly believe that advising is a critical part of academic success. Sociology prepared me to work in a variety of environments and to see the value that Social Science brings to any number of professional endeavors.



Daniel Donathan (Anthropology)

I graduated in 2009 at a time that was not particularly encouraging for advanced degrees in the social sciences, so I toiled part-time in retail. Despite my efforts, it was difficult to find a job. Then, in 2013, I convinced myself that I was up to the challenge of graduate school, and I accepted the offer from VSU's Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) graduate program. Anthropology and MFT are similar, both philosophically and academically, and I excelled. Since obtaining my LAMFT, I've worked at Legacy Behavioral Health Services. I lead a team that reaches out to people who are homeless and struggling with serious mental illness, connecting them to mental health and housing services.



Miranda Yearwood (Sociology)

After obtaining my BA and Master's in Sociology in 2004 and 2006, respectively, I worked in a small town cider factory in northeast Georgia. I drove a forklift, worked on the assembly line capping bottles, and created product labels. These days, I'm a freelance writer, specializing in research-based web content for businesses. And this year I'm gravitating to fiction and nonfiction as I've spent the last 10 years developing my skills to write longer, publishable works. I spend every day reading, researching, and writing—it's like I've never had to leave the cozy collegiate setting.



Matt Newsom (Anthropology)

I earned my BA in anthropology in 2007, and toured the US in a punk rock band before enrolling in a Master's program in cultural anthropology at Louisiana State University. While at LSU, I studied gender models in the sport of women's roller derby. I'm currently a doctoral candidate and instructor at Washington State University where I specialize in psychological anthropology. My dissertation research focuses on dreaming, identity, and collective memories among several subcultures in Berlin, Germany. Dream studies fascinate me, for I believe they offer an effective way to address critical questions of subjectivity, emotion, and selfhood.



Christian Gerhardt (Anthropology Minor)

I graduated in 2019 with a BS in Computer Science and a Minor in Anthropology, and now I am an apps developer for HNTB, an infrastructures solutions firm in Atlanta. I began as an intern and transitioned to full-time after graduating. I feel fortunate to find myself in an environment that allows me flourish as a computer scientist and to be comfortable with my co-workers. I'm constantly challenged by new technologies, whether it be for making implementations of features for different clients or incorporating entire web applications.



Katie Garrison Pociask (Sociology)

After graduating from VSU in 2004, I attended the University of Georgia's School of Law. During my time there, I interned at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, UGA's Family Violence Clinic, and offered free legal services for the underserved population of Athens-Clarke County. I now serve as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Georgia defending state entities from civil suits. Serving the entire state allows me to stay engaged with the wholeness of the state, rather than just the city I call home, and the variety of legal issues keeps me on my toes.



Ben Speight (Sociology Minor)

I earned my BA in Political Science with a minor in Sociology in 2004, and I am currently the Organizing and Political Director of Teamsters Local 728, an 11,000-member union based in Atlanta. I also serve as a Vice President on the Atlanta/North Georgia Central Labor Council (AFL-CIO) Executive Board. I am a 14-year Teamster veteran, having begun as an employee of UPS after graduating from VSU. I have negotiated collective bargaining agreements, wage increases, and improving working conditions for thousands of transportation workers in Georgia. I am particularly proud to have led the statewide fight in two labor actions: (1) the restoration of \$8 million in unemployment benefits to school bus drivers and other contracted school workers in 2012, and (2) the misclassification of short-haul truck drivers by trucking companies operating out of the Port of Savannah in 2015. I got my start in community organizing as an undergrad, having been a cofounder of VSU's Living Wage Campaign in 2001.



Carolyn Pikey Ward (Anthropology)

I remember, vividly, sitting in the counselor's office, sophomore year, the pressure of having to choose a major, and "what was I going to do with my life?" He stamped my file with a big red "Anthropology major," because Introduction to Anthropology was my favorite class. Little did I know that that decision—almost 20 years ago—would be one that would shape my life forever. After graduating in 2000, I did some soul searching and volunteered for the Peace Corps, and was placed in Guatemala, where I witnessed grave economic disparities and inadequate healthcare. I soon discovered that I thrive among people of other cultures, and the experience solidified what I was meant to do with my life: to become a Certified Nurse Midwife/Family Nurse Practitioner, which I achieved at Emory University in 2010. I have been honored for the past decade to empower women through their reproductive years and to have positive and safe childbirth experiences! Giving birth is a powerful experience that affects a woman's self-confidence and self-worth for a lifetime. After practicing in Guam and the Virgin Islands for a number of years, I am back on the mainland, working at the University of Virginia, providing midwifery care and teaching medical residents and students the miracle of childbirth.



Travis Edwards (Anthropology)

I'm currently an MA graduate student in Anthropology at Georgia State University (GSU). My thesis investigates queer subjectivity and social space in online communities. GSU's Anthropology Department has been very much like a second home to me with a group of impressive professors, staff, and my fellow graduate students. I don't think I could have succeeded in this program, however, without the tools and knowledge I gained from Valdosta State's Anthropology Department whose professors constantly pushed me to heights I didn't think I could reach. That program has proven invaluable to me as I near the end of my coursework at GSU and a May, 2020, defense of my thesis. I am in the process of applying to anthropology doctoral programs in order to pursue the wonderful cognitive and emotional adventure that anthropology has introduced me to.



Raeda Anderson (Sociology)

I am a two-time alumna of VSU's sociology program, having obtained my Bachelor's in 2008, and my Master's in 2009. After graduating, I joined the faculty at VSU and also worked as a statistician before earning my PhD in sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Currently, I am an associate professor in the department of Research and Engagement at Georgia State University where I specialize in statistical analysis, social network analysis, data collection, big data, and mixed methods. My research interests are survey implementation and biopsychosocial analysis of physical disability. I approach my research as an applied sociologist, focusing on how research findings inform decision making, policy, and practices to improve the lives of older adults with disabilities. The best thing about my career is working on exciting research projects with students and faculty at Georgia State, but I also work on a myriad of projects around the globe. If you ever want to talk sociology, email me! randerson39@gsu.edu

Profs' Corner

Students in **Dr. Yankovskyy's** "Environment, Food and Society" class took a fieldtrip to "White Oak Pastures" in Bluffton, Georgia, in early November. The fieldtrip provided an ideal opportunity to broaden students' understanding of the issues being discussed in class and included a tour of the farm's red meat and poultry abattoirs, leather workshop, tallow room, pet chew production, and general store. The tour concluded with a luscious lunch of the farm's grass-fed beef burgers and French fries.



Dr. A.J. Ramirez and Dr. Tracy Woodard presented research on how sex education programs fail to address safe sex and education for homosexual and bisexual students as part of Florida State University's 2nd Annual Symposium on Diversity & Inclusion in Research & Teaching. The symposium, entitled, "LGBTQ Children in Public Schools," explored ways to incorporate diversity and inclusion in research projects, teaching methods, and higher education life, which Drs. Ramirez and Woodard critiqued for sometimes providing false, misleading, or incomplete information about LGBTQ people.

Dr. Ellis S. Logan's graduate theory students recently dedicated a class to playing the game of "Sociopoly," based on the classic game of monopoly, to explore stratification and class inequality. The game illustrates many of Marx's and Weber's conceptions of socioeconomic class. Graduate student Destini Shaw took photos of the experience.

