

# ASA ETS SECTION NEWS

NEWSLETTER of the SECTION on ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY and SOCIETY of  
the AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Spring 2017

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## FEATURE ESSAY

### Diversity in Sociology and Environmental Sociology: What we Know About our Discipline

ETS Committee on Racial Diversity

As an initial effort of the ETS Committee on Racial Diversity, we put together this brief article to establish clarity around the state of diversity in our field. The following is a summary of available data regarding diversity in the American Sociological Association and the Environment and Technology section. The data in this summary draw on two sources. The first is an ASA Research Brief (2005), *Race and Ethnicity in the Sociology Pipeline*. Although dated, this report provides important information regarding points of equality and points of disproportionate "leakage"<sup>1</sup> throughout the

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## Diversity in Sociology and Environmental Sociology (cont'd)

academic careers of scholars of color, especially African American scholars, in sociology. The second set of data focuses on diversity in the Environment and Technology section from 2005 to 2016. It comes directly from ASA membership database and was compiled by the ASA Research Department.

### Diversity in Sociology

Approximately 16 percent of all sociology bachelor's degree recipients in 2004 were African American, higher than the percent of African Americans in the U.S. population. Almost 10 percent of U.S. bachelor's degrees were awarded to Hispanic/Latino(a) students, and 5 percent were awarded to Asian/Asian American students. These statistics (Table 1) represent a slight but positive increase of the selected racial/ethnic groups under examination over the decade considered (1995-2005) (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007).

Table 1. Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded to Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups in Sociology from U.S. Colleges and Universities: 1995-2004

Racial/Ethnic Groups	1995-1998	2000-2004
African American	15.2%	16.3%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	7.6%	9.6%
Asian	4.7%	5.4%

However, for sociology students who go on to graduate study, the ASA Brief shows that clear racial and ethnic divisions emerge. While about half of white master's degree recipients go on to complete a PhD, only 15 percent of African American master's degree recipients obtain a doctoral degree (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007). As a result, in 2004, 352 doctorate degrees were awarded to white students in sociology, compared with only 40 to African Americans and 25 to Hispanic/Latino(a) and Asian scholars combined.

The ASA Brief also provides data on tenure-track and postdoctoral employment rates. Given the relatively small numbers of African American doctoral recipients in any given year (approximately 40), the data show a relatively strong demand for these new Ph.D.'s, but less of a demand for Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) scholars. For example, in 1998 almost 72% of African American sociology PhD

Table 2. Doctoral Degrees Awarded to Select Racial Ethnic Groups in Sociology: 1995-2004

Racial/Ethnic Groups	1995-1998	2000-2004
African American	7.6%	9.4%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	3.1%	5.4%
Asian/Asian American	6.4%	5.6%

graduates obtained a tenure-track or postdoctoral position, compared with 58% Whites, 31% Asian/Asian American or Pacific Islander, and 64% Hispanic (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007).

Scholars of color, however, were unequally distributed based on the type of academic institutions where they were hired. African Americans were somewhat under-represented at Research and Doctoral Universities and over-represented in Bachelor's-only institutions compared to their percentage within all institutional sociology faculty in the U.S. In contrast, Hispanics/Latinos(as) and Asian/Asian Americans were under-represented at Bachelor's-only institutions. For example, in 2000/2001 Whites made up 84% of sociology faculty members at research 1 institutions compared to just around 7% African American, 4% Hispanic/Latino (a), and 5% Asian/Asian American faculty members at Research 1 institutions (see Figure 1). It is important to note that these numbers may not provide an accurate picture of demand--nevertheless, it appears that faculty of color are over-represented in Bachelor's-only institutions and under-represented at research and doctoral institutions (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007). Other research has highlighted that scholars of color are also overrepresented in the contract side of the academy. In other words, they do not hold tenure track positions but are rather employed as instructors, adjuncts, post-doctoral associates, research scientists, assistant teaching professors, and professors of practice (Mascarenhas 2016).

