



# SOCIOLOGY

## THE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

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### FROM CONNECTING ALUMNI TO BECOMING ONE: A SPOTLIGHT FOR KIRSTEN ANDERSEN

As the new academic year gets started, we are saying goodbye to the mastermind behind our fabulous alumni network, Kirsten Andersen. As I took over the alumni relations position, I asked Kirsten to reflect on her time in the position. When appointed, there was no guidebook; instead, she hit the pavement trying anything that came to mind in an attempt to identify and engage our alumni community. She describes the process as "making it up as she went." But eventually, she figured out what it took to build a more connected UIC Sociology.

*"I realized that what our department and alumni community needed was to build a sense of connectedness between them. At that point, the objective of the position became more clear to me; I needed a strategy to engage those few, loyal and consistent alumni who had always supported us, find ways to reach out to and find alumni we had fallen out of touch with, and to connect our alumni and student/faculty communities to one another*



Dr. Kirsten Andersen, Former Alumni GA

Kirsten was steadfast in her attempt to engage the alumni community; hosting alumni panels and setting up mentor relationships. Her favorite was working with undergraduate students in the 490-capstone course (Igniting Sociological Futures). A team worked with the department's Alumni Relations committee to explore ways to highlight some of our magnificent alums. You all may know it as 30 in 30 or "Living Sociology". Through this experience, Kirsten came to see how sociology shapes the professional lives of our alum while watching the passion and hope bubble in our undergraduate students. It is in those moments that Kirsten redefined success.

*"The quality of the conversations --the warmth, passion and genuine connection between alumni--was tremendous. I had been defining our "success" in numbers and had overlooked the value of the connections that were happening. Of course, we want to engage as many alumni as possible, but numbers aren't everything. I know that the people who attended really enjoyed the event and one another, and I realized that our work was meaningful in a different way after that event."*

Kirsten credits much of her success to the collaborative work and support from others in the department. Namely Professors Barbara Risman and Maria Krysan, and the fabulous office staff, Lisa Berube, Tara Williams, Jennifer Michals, and student workers. Their contributions helped Kirsten think more creatively about how to solve problems and build a more unified department. Though Kirsten claims these folks took a chance on her, the success she had in this position suggests that they made a calculated bet. Professor Krysan who worked closely with Kirsten as Department Head for four years, couldn't agree more: "Kirsten was indefatigable in her work on behalf of the department's alumni—after every event or experience, she had 100 more ideas about what to try next. And she was amazing at helping pick one and making it happen. I can't wait to see what she does next as a newly minted PhD!" Kirsten summed up her experience this way:

*"The community of UIC Sociology alumni [are] an exemplary group of humans... UIC sociology alumni are intelligent, diverse, hard-working, creative, thoughtful and willing to help. I have really appreciated the intimate look at this group I've been afforded over the last few years. It has been a ride full of bumps and surprises, but I think we've built some incredible momentum that I'm proud to have been part of creating!"*

Well Kirsten, I think it is safe to say that everyone else is proud of the work you've done too. Between completing your coursework and writing your dissertation, you managed to forge a strong alumni base. Please join in congratulating Kirsten in joining the alumni community she worked so hard to unite!

-Erielle Jones, Alumni Relations



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