



2020 SWS Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship Award Winner and Honorable Mention Awardee Announced

Celebrate with the Awardees on July 13, 2020

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The Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship Award was established in 2005 to support first generation college students who began their academic careers in a community college, have faced significant obstacles, are committed to teaching and mentoring other first-generation students, and exemplify Beth's commitment to professional service and social justice work. Beth B. Hess was a President of SWS and one of our mentoring award winners; she also was the President of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) and Secretary/Treasurer of ASA, and these other organizations join SWS in supporting the Beth B. Hess Scholar each year. Graduate students in sociology at the dissertation writing stage are invited to apply. In 2020, the subcommittee (Sarah Bruch, Chair; Myra Marx Ferree, Mairead Eastin Moloney, Nancy Naples, Elizabeth Seton Mignacca, Toni Calasanti, and Gul Marshall) faced the challenge of selecting the winner, who notably receives an \$18,000 scholarship, a certificate from SWS, one-year complimentary SWS membership, a \$500 travel grant to attend SWS's 2021 Winter Meeting and a \$500 travel grant to attend the SWS Summer Meeting in 2021. SSSP honors the awardee with a one-year membership and will also be providing a \$300 travel award for future academic meeting travel. ASA will provide an ASA membership through the end of 2021 as well as a \$500 travel grant to off-set the cost of attending the next in-person ASA Annual Meeting. When there is more than one exceptionally strong candidate, an Honorable Mention Awardee is also selected.



This year's Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship Award winner is Brandi Perri. Brandi is a self-described third-generation janitor who has overcome enormous personal challenges to become a rising sociology star and exemplary teacher and mentor. Brandi had two unsuccessful attempts at starting college before she attended Austin Community College (ACC). At ACC, Brandi found connection with other students who, like herself, were working full time even as they yearned to learn. She also encountered a faculty member who, despite Brandi's struggles with her coursework, "never made me feel like a D student." Instead, Brandi recounts, she "made me feel like a valued student, even if I was not a model student." Like Brandi, her professor was juggling multiple

jobs, even as she worked at ACC. Previously, it had not occurred to Brandi that someone with a similar background could pursue a position in academia.

Inspired to tap into her own potential and consider new possibilities, Brandi transferred to SUNY Purchase to finish her Bachelor's degree. At SUNY Purchase, Brandi discovered sociology. Using her new insights and methodological tools, she could finally explore the questions of identity and inequality that fascinated and challenged her. Brandi quickly recognized that the approach of intersectionality was central to both her life and to her research. Brandi's teaching and research agendas are guided by two central questions: "How do our intersectional identities shape how we interact with the world around us? And what does this tell us about inequality?"

Pursuing a doctoral degree in Sociology at UMass Amherst has allowed Brandi to delve deeply into these questions. Her dissertation "Born to the Broom: The Relationship between Identity Work among Janitors" "considers how the interactions among a diverse janitorial crew at a public school reflect the larger institutional environment when services are being privatized." Her central research questions are: (1) What are the day-to-day experiences of janitors in educational institutions? (2) Through what processes are social boundaries produced and maintained among janitors? and (3) How do janitors' experiences and relationships with each other in the workplace reflect the political climate within the educational system, their union, and the larger culture? To explore these questions, Brandi is collecting ethnographic data, conducting interviews, and performing content analysis of formal documents from unions and the corporation. Her work builds on previous research on service work but importantly, considers how race, gender, and social class inform experiences in this "invisible" profession. Impressively, Brandi has already spent over 2000 hours working on-site with the janitorial crew and completed fifteen interviews. She is well on her way to completing her dissertation, and also has multiple publications under review.

In addition to her innovative and important research agenda, Brandi is an exceptionally committed teacher. In fact, she has won multiple awards in recognition of her teaching, including the SAGE Teaching Innovation Award. During her time at UMass Amherst she has been recognized with both the Best Teaching Award (2019) and Best Teaching Assistant Award (2018). As Brandi notes, when she decided to pursue a Ph.D., she vowed to use her education to make campus experiences more accessible for working-class students, through teaching and mentorship. She has already designed and taught ten classes at UMass Amherst and Greenfield Community College. She uses her own experiences as a queer student from a working-class background to inform her pedagogy. Brandi supports her students as they guide one another through deeper explorations of the course materials. Using her own experiences as a framework and example, she encourages her students to think critically about their own experiences and biases in relation to the narratives and research they analyze.

Brandi's teaching, research, and mentorship truly embody the spirit of Beth Hess. We have no doubt that Brandi, like Beth, will change lives, inspire the next generation of sociologists, and engage in activism and research that will erode deep social inequalities. We are delighted to honor her and her work with the 2020 Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship.



The Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship Subcommittee recognizes Sandra Portocarrero with the 2020 Honorable Mention. Sandra began her academic trajectory at Berkeley City College (BCC), an institution that reflects the San Francisco Bay Area's ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity. Without any family support, she worked for years at various restaurants before transferring to the University of California, Berkeley. She is currently a doctoral student in Sociology at Columbia University. In her three-article dissertation, Sandra examines diversity, equity, and inclusion management practices in organizations, focusing on processes. She seeks to understand what people talk about when they talk

about diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how this meaning making process has an impact on organizational behavior.

Along with these areas of focus, she maintains a strong interest in the relationship between education and inequality. At Columbia, Sandra co-chaired the Graduate Students of Color Alliance, and founded the Intimate Conversations with Women in Academia series in the Sociology department, a once a semester meeting between professors and graduate students who identify as women. The subcommittee is confident that her personal experience, scholarship, and public advocacy, reflect the characteristics of the Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship Award and Berkeley City College's belief "in the power of education as the engine for cultivating a democratic society, where the hopes and dreams of the community are nurtured."

SWS will be honoring Brandi Perri and Sandra Portocarrero via a Virtual Awards Presentation. Pre-registration is required. Please click [here](#) to register for the Bess B. Hess Memorial Scholarship Award Announcement taking place on July 13, 2020 at 1:00 pm Eastern Time. If you are interested in making a gift to support the Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship, please contact Barret Katuna, Executive Officer, at swseo.barretkatuna@outlook.com. You can also make a gift online, by clicking [here](#).