A History of the Department of Sociology

The Sociology program at North Carolina Central University began with one Principles of Sociology course taught by Dr. C. G. O’Kelly in 1923. At this time, NCCU was known as North Carolina College for Negroes. This course was taught in the fourth year of a student’s educational curriculum. In 1928, Educational Sociology was introduced as a second course offering. The next decade saw an addition of five new academic course offerings. Students were eager to study Social Pathology, Criminology, Population Trends in the South, Social Psychology and to participate in a Seminar in Social Sciences. Most of the courses focused on social issues which are still relevant in today’s society. Sociology was later included in the Division of Social Sciences of the college under the leadership of Professor James H. Taylor, Chair.

By 1939, the Sociology Department was organized and offered students a wealth of knowledge in the field. Courses in Principles of Sociology, Social Pathology, The Family, Race Relations, The Negro in American Life, Criminology, General Anthropology, Rural Sociology, and Urban Sociology were taught at the undergraduate level. The graduate curriculum included courses in Population Trends in the South, Social Psychology, Social Welfare, Introduction to Child Welfare, Social Statistics, and a Seminar in Sociology.

The late 1930s through the 1950s afforded great research opportunities and scholarly endeavors for our faculty. Students were fortunate to have for professors such scholars as Drs. Howard Odum, Joseph S. Himes, Jr., Edgar Thompson, Charles E. King and Jane Leserman. Dr. King would often engage students in conversations about his studies as a graduate student at the University of Chicago and his dissertation writing days under Dr. Robert E. Parks, one of the trailblazers in the field of Sociology. Afternoon and evening gatherings with faculty and students engaging in intellectual discourses were regular occurrences. Students were rarely late for classes and student absences were minimal.

Our Department faculty was well known and respected by colleagues in the discipline at local, regional, national and international professional meetings. Dr. Himes founded, along with several other sociologists, the North Carolina Sociological Association in 1969. He served as president of the organization from 1969 to 1971. In honor of Dr. Joseph Himes, the Himes’ Outstanding Student Sociology Papers Awards are given each year to an undergraduate and graduate sociology student at the state meeting. While at NCCU, Dr. Himes was the first recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Award. He served as a Fulbright lecturer at both Helsinki University in Finland and Machas University in India. NCCU was fortunate to have him as a professor in Sociology for 23 years (1946 – 1969). In our centennial year, he serves as a shining example of the professionalism our students seek to accomplish. Although he was blind, Dr. Himesexcelled as a scholar. His personal motto was: “It is the mind that sees.”

The Gamma Chapter of Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society was founded in 1952. This chapter is the third oldest AKD chapter in the state of North Carolina. NCCU’s Gamma Chapter also holds the distinct honor of being the first HBCU inducted into Alpha Kappa Delta in the state. The AKD organization has provided mentoring and academic tutoring for sociology students. It also has participated in campus organizational activities. Political campaigning and community food drives were a major part of community activities for our honor students. Several students served as research and teaching assistants in the department. Many of the students presented student papers at local and regional conferences. Past advisors for the honor society included: Professors Charles King, Francis Scherer, Sandra Rogers, Charles Slappy, Chien Ju Hung, Miles Simpson, and James Davies. Our current advisors for Alpha Kappa Delta are Professors Sandra Rogers and James Davies.

The Sociology Club was established as a department community service club for sociology majors. The club over the years has participated in feeding selected families in Durham, collecting school supplies for needy children, organizing blood drives and walk-a-thons for numerous charities, managing big sister/ big brother projects, and collecting clothes and food for the homeless. The NCCU Sociology Club is open to all who are interested in Sociology, and is a student-run organization. One of the goals of the Sociology Club is to provide service on campus and in the community. In Spring 2009 members of the Sociology Club served as mentors to high school aged females as part of the Durham Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (DCAPP). The Sociology Club has been invited to continue with the mentoring service and to participate in other DCAPP programs. Past advisors of the organization were Professors Marsha Goodwin Kee, Charles Slappy, Isaac Robinson, Gwendolyn Dixon, Gloria Drew, Annette Bailey, and Vickie Newsome. The present advisor of the sociology club is Dr. Vicki Lamb.

