Hello students and alumni! We created this newsletter to keep in touch with you. We hope to produce a new issue each semester. Here’s what been happening: See our new and improved department website http://www.rider.edu/academics/colleges-schools/claes/liberal-arts-programs/sociology. Click on “Why our faculty are passionate about sociology.” The department is growing; we are hiring an eighth full time faculty member for next year, whose focus will be criminology and criminal justice. This is part of the new criminal justice major for which sociology courses are a major component. Our social work minor is thriving, the second largest minor on campus. Our sociology majors are thriving too, a third of whom made the Dean’s list last Fall; and a third of those had a 3.8 gpa or higher! Also, I’ve taken on the job of chairperson this year.

We would really love to share your successes, too. Email me at butsch@rider.edu, with your news and contact information to stay in touch. Looking forward to hearing from you,

Dr. Richard Butsch
Chairperson, Department of Sociology

Sociologists and anthropologists have skills and knowledge valuable to business in a wide variety of ways. Consider for example product design, a field long dominated by people with background in art and architecture.

About forty years ago, some companies began to employ scientists and medical practitioners knowledgeable about human muscle and movements in order to redesign furniture and tools to better fit the human body. They called this new field ergonomics.

Today, some companies are hiring sociologists and anthropologists, most of whom do qualitative research and do not use numbers in their work, for what we might call social ergonomics. These researchers study how people use products sold by their companies to see how assumptions of the designers about the product fit or are contradicted by how people actually use the products. For example Intel Corporation employs a hundred social scientists to do this research.

Users, embedded in their own cultures and societies, are also consumers of global products. A range of companies, from the tech arena to the food business, are striving to carve a niche in these countries around the world, trying to redesign themselves to cater to local cultural needs. Most of these companies try to manufacture products for a global market and achieve large scale volumes in production. However, this often requires the coordination of multiple companies to manufacture a single product, companies that may be situated in different cultures and countries. Designers face a tremendous challenge against the backdrop of this changing landscape. With local practices and cultures on one hand, and large global corporations and global lifestyles on the other, designers and social scientists are challenged with striking the right balance between these two ends.

Sociologists and anthropologists have precisely the knowledge to do that.
Judge Linda Feinberg is a 1971 graduate of Rider University. She began college as a psychology major planning a career in counseling. However, after completing her first year — and with a strong interest in sociology and history — she decided to become a lawyer. To pursue this dream, she changed her major to sociology. In Judge Feinberg’s own words, “having a sociology background was a homerun because it gave me a sense of how to deal with people from all economic and social backgrounds… for a judge on the bench 28 years, this really helped.”

After graduating from Rider, she attended law school and was admitted to the Bar of New Jersey in 1974. Initially, she worked for the Federal Government as a labor lawyer and then continued to work in many different positions in the law and justice system, including a successful career as a judge. For sixteen years, she served as the Assignment Judge of the Mercer Vicinage. In this capacity, she supervised the judges and support staff in Mercer Vicinage.

When asked what advice she would give to current sociology majors about their education, careers, and life, she responded by saying, “Pursue something you would be happy with. Because you will be spending a lot of time at work, and you want to do something you like. Don’t limit yourself. There are so many opportunities with a degree in sociology. Never take yourself too seriously and seek to obtain excellence in everything you do. But don’t try to be perfect or you will always be disappointed.”
Courtney Lok is an education major with her second major as sociology. “The great thing about having a background in sociology is that you are able to look at situations,” in Courtney’s case educational settings, in a new way, to understand that behavior is influenced by something more than one’s psychology or biology. That something is society, its organization and its culture. “I chose sociology as my second major because I was curious about how society affects people. I knew nothing about it, but I am certainly happy with my decision to declare it as a major.”

With the education major as well, Courtney plans to be a kindergarten teacher. She says, “Sociology definitely helped me open my eyes to outside ‘forces’ that may affect my students in the classroom. Whether it be a cultural, socioeconomic, or political issue, all those things have an influence on schools and students.” When asked what her favorite thing about the sociology major was, Courtney said she loved all of the aspects to it. “For example, in one class I could learn about marriage and obesity, while in another about politics and government.”

Kelsey Kirchner chose sociology as her only major and added a minor in social work. “I chose sociology because I knew I wanted to help people and I realized that learning more about social issues would help me to do so.”

When it comes to Kelsey’s future plans to help others, she would like to work with cancer patients in a hospital setting. “This major helped me progress with these plans by opening the doors to learning about all the social issues and problems that are in the world. Hopefully, one day I can make an impact on other people’s lives, can give back and help those in need.” When asked about her favorite aspect of the major Kelsey said, “My favorite thing about this major is the freedom to research topics that you are interested in. Also, all the sociology professors are always willing to help and meet with the students when needed. It is such a great major to take on if you are not sure specifically what you would like to do because there are so many different career paths that can be achieved with a background in sociology.”
University Launches New Criminal Justice Major

Rider University added a new major to its curriculum this past Fall — criminal justice, which is closely linked to sociology. Dr. Baron, who created the Law & Justice Program where the new major is housed, as well as many of the new courses for the new major, said, “Sociology is the theoretical and scholarly foundation for criminal justice. Early criminologists were sociologists, and we are pleased that the new major appropriately draws on the strengths of sociology.” The Sociology Department offers many courses that are important to, and are included in the criminal justice major such as Deviance and Crime, Race and Crime, Gender and Criminal Justice, White Collar and Corporate Crime, and Youth and Crime. Dr. Baron commented, “Given that the foundation for criminal justice is sociology, it is not surprising that a number of sociology majors have opted for a second major in criminal justice.”