There are innumerable concerns regarding the failures of sociology, and academia more generally, to support and retain scholars of color. In addition to the injustice of "colorblind" white favoritism, academia loses out on the new topics, skills, and insights that scholars of color bring to the academy. The ASA brief notes that each racial/ethnic group had a strong interest in sociological perspectives and knowledge based on their own race or ethnic group. In effect,

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## Diversity in Sociology and Environmental Sociology (cont'd)

not having scholars of color in the academic pipeline, as tenure-track faculty, post-doctorates, and as teachers, ensures that sociology remains a “white space” (Anderson 2015). Other research has argued that this white space is not limited to the university; academic journals, editorial boards, and the accepted scope of empirical and theoretical expertise also constitute white spaces in academia (Anderson 2015, Bonilla-Silva 2010, Bonilla-Silva 2015, Feagin 1991, Morris 2015, Pellow 2016). The same can be said of our national funding agencies, NSF and NIH, and funding agencies, whose program officers and review panels remain predictably white (Mascarenhas 2016). The lack of nonwhites in these spaces suggests that there might be underfunding and lack of support for key sociological topic areas that white reviewers are less familiar with.

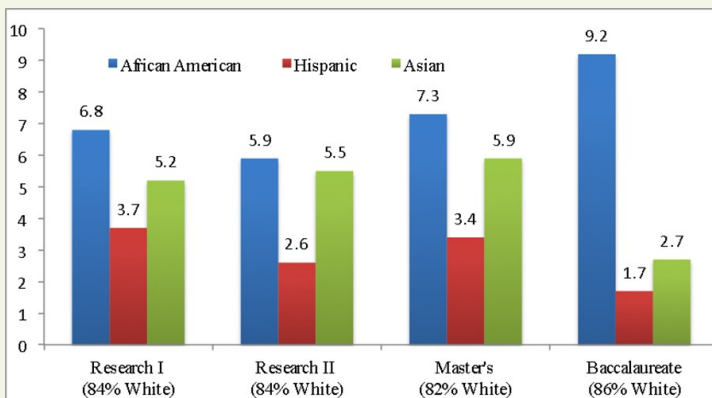


Figure 1. African American, Hispanic/Latino/a, and Asian/Asian American Faculty by Institution Type: 2000/2001 (Percent of Total Faculty)

## Diversity in Environmental Sociology:

Environmental sociology is a relatively new section of the ASA, officially forming in 1976 as an outgrowth of America’s environmental movement and the need to strengthen sociologists’ ability to contribute to environmental impact assessments, which had recently been mandated by national legislation (Dunlap 2016). Over its four decades the membership has steadily grown to more than 500 (504) in 2016. In terms of gender, there is a noteworthy failure to retain women from student to faculty members. For example, in 2005 two thirds of student membership were women (67% women, 33% men) compared with 40% for regular members (40% women, 60% men). This gender trend is consistent

a decade later for regular members (42% women, 58% men); however, there was also a noticeable drop in women student members during this period (from 67% to 56%). The data suggests that the loss rate of women from student to faculty may be decreasing in comparison to a decade ago. Overall membership increased from 359 to 504 over the last decade (2005-2016). See Figure 2 for illustration of the trends discussed above.

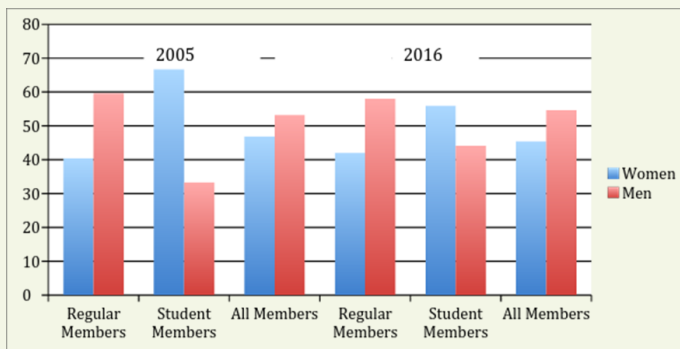


Figure 2. Section on Environment, Technology, and Society Gender Distribution by percent: 2005-2016

The percentage of African American, Hispanic/Latino(a), and Asian/Asian American scholars in the ETS section is very low in comparison to other ASA sections and the association overall. Over the decade, the percentage of Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) regular members in the section has remained relatively consistent (4.6% Asian/Asian American in both 2005 and 2016, and 2.5% Hispanic/Latino(a) in 2005 compared with 2.8% in 2016). Regular ETS members who identify as African American increased from zero members in 2005 to seven in 2016, an increase to 2.5% of section membership. See Figure 3 for race distribution of ETS members.