In the 1960s, Drs. William H. Howell, Jacqueline J. Jackson, Leonard H. Robinson, Charles E. King, Edwina C. Williams, just to name a few, continued to engage students in critical thinking and analyses of social issues in our society. A significant
number of sociology majors continued their education by pursuing graduate studies. Social agencies dealing with societal issues were popular employment choices for those not continuing their education after graduation.

The 70s and 80s created an exciting environment for student educational and research opportunities. Many students engaged in research activities which helped create job opportunities in social agencies, public school and higher education. During the early 70s, Dr. Charles E. King and his then graduate research assistant, Sandra Rogers, along with UNC-Chapel Hill researchers engaged in a pilot study of the desegregation process of the Goldsboro public school system in North Carolina. This research was used by the Department of Public Instruction to identify key factors which impacted the positive or negative progress of school desegregation. Faculty and students actively engaged in classroom and community issues involving race relations and relevant social issues of that era.

Our faculty in the mid-70s and 80s included scholars teaching in an environment focusing on student activism and social change. Faculty included Professors Charles King, Marsha Goodwin Kee, Charles Slappy, Isaac Robinson, William Howell, Francis Scherer, George Conklin, James Davies, Miles Simpson, Gloria Drew, Edwina Williams, Donald Addison, Sandra Rogers, and Gwendolyn Dixon. While still teaching academic courses, engaging in research and active student engagement, Mrs. Edwina Williams, Drs. Howell, Conklin, Davies and Simpson also served as sociology departmental chairs. A concentration in social work was added to the sociology department during the mid-70s and continued through the late 1990s. This resulted in hiring additional faculty, including Drs. Patricia Ramsey, Robert Creecy and Craig Benton to teach a growing student interest in the field of social work.

In 1979, after Dr. George Conklin became department chair, the National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded several grants to the sociology department to integrate the methods of sociology into various courses using personal computers during the students’ first academic year at the university. This was a forerunner of today’s web-based course materials. A grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) extended this work into the course on Criminology. Drs. Robinson and Conklin jointly worked on a grant from the Lilly Endowment to further their work on introductory computer-based materials. Under a program sponsored by former Chancellor Julius Chambers in an attempt to put together the best ideas in the social sciences, the department interdepartmentally shared the laboratory assignments developed under previous grants to create a course covering anthropology, sociology, psychology and geography at the university. This course still exists and will likely continue into the next 100 years of North Carolina Central University.

Dr. Miles Simpson joined the faculty in 1981. At that time, the department was known as the Department of Sociology and Social Work. The sociology faculty consisted of Dr. William Howell and Dr. George Conklin. In the fall of 1988, Drs. James Davies, Robert Worthing and Dr. Louie Ross joined the sociology department as assistant professors. Later Dr. Chien Ju Huang joined the faculty, creating the opportunity for more sociology courses to be taught by sociologists rather than social workers. Dr. Simpson edited the Journal of Applied Gerontology between 1987 and 1993. This journal became a major vehicle for disseminating emerging research areas in social gerontology. The journal quickly established an international reputation and rose from being biannually to quarterly published. Institutional library subscriptions grew from zero to 300 during a period when libraries were decreasing their periodical holdings.

During Dr. Simpson’s tenure as interim chair, Drs. Ross and Hung left the department and Drs. Vicki Lamb, Dana Greene, and Sandra Rogers (returning from the private sector) joined the existing faculty. Professor Lamb has done extensive research on indicators of child well-being and disabilities among older Americans. Professor Greene has published articles focusing on the changing status of Islamic women, Jewish culture, and the infusion of quantitative research methods across the sociology curriculum. A new course on Society and Law will be offered by Professor Rogers in Fall 2010, utilizing her Juris Doctorate and Sociology backgrounds.

Our Department has the distinct honor of having produced three NCCU Professor Emeriti: Dr. Leonard Robinson, Dr. Charles King and Dr. George Conklin. At present, Sociology has more than 100 undergraduate students and 28 graduate students enrolled. Our faculty has published extensively in major sociological journals, published books, and presented their research at conferences and sociology meetings. Collaborative writings with undergraduate and graduate students are invited and strongly encouraged. In recent years, several students have published in sociology journals and presented papers at local and regional meetings.

