

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 December, 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



Andrew Tatch (Sociology)

I'm a newly minted PhD graduate from the Department of Sociology at Mississippi State University and a former sociology student at VSU where I obtained my BA (2008) and MA (2012) degrees. Broadly trained in social stratification, my interests revolve around health disparities and substance use and misuse. I'm currently working on MSU's campus with the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision as a Research Associate. My talented and dedicated team works to improve employment outcomes for individuals with visual impairments. Prior to this, I worked with the Mississippi Alcohol Safety Education Program, a DUI intervention program that publishes research findings to key stakeholders in an effort to reduce impaired driving statewide. I am thankful for the training and mentorship I received at VSU, where the emphasis on applied sociology has been very beneficial to my work thus far.



Jennifer Stanford (Sociology)

I graduated in 2017 and joined the fight for educational equity with City Year—part of AmeriCorps’ umbrella of national service organizations—as a Student Success Coach. I led a team of AmeriCorps Members through their City Year before becoming a 1st-Grade Teaching Fellow at the charter school where I served. I’m learning on the job how to apply what I studied at VSU to being the best educator I can be on behalf of my students. I love my kids. Interacting with them as they learn and grow into well-rounded individuals is an amazing experience.



Tricia McKinney Bergantino (Sociology)

I graduated with a degree in Sociology and Anthropology in 2001 and obtained my MEd in Higher Education from Northeastern University in 2014. I have always been fascinated by cultures, international cuisine, and languages, and I am currently the Assistant Dean of Admissions/Coordinator of International Admissions at Providence College in Providence, RI. I travel around the globe actively recruiting students. I read their applications and conduct interviews all the while trying to understand their stories and determine their “fit” to the college. I also review financial documents and issue immigration documents. I have been so lucky to visit over 50 countries and meet thousands of students world-



Patty Gilbert (Sociology)

I graduated in 2006 and spent nine years serving as a youth director in Evans, Georgia, before pursuing a Master’s in Social Work at Western New Mexico University (WNMU). I am currently working as a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) for Humana as a case manager for Georgia and South Carolina, and I teach online for WNMU, as well. I constantly use the skills I obtained as an undergraduate at VSU by promoting culturally competent practice, and I strive to instill those same values in my students. I am grateful for the strong foundation I obtained from VSU’s Sociology and Anthropology program.



Danielle Jordan (Anthropology)

After completing my degree in 2014, I worked on environmental issues, including climate and energy, in the non-profit sector. I am currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Florida where I study the environmental humanities, science fiction, and film. Through critical engagement with these media, I am able to explore how narrative shapes our shared understandings of climate change. In addition to my research, I play a supportive role with public humanities initiatives. I enjoy my work immensely because it allows me to work creatively on the pressing issues of the Anthropocene Era.



Maia Wilson (Anthropology Minor)

I graduated in 2016 with a B.S. in Psychology and a Minor in Anthropology. Afterward, I volunteered as a curatorial support technician at Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, where I cataloged artifacts for a year-and-a-half. I'm currently enrolled at the University of Idaho, studying relations between members of the African diaspora and indigenous populations of Ocmulgee as revealed in burial styles and oral histories among both communities. In addition, I'm working with Idaho Public Archaeology (IPA), on an excavation of Moscow High School here in Moscow, Idaho with a renowned team of historical archaeologists led by U of I Professors Dr. Katrina Eichner and Dr. Mark Warner .



Jameson Brewer (Anthropology Minor)

I completed my BS Ed in Secondary Education with a minor in Anthropology in 2007, and subsequently obtained a Masters in Social Foundations of Education from Georgia State University and a Doctorate in Educational Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Currently, I am an Assistant Professor of Social Foundations of Education at the University of North Georgia. I teach classes on policy, culture, and social justice to pre-service teacher candidates, and I research the impact of school privatization on marginalized groups. I am thankful for the training I received in Anthropology because I rely on the skills and dispositions it imparts in both my personal life and my professional work.



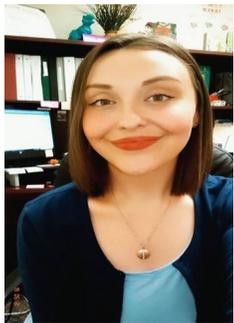
David Johnson (Anthropology)

After graduating in 2012, I knew just one thing—that I wanted to help people. Sociology/Anthropology helped me to understand that every person on this Earth has a unique story. I applied to Mercer University's graduate program for rehabilitation counseling in order to learn how to help people further. I obtained my Master's in 2016, and took a job in clinical research. A year or so later, I became a certified professional coach. Since January of 2018, I have been the proprietor of Co-Lab Coaching LLC, a relationship coaching business. I would not be where I am today without the knowledge and critical thinking skills I acquired at VSU.



Billy Esra (Anthropology)

After graduating in 2000, I worked in retail and computer networking while pursuing my teaching certification. I taught migrant children and ESOL briefly, but have been a high school math teacher for most of my career. I currently teach at Bishop Hall Charter School in Thomasville, Georgia, which serves at-risk students, i.e., those who have not experienced academic success in the traditional high school setting. I love my students, but every day is a challenge. Thankfully, my background in sociology and anthropology has served me well in the classroom!



Chelsea Marty (Sociology)

I obtained my Master's in 2017 and began a full-time position with ABAC's Upward Bound program soon after. Upward Bound is a federally funded college preparatory program that recruits low-income and/or first-generation college students from ABAC's surrounding counties. We provide scholarships, tutoring, cultural field trips, college campus tours, a five-week summer program, and other enrichment opportunities. Two years in as the program's guidance specialist, I have learned more than I could ever have imagined. I love my job because I get to see first-hand how exposure can change a young adult's perspective. Many of ABAC's students haven't had the occasion to see the world outside of their town, county, or state, and I love watching them learn more about the world and themselves through the opportunities we provide. I'm thrilled that my degree and my career align with my values, and that I gain a sense of purpose from the work I do.

Profs' Corner



Dr. Fanhao Nie received a Faculty Research Seed Grant (FRSG) to study how geographic environment influences individual preferences regarding interethnic and interracial dating. He notes that when an individual lives in an area in which a higher proportion of the population are racial and/or ethnic minorities, s/he has a greater opportunity to date interracially. On the contrary, in such diverse cities, high populations of racial and ethnic minorities might create bonding within one's own racial and ethnic group, leading to less interracial dating. In addition, Dr. Nie wonders how the social and religious culture specific to a geographic area plays a role in interracial dating. To answer these research questions, Dr. Nie will collect data from individuals and then merge the data with county-level census data. This will involve using soft-dataset to generate fictional dating profiles on the Tinder dating app. These fictional profiles will come with computer-generated pictures portraying people of different races and ethnicities. Dr. Nie will then look at the extent to which each race/ethnicity attracts attention (e.g., messages, likes, etc.) from those real dating app users of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Dr. Nie will use 2010 Census Data to examine how county-level social, demographic, and religious characteristics influence individuals' interracial dating attitudes and behaviors.



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. Shelly Yankovskyy and VSU Reference Librarian, Catherine Bowers have been invited to submit a book chapter entitled “Teaching about Fake News,” which details a learning activity they devised and applied in Dr. Yankovskyy’s “Environment, Food and Society” class. The exercise consisted of a one-day, in-class workshop wherein students tested the validity and reliability of news items from social media. Students were invited to consider and discuss misinformation, misrepresentation and inaccuracy in both scholarly and sociocultural terms in order to understand how news and social media affect our ideas about the world. The workshop concluded with a library instruction session.



2019-2020

Sociology and Anthropology Faculty