The percentage of scholars of color who are regular members of the ETS Section is much lower than doctorate degrees awarded to members of these groups in sociology overall, suggesting that this section disproportionately fails to attract and retain a number of scholars of color compared with the overall discipline.

The data also seems to suggest a mixed trend in the membership of students of color in the ETS section over the decade. For example, African American student membership decreased threefold, from 6% in 2005 to 2% in 2016. However, both Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) student membership

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## (Diversity in Sociology and Environmental Sociology (cont'd))

increased slightly from 3% for both groups to 5% Asian/Asian American students and 6% Hispanic/Latino(a) students. While the increases for Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) students over the decade are modest, it is important to also note that the actual number of students of color in the section remains very low, constituting what Moore (2008) describes as a "micro-minority" in an otherwise exclusively white institutional space (Moore 2008) (See Table 3).

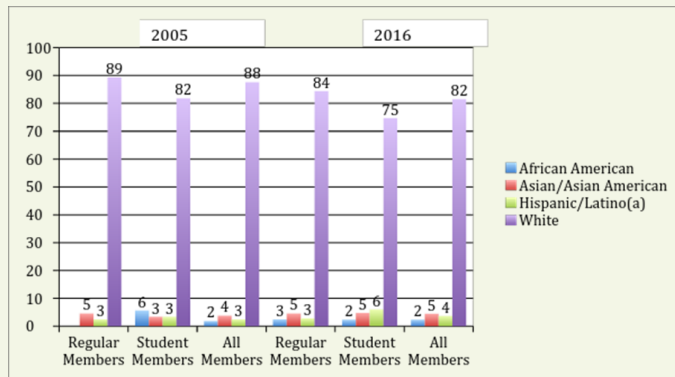


Figure 3. Section of Environment, Technology, and Society Selected Race Distribution by percent: 2005-2016

Table 3. Race distribution of ETS student membership: 2005 and 2016.

Racial/Ethnic Group	2005	2016
African American	5.7%	2.4%
Asian/Asian American	3.4%	4.8%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	3.4%	6%
White	81.8%	74.7%
Other	5.7%	1.8%
Multiple	n.a	10.2%

### Conclusion:

To conclude, the ETS section of the ASA remains highly undiversified in terms of race. Moreover, while there have been some gains in diversity in the discipline of sociology, these gains have not been achieved in ETS. More research needs to be conducted on understanding why there continues to be a loss of underrepresented faculty and student membership in the ETS section across advancing ranks within the discipline. Towards this end the ETS Committee on Racial Diversity will be conducting a confidential survey

available to all section members and follow-up interviews with those interested. We look forward to strengthening the ETS section by creating a racially conscious space with greater capacity to engage in the robust and engaged social science needed for the present environmental and intellectual climate. We also invite all members to share your ideas and concerns with us.

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### Endnotes:

1. The committee has serious concerns about the term "leakage" because of its passive nature and implicit colorblindness. The work of the leakage discourse suggests that students of color just fall out—which suggests that the students themselves may be to blame while eclipsing the institutional structures within which racism is reproduced. Rather, volumes of literature illustrate that the system is structured in such a way to push people of color out, and maintain extant hierarchies (Wyse 2014; Gutiérrez et al 2012; Brunsma, Embrick, and Shin 2017).

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\*Dr. Jennifer Carrera was inadvertently excluded from this committee when we reported its inauguration in the Winter 2017 Issue of this newsletter. We apologize to Dr. Carrara for this error.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Books:

#### Transitioning to a Post-Carbon Society: Degrowth, Austerity and Wellbeing

Garcia, Ernest, Mercedes Martinez-Iglesias, and Peadar Kirby

(Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017) <https://www.palgrave.com/la/book/9781349951758#aboutBook>

This book deals with one of the most pressing social and environmental issues that we face today. The transition to a post-carbon society, in which the consumption of fossil fuels decreases over time, has become an inevitability due to the need to prevent catastrophic climate change, the increasing cost and scarcity of energy, and complex combinations of both of these factors. As the authors point out, this will not only entail political adjustments and the replacement of some technologies by others, but will be accompanied by social and cultural changes that bring about substantial modifications in our societies and ways of life. This book examines whether the current conditions, which date back to the crisis that began in 2007, favour a benign and smooth transition or will make it more difficult and prone to conflict. It argues that, even if this transformation is unavoidable, the directions it will take and the resulting social forms are much less certain. There will be many post-carbon societies, the authors conclude, and any number of routes to social change. Transitioning to a Post-Carbon Society therefore represents a significant contribution to global debates on the environment, and is vital reading for academics, policymakers, business leaders, NGOs and the general public alike.