Dr. Wortham insisted that one point be made in this abbreviated sociology history for the centennial celebration. He and other faculty members insist that “our students welcome being challenged academically and take great pride in producing work of high quality.” Every student opportunity to engage in scholarly research is met with eager acceptance.

As a result of this assumption, a course focusing on the works of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois was developed. Alpha Kappa Delta sponsored a colloquium on Du Bois which resulted in five of our graduate sociology majors presenting their papers at the Southern Sociological Society meeting held in Richmond, Virginia in 2008. Three of the students were able to publish their papers on Du Bois in Sociation Today, a refereed journal in the field of sociology. Significant interest exists within the
department and among undergraduate and graduate students on the role that African American sociologists have played in the
development of American sociology. It is a path that is being pursued aggressively for grant funding support.

As you may already have gathered, the Department of Sociology is well established in the discipline, providing challenging academic opportunities for students in the field. This centennial year is expected to be our most exciting year ever.

Information about our current 2009 Sociology faculty, staff, and AKD International Sociology Honor Society students is provided below.

**APPENDIX**

**George Conklin, Ph.D.,** is a Professor Emeritus. He is editor of *Sociation Today*, the official journal of the North Carolina Sociological Association. *Sociation Today* is a peer-reviewed online journal of sociology which is available to faculty, students, and researchers without charge. The journal, now in its sixth year, is indexed in *Sociological Abstracts* and is an EBSCO publication. The Spring 2009 issue will focus on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois and feature student papers from the graduate course taught by Dr. Robert Wortham.

**James Davies, Ph.D.,** is Professor and Chair of the Sociology Department. Originally from Freetown, Sierra Leone, he obtained his terminal degree from the University of Oklahoma. He has been on faculty at NCCU for twenty-eight years, during eight of which he served previously as department chair. Dr. Davies is also a student of the classics, enjoys traveling, and playing the guitar and piano. He has published research studies in *Family Perspective, Sociological Spectrum, National Journal of Sociology* and the *Journal of African American Studies*.

**Gloria Drew, M.A.,** and her father are NCCU alumni. She received her BA and MA from NCCU and has taught for more than twenty years as an Adjunct Instructor. She retired after thirty years from Durham Technical Community College where she was the Program Director in Continuing Education. She delights in interacting with students and telling them what NCCU was like “back in the days”. Ms. Drew is a member of several professional organizations and has served on educational, civic, and religious boards over the years. Her current hobbies are reading and traveling, especially with the NCCU football and basketball teams.

**Catherine Farrar, A.S.,** is a native of Chapel Hill, NC. Ms. Farrar received an Associate of Secretarial Science degree from Croft College and began working at UNC-CH in 1970 as a secretary in the Department of Independent Study. Ms. Farrar later became the Executive Assistant to the Director of National Public Radio at UNC. When she relocated to Decatur, GA, she was employed as a Registration Assistant in the 80’s. Upon her return to Chapel Hill, she worked as an office manager in the UNC Department of Psychology. Ms. Farrar is now the Administrative Support Associate for the Department of Sociology.

**Dana Greene, Ph.D.,** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology. Her work and publications focus on the Sociology of Disasters, Natural Hazards, and the Environment; Social Psychology; Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods; Religion; and Regionalism. She serves as book review editor of *Southern Jewish History*, and has received several awards for her research. An avid teacher-scholar, Dr. Greene incorporates her research interests and praxis into her classes to increase student engagement.

**Vicki Lamb, Ph.D.,** joined AKD when she was a Masters’ student at Virginia Tech. She is an Associate Professor of Sociology at NCCU. Since joining NCCU in 2006, Dr. Lamb has published six peer-reviewed articles, two book chapters, and has forthcoming two peer-reviewed articles and two encyclopedia entries. This spring semester, she has a $13,797 grant entitled “Child Well-Being Index” that is funded by the Foundation for Child Development.

