



Sociologists for Women in Society

Congratulations! 2018 Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship Winner

2018 Beth B. Hess Award Winner and
Honorable Mention Winner Announced

The Beth B. Hess Award was established in 2005 to support first generation college students who began their academic careers in a community college, faced significant obstacles, are committed to teaching and mentoring other first generation students, and exemplify Beth's commitment to service in both professional fields and in social justice work. Beth Hess was a President of SWS and one of our mentoring award winners; she also was the President of SSSP and Secretary Treasurer of



ASA, and these other organizations join SWS in supporting the Beth Hess Scholar each year. Graduate students in sociology at the dissertation writing stage are invited to apply. In 2018, the committee (Sarah Bruch, chair; Myra Marx Ferree, Mairead Eastin Moloney, MJ Cravens, Nancy Naples and Denise Copelton) faced the challenge of selecting the winner, who receives a \$15,000 scholarship and summer and winter banquet tickets from SWS, plaques and transportation subsidies from SWS and SSSP, and free meeting registration from all three organizations. When there are exceptionally strong candidates whose completion date is near, an Honorable Mention Awardee is also selected.

This year's Beth B. Hess Award winner Melissa Osborne enrolled in night classes in Umpqua Community College in 2008, twelve years after dropping out of school after completing the 8th grade. The only class that fit her work schedule was "The Sociology of Race, Class, and Ethnicity," and it proved a revelation. "For the first time in my life,"

Melissa notes in her application, “I had access to terms that could describe the inequalities and struggles I had witnessed in my community – I was building a sociological framework for understanding and changing the world around me.” Melissa completed her Associates Degree at Umpqua, and enrolled in Reed College, where her senior thesis examined the challenges of prisoner reentry. For her Master’s in Sociology at Chicago, she completed an ethnography of homelessness and social services in the Midwest. Her dissertation project examines the experiences of first generation and low-income college and university students in the U.S.

What impressed the award committee was not just the range and ambition of this research agenda, but Melissa’s determination—in each of these projects—to point her understanding of the problem towards the identification of solutions. What interests her is both the subject populations—ex-prisoners, the homeless, first generation and low-income students—and their experience with different forms of institutional support or intervention. Her work on prisoner re-entry at Reed was crucial in winning grant support for a Reentry Transition Center. Her award winning MA work on the homeless, which was recently published in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, yielded new insights into the ways in which housing policy might influence access to programming and support for different homeless populations. And her current work is informed and enriched by both her own experience and a decade of activism on behalf of first generation and low-income students: at Umpqua, she pioneered a food pantry program; at Reed, she threw her energy into a wide array of campus diversity work and continues to serve as co-chair of the Alumni Board’s Diversity and Inclusion committee; at Chicago, she has served on a variety of student advisory boards focused on diversity, inclusion, and engagement.

Ms. Osborne’s commitment to first generation and low-income students is also evident in her teaching. Indeed, Melissa’s description of an inspirational and dedicated mentor at community college echoes through her own commitments, and through the assessment of her teaching. One of her supervisors at Chicago judges Melissa “the best graduate student teaching assistant I have worked with to date,” adding that she is “a source of support and inspiration for many of the students in my class.” Melissa clearly views her own professional path as one of opportunities rather than obstacles, and as a chance to encourage in others—through her research, her teaching and her social activism—the same interests and passions that have marked her own professional journey. “I am aware of the rarity of my position as a future professor of sociology from a historically underrepresented background with a non-traditional educational trajectory,” she writes, “and look forward to leveraging my position as a means for fostering the success of my students and using my current and future academic work as a springboard for

generating new programming and policy designed to increase access to higher education for unrepresented and marginalized communities.”

Melissa’s research, teaching, and social commitments—all animated by a fierce commitment to the disadvantaged--capture the spirit of Beth Hess. We are delighted to honor her and her work with the 2018 Beth Hess Scholarship.

The 2018 Honorable mention goes to Katherine McCabe. Katie started her academic career at Brookhaven Community College outside of Dallas. Her mother died shortly before she graduated from high school, and as a primary caregiver and low income, first generation student, she was not yet “ready to roll” academically. As she describes it, “My community college years were formative in ways that I could never have expected. It was at community college that I learned to appreciate education and grew into a thoughtful and critically engaged scholar.” She transferred to Southern Methodist University, threw herself into research on domestic violence and became a community educator on healthy relationships and intimate partner violence. Her return to academia was to a Master’s program at Fordham, where she worked with Jeanne Flavin both academically and as an activist with National Advocates for Pregnant Women.

Kate is currently completing her PhD at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she has become an advocate and instructor for low income, first generation students. She offers both recognition in the classroom for the complex challenges of their lives and advocacy outside the classroom. Inspired by Prof. Flavin, her current research at UIC includes a collaborative study of sexual minority women faced with unintended and unwanted pregnancies, her own interview project with midwives, doulas and other birth attendants about the ideology of choice and the practices enforcing division into “good” and “bad” mothers, and a dissertation addressing how state actors in disparate systems build alliances to regulate low-resourced, typically non-white, substance-using pregnant women. Her article in *Social Science and Medicine*, “Mothercraft: Birth work and the making of neoliberal mothers” is well worth reading, and we do not doubt that we will see similarly insightful, engaged scholarship in coming years. Kate had a NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant this past year and is also an active member of SWS and SSSP, and served on the student editorial board of *Social Problems* from 2015-16. We congratulate her on behalf of both organizations.

We would like to acknowledge the awards committee:

Sarah Bruch (Chair) ; Myra Marx Ferree, Mairead Eastin Moloney, MJ Cravens, Nancy Naples and Denise Copelton.