

Nation's First Department of Rural Sociology Celebrates its Centennial

Julie N. Zimmerman, University of Kentucky, and David Brown, Cornell University

In September 2015, more than 100 alumni, faculty, and students gathered in Ithaca, NY, to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the nation's first Department of Rural Sociology. Reflecting 100 years of continuity and change, the department was originally named the Department of Rural Social Organization. In 1939, it was renamed the Department of Rural Sociology. In 2003, the department became the Department of Development Sociology.

The Cornell department began with the appointment of Albert R. Mann as Professor of Rural Social Organization in 1915. Within a year, Mann was called on to serve as Dean of Cornell's College of Agriculture. In 1918, he hired Ezra Dwight Sanderson to continue establishing the department. Both men had recently returned to graduate education to pursue doctoral degrees in sociology at the University of Chicago—the nation's first Department of Sociology.

For both Mann and Sanderson, their appointments signaled the start of a new career, and both went on to hold multiple distinguished positions. Sanderson had already been a recognized entomologist before becoming a sociologist. Along with being the department's first head, Sanderson went on to be the first Chair of the ASA's Section on Rural Sociology (the first section in the ASA and for a time its largest), the first President of Rural Sociological Society (RSS), president of the American Country Life Association, and the 31st president of the ASA. Before his appointment, Albert R. Mann had served in several positions in the college including secretary to Professor Libery Hyde Bailey—a horticulturalist and leader in the American Country Life Movement. After 15 years as dean of the college, Mann became Cornell's first Provost. Some of his other positions include vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board and he was one

Farm Foundation. Today, Cornell's agriculture and human ecology library bears Mann's name.

"Throughout its long history, the Department of Development Sociology has helped shape development scholarship, discourse, and policy domestically and throughout the world," says Philip McMichael, professor and chair. Recently, the department played a leadership role in establishing the ASA Section on the Sociology of Development, currently chaired by Cornell's David Brown.

Continuing to Thrive

Today, the department conducts theoretical and applied research, teaching, and outreach on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of social, cultural, political, and economic change. Foci within the department include population and development, the politics and economics of development, environment and development, and the social organization of food systems in all geographical regions including the United States, other advanced industrial nations, and the global south. The department offers graduate and undergraduate degree programs and houses several outreach and extension programs and institutes that link the department to the Cornell community and to off-campus organizations engaged in rural, community, and international development.

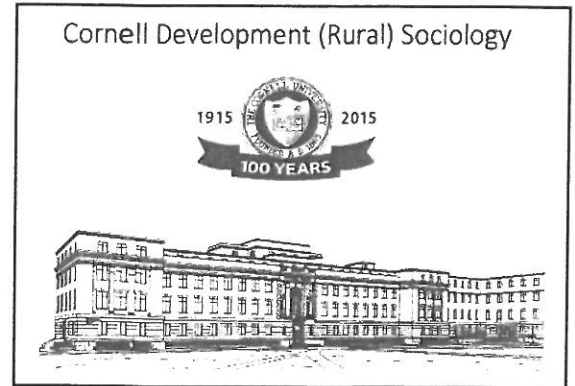
Over the last century, department faculty have strongly influenced research on rural community organization, agriculture and the food system, population and development, the political economy and ecology of development, and coupled human-natural systems. In the late 1980s, the department obtained new faculty and resources to establish the Population and Development Program. Being at a Land-Grant Institution, the Community and Regional Development Institute (CaRDI) was created in 1990 to coordinate and direct research-based outreach to New York State communities. Around 2000, the Department received a large gift

that supported the establishment of the Polson Institute for Global Development.

The department began with five courses, 52 students, and the equivalent of one full-time instructor. The first PhD was granted to Ellis L. Kirkpatrick in 1922, and the first master's degree was granted to Cass Ward Whitney the next year. Since its start 100 years ago, the Department has operated under 12 different department chairs and 9 different college deans. At its halfway mark in 1965, it had more than 40 undergraduate majors and 82 graduate students—including those from 31 different counties beyond the United States. At that point, there had been 233 graduate degrees awarded of which 107 were PhD degrees. By its 100th anniversary, the undergraduate program had surpassed 120 majors, about 40 scholars are enrolled in its PhD program, and 14 tenure-track faculty members teach and conduct research and engage in outreach activities. In addition, the Graduate Field of Development Sociology has granted more than 300 PhDs since 1922.

Leaders in Rural Sociology

Department faculty and alumni have been leaders in American sociology. In addition to Sanderson, two other department faculty chaired the ASA Section on Rural Sociology: E.L. Kirkpatrick and W. A. Anderson. Since its inception in 1981, 11 PhD alumni and six faculty from the department have been awarded the highest honor given by the Rural Sociological Society (RSS)—Distinguished Rural Sociologist. In addition, 21 faculty members and PhD alumni have served as president of the Rural Sociological Society. Among these RSS presidents is Olaf Larson, the nation's oldest surviving emeri-



tus professor of sociology. Other notables in the department's history include Mary Eva Duthie who was the first woman to hold a leadership position in the RSS. In 1939, Leonard S. Cottrell moved from the department to chair the new Department of Sociology and Anthropology in Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences. He went on to be the 40th President of the ASA.

To celebrate the department's centennial, a symposium was held in the newly renovated Warren Hall on Cornell's campus. Distinguished alumni from across the globe were invited to participate on two panels examining the challenges of development and possibilities for transformative change in the next century. In addition, Julie N. Zimmerman (Cornell PhD 97), Coughenour Professor of Rural Sociology at the University of Kentucky and Historian for the RSS, opened the event with a keynote address and was invited to produce a monograph on the department's history. Due out next spring, the work will examine the multifaceted landscape of the department's first 100 years. The anniversary event was recorded and will be available in the near future on the Cornell University Library's open access digital repository called e-Commons. For more information on the Department of Development Sociology, visit the website at devsoc.cals.cornell.edu/.

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