**Michelle Laws, M.A.,** is an Adjunct Instructor who has taught Sociology courses for several years. She has successfully engaged in several funded grant writing projects while at NCCU. She teaches undergraduate sociology courses in the department and is currently a doctoral candidate in Sociology at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.

**Donnetta McCain, M.A.,** is an Adjunct Instructor who has taught at NCCU for four years. She received her BA in Biology in 2001 from Methodist University in Fayetteville, NC. She obtained her MA in Sociology from NCCU in 2005. Ms. McCain loves the discipline of Sociology and her main interests are in the area of Social Diversity and Social Psychology.

**Vickie Newsome, M.A.,** is a graduate of NCCU with a BA and an MA in Sociology. She has taught at NCCU for six years and brings to the university thirty years of teaching in the North Carolina Community College system. Ms. Newsome has taught Principles of Sociology and now focuses on teaching courses in Society and Human Behavior. She serves as an advisor for the Sociology Club and considers it a privilege and honor to serve as an Adjunct Instructor at her alma mater.
Sandra Rogers, J.D., M.A., loves teaching, advising and interacting with students. She received her formal education from NCCU, Duke and UNC-CH and has taught for 18 years at NCCU. She was recently appointed Clinical Instructor and Director of Student Services. She oversees all areas of student engagement activities. Although she has taught numerous courses in the department, her recent teaching responsibilities have included American Minority Groups, Social Psychology, Principles of Sociology, Marriage and the Family, and developing a course in Society and Law for Fall 2010. She serves on numerous university committees including the SACS reaccreditation committee. She and the students of Alpha Kappa Delta are responsible for organizing the history of the Sociology Department for the NCCU Centennial Celebration.

Miles Simpson, Ph.D., is a Professor of Sociology. He received his PhD in Sociology and his BA and MA in Psychology from Michigan State University. He edited the Journal of Applied Gerontology from 1987 until 1993. His research interests include the comparative study of social mobility, income inequality and democracy, political violence, and suicide.

Robert Ssengonzi, Ph.D., is a Senior Research Specialist at Research Triangle Institute and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Demography in the Department of Sociology at NCCU. He is skilled in training, monitoring and evaluation, project management, primary data collection, questionnaire design, and the use of both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques in data analysis. He currently directs several grants funded by CDC, USAID and US DOD on HIV/AIDS, about malaria issues in sub-Saharan Africa with an annual budget of $6 million.

Robert Wortham, Ph.D., is a Professor of Sociology and has been teaching Sociology at NCCU since 1988. He enjoys having the opportunity to observe the awakening of the sociological imagination among undergraduate and graduate students. Dr. Wortham’s most recent interest is the early sociological legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois. His most recent book, W.E.B. Du Bois and the Sociological Imagination, was published in August, 2009, by Baylor University Press. His major interest includes developing courses focusing on the contributions of African American sociologists and, at the present time, he teaches a graduate course on W.E.B Du Bois. Dr. Wortham is also a volunteer choir director for a local congregation and a trombonist.

During the last six months of 2009, under the direction of Dr. LaVerne Reid, our department reorganized, refocused and recommitted to the mission and purpose of North Carolina Central University. A clinical faculty position was added to the department to focus on student engagement and teaching. The NCCU Sociology Department under the direction of our returning chair, Dr. James Davies, is dedicated to producing students committed to the NCCU legacy of Truth and Service and positively impacting and changing humankind.

Information on the accomplishments of a few of our sociology undergraduate or graduate majors demonstrates a strong commitment to truth and service to our community, state and nation. Only a small listing of our distinguished alumni has been featured at this time. They are: Dr. Dudley Flood, former North Carolina Associate State Superintendent of Public Instruction; Congressman George (G.K.) Butterfield, United States House of Representatives; Dr. Alton Thompson, Professor and Dean of the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, A & T State University, Greensboro, NC; Dr. Clarence Brown, Executive Director, United States Department of Aging, Washington, DC; Theodis Beck, former North Carolina Secretary of the Department of Corrections (2 terms, James Hunt Administration); Dr. Louie Ross, retired Epidemiologist/Behavioral Research Scientist, Institute for Health, Social and Community Research, Shaw University, Raleigh, NC; Dr. Janice Harper, NCCU Assistant Vice Chancellor for University Programs and E’Vonne Coleman-Cook, Vice President of Marketing Resources Support, Durham Convention & Visitors Bureau. A significant number of the present department’s faculty are our own alumni. They are Professors Davis, Drew, McCain, Laws, Newsome and Rogers.