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## Books (cont'd)

**Ernest Garcia** is Professor of Sociology at the University of Valencia, Spain.

**Mercedes Martinez-Iglesias** is a Research Technician at the University of Valencia, Spain.

**Peadar Kirby** is Professor Emeritus of International Politics and Public Policy at the University of Limerick, Ireland.

## Articles –Journal Special Issues

The *Sustainability* journal has published a special issue themed “Sustainability through the Lens of Environmental Sociology.” The issue was guest edited by Md Saidul Islam, Associate Professor of Sociology, Nanayang Technological University, Singapore. This special issue is free and openly accessible to all readers. Topics covered in it include:

- Environmental sociology as a field of inquiry for sustainability: Historical context of sustainable development in environmental sociology
- Nature-society relationship in environmental sociology
- Theories/approaches to sustainability discourse in environmental sociology
- Environmentalism/environmental movements for sustainability
- Empirical cases (such as climate change, biodiversity, food, certification, etc.) through the lens of environmental sociology

## Journal Articles and Book Chapters

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- Alexis-Martin, B., Stephanie Malin, T. Davies. 2016. "The Anthropocene is a Nuclear Epoch – So How Can We survive it?" *The Conversation*, December 8, 2016.
- Alexis-Martin, B., Stephanie Malin, and T. Davies. 2016. "The Anthropocene is a nuclear epoch – So How Can We Survive It?." *The Independent*, December 9, 2016.

## MEMBER NEWS

**Dr. Thomas Dietz**, long-term member of this section, has been appointed to the Canadian Academy of Science Committee Expert Panel on State of Knowledge and Practice of Integrated Approaches to Natural Resource Management in Canada. Dr. Dietz is a Professor of Environmental Science and Policy, Sociology and Animal Studies at Michigan State University. He is Administrative Co-Director of the Great Lakes Integrated Science and Assessments Center.

Many congratulations to Dr. Thomas Dietz!

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Starting with the Summer 2017 Issue, this Newsletter will carry a *Transitions* subsection. The subsection will publish member news about job changes, significant promotions, and transition to eternity.

*See important after press item on next page, page 9*



**Call for Participants: 2017 ETS ASA Mentorship program**

This note is to invite those attending this year's ASA conference in Montreal to take part in the 2017 ETS ASA Mentorship program.

In short, this program will pair tenured mentors with un-tenured mentees with the expectation that the pair has coffee, lunch, or some sort of informal meeting during this year's ASA conference in order to discuss life as a professional environmental sociologist. Pairs will be made based upon shared interests. Discussions can range from how to negotiate the job market, publications, research, navigating conferences, or just plain old "ideas". The point is to solidify our section's inclusive and welcoming foundation through establishing a program that can facilitate new relationships across the sub-discipline.

The program was a great success last year in Seattle. This year, however, the program will work slightly different. I received a number of comments after last year's program in Seattle, and, from what I can tell, it seemed that there was some consensus regarding the need for more categories beyond the graduate student / faculty binary we ran with last year.

To address this need, our plan is to create three categories this time around. One would be graduate students, who will only serve as mentees. A second would be people who have tenure, who will only serve as mentors. And the third would be folks in between, and they can choose whether they would like to be a mentor or mentee. In addition, if there are folks outside academia who are attending and want to take part I would be happy to deal with them on an individual basis and cater the program to their needs.

Please note that if you took part in the program last year you are absolutely encouraged to do so again this year.

If you are interested, email me ([jfb@uoregon.edu](mailto:jfb@uoregon.edu)) with the following basic information using the suggested subject line

Subject line: "ETS ASA Mentor Program 2017"

Name:

Email:

Institution:

Whether you interested in being a mentor or a mentee:

Sociological Interests:

I will use this information to organize the pairs.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to send them my way.

Jordan Fox Besek

Student Representative, ASA Section on Environment and Technology

Department of Sociology, University of Oregon