Sociology has seen its student enrollment increase during the past two years. Currently there are over 128 undergraduate majors and 30 fulltime graduate students. At present, five (5) of our sociology graduates are enrolled in PhD programs at Oklahoma University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, University of Maryland (Baltimore County), Duke University, and North Carolina State University.

Sociology Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society Members 2009:

Florence Batine is a second year student in her last semester of classes and will graduate after defending her thesis which focuses on juvenile recidivism in North Carolina. She presented a paper on Du Bois at the Southern Sociological Society meeting in Richmond, VA last year and received a research award. She is a member of Alpha Chi National College Scholarship Society and the American Association of University Women. This semester Florence received an award for Scholastic Achievement (3.818 GPA) and an Academic Excellence Award.

Porcia Brookshire, originally from Chester, PA, is a preschool teacher at Hope Chapel Preschool in Apex, NC. She is a second year graduate student. After she finishes the graduate program in Sociology, she plans to further her education at Temple University.
Terrence Campbell, a first year graduate student, completed his BA in Sociology from UNC-CH in May 2008. He entered the master’s program in Sociology in Fall 2008. Terrence has maintained academic excellence while pursuing his graduate studies. He plans to become a dentist after finishing his MA in Sociology in 2010.

Pamela Davis, a summa cum laude 2007 NCCU graduate, is in her second semester of graduate study. She has already decided to do her thesis on “The Impact of Alzheimer’s Disease on Care Givers.” She plans to pursue a PhD in Sociology. Her future plans are to teach at the university level, focusing on social policy and gerontology. Pamela is active in numerous local civic organizations and a current member of Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society.

Jo’Van Dixon, a native of Wilmington, NC, graduated from NCCU in 2008 with a BA in Sociology and a minor in Business Management. While in undergraduate school, he was on the Dean’s List and was selected to perform in the CIAA marching band at the NC Governor’s Inauguration. He is a member of the Southern Sociological Society and the North Carolina Sociological Association. Jo’Van’s hobbies and interests include riding motorcycles, marching in the band, plumbing, and understanding family relationships.

Tyfanny Evans, a junior from Durham, NC, is a double major in sociology and public health education. After graduation she plans to gain experience in the areas of STD/HIV prevention and awareness as well as teen pregnancy prevention. Ultimately, she wants to obtain an advanced degree in Public Health and work for the United States Public Health Commissioned Corps. Tyffany is a member of Eta Sigma Gamma and Golden Key Honor Societies. She is president of Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Society.

Dana Greene. Even though Dr. Greene is an Assistant Professor and also serves as the Director of the Sociology Graduate Program, she wanted to join the AKD honor society. Her academic accomplishments are listed on the department faculty and staff page. Dr. Greene swims competitively for the Raleigh Area Masters swim team, enjoys photography, and traveling. She loves walking on the beach and spending time with her husband Bryan, other family, friends, and three dogs, Guido, ben Gurion, and Sampson.

Leslie Hurt, a first year graduate student, finished NCCU with a BA in Sociology in 2008. While at NCCU, Leslie received the Sociology Award for the Highest GPA in his junior and senior year. He recently was given an award for Outstanding Graduate Research Assistant. He plans to pursue a PhD and hopefully return to NCCU as a professor.

Montia McMillan, a first year graduate student, graduated from UNC-Greensboro with a BA in Sociology and a concentration in Criminology. She received numerous academic awards while in undergraduate school. As a first year graduate student, she has continued that trend by receiving an award for academic excellence for maintaining a 4.0 GPA. She is currently a Graduate Assistant for the Department of Housing and Residential Life. Montia is currently doing research for a possible thesis topic dealing with child/youth obesity. She plans to pursue the PhD after finishing NCCU.

Tasha Melvin, now taking her last sociology graduate classes, has chosen to do her thesis on W.E.B. Du Bois: Criminological Thought Prior to the 1920’s. She has presented two papers at the Southern Sociological Society meetings in 2008 and 2009 focusing on W.E.B. Du Bois: Forgotten Criminologist and Sociological Imagination & Disaster Relief. Tasha has received numerous awards and certificates including Graduate Student with the Highest GPA (3.916) this year. She plans to pursue a PhD degree in Sociology.

Micca Pace, a second year graduate student, works as a Research Associate at the NC School of Science & Mathematics. After graduation she would like to teach and continue doing research. She is a member of the American Sociological Association and the American Public Health Association.

Derrell Pettiyaw, a second year graduate student. His thesis will focus on issues and solutions concerning acceptance and equality of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons within the African-American community. He currently volunteers in the Youth Department and Sojourner Truth Homework center at the Monument of Faith Church of God of Prophecy. After graduation he plans to pursue a career in a non-profit organization, eventually starting his own non-profit focusing on his thesis topic.

Mindy Saari has chosen as her thesis topic W.E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier: Pioneering Figures in the Sociology of the African American Family. Mindy taught Principles of Sociology (four courses) Summer/Fall 2008. She presented papers at the Southern Sociological Society meeting and at the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology Conference in 2008. Mindy received a certificate for academic excellence and an award for being the Graduate Student with the Second Highest GPA (3.90) this year.

Denettia Shaw, currently a graduate student in Sociology, received her BA in Sociology from NCCU. She is an Admissions Counselor at Durham Technical Community College and wants to eventually start her own nonprofit for at-risk youth and
teen parents. She also is on the Board of Directors for the NC Chapter on Black American Affairs and works with the Women’s Leadership Initiative. She is a mother of two girls and has been married for ten years. Denettia is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., National Council of Negro Women, Pi Gamma Mu Honor Society and Alpha Kappa Delta Sociology Honor Society. While in undergraduate school, Denettia served as president for the Sociology Club for three years and vice president for AKD and was afforded an opportunity to present a paper at the Mid-South Sociological Association with Dr. Dana Greene.

**Dana Stewart**, an NCCU graduating senior planning to attend graduate school at NCCU, Dana graduated from Durham Technical Community College in 2007. Dana’s academic excellence at DTCC allowed her to receive three Outstanding Achievement Awards, The Hat Ladies Monetary Award, Burger King Scholarship Award, and the South Carolina Two-Year Life Scholarship. She is vice president of Alpha Kappa Delta, a member of the American Sociological Association and the National Association of Social Work. Dana believes in the biblical scripture, “To whom much is given, much is required” and therefore volunteers as a mentor to teenage mothers. She also serves as a community intern advocating for a nonprofit organization that motivates African American males to read to children.

**Nii Tawiah**, a first year graduate student, plans to pursue his education to obtain a PhD. and would like to become a researcher, specializing in rural sociology, demography and poverty. He plans to focus his research on race and poverty in the black belt region of the United States.

**Cassandra Walston**, a second year graduate student, plans to complete her M.A. in December 2009. She graduated from UNC-Greensboro with a BA in Sociology and a BA in Women’s and Gender Studies. She is a member of Golden Key International Honor Society and the graduate representative for Alpha Kappa Delta. She received a certificate for Academic Excellence, a Scholastic Achievement Award (3.875 GPA) and an award for Outstanding Graduate Assistant for Sociology 2100. After graduation from NCCU, Cassandra plans to pursue a PhD in Sociology or Human Development and Family Studies.

**Timothy Wilson**, a graduating senior this semester, is majoring in Sociology. He graduated from Wake Technical Community College (WTCC) with an Associate in Arts Degree in 2007. Timothy is originally from Miami, FL. He is the treasurer of Alpha Kappa Delta. Upon graduating, Timothy will be entering the business sector as the CEO of his own sports and entertainment company.

Unfortunately, inadequate documentation limits a thorough showcasing of our students and alumni at the launching of our website information. In the succeeding months, the department will further update this most important area of interest.

Prepared by Sandra M. Rogers, J.D.
and Members of Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society
September 30, 2009