

## Arresting Developments:

# Report Takes a Hard Look at NYS Misdemeanor Arrest Trends

Psychology Professor Preeti Chauhan has raised a few eyebrows with the report “*Trends in Misdemeanor Arrests in New York*,” which was unveiled on Oct. 28. To that end, she had considerable assistance from a handful of student researchers who helped make the report possible and assure its impact.

The misdemeanor justice report looked at arrest data from 1980-2013 and found that while crime in the state, especially New York City, has dropped dramatically, misdemeanor arrests have soared, especially among young minority men. “Taken in a historical context, these data trends represent a profound shift in our city,” said President Jeremy Travis. “Crime is down to historic lows, felony arrests have dropped in half, yet the rate of misdemeanor arrests has tripled.”

Travis added that through an in-depth analysis of the arrest trend, researchers hoped to “promote an important policy discussion about this aspect of our approach to crime and justice.”

Chauhan, the study’s principal investigator, said that an informal canvass

of faculty produced the names of four students who would play important roles as the research evolved. Ervin Balazon is a graduate student who had served as an intern in President Travis’s office, while Megan Welsh, Adam Fera and Evan Misshula are all students in the doctoral program in criminal justice.

“Each of the student researchers brought special skill sets to the project,” said Chauhan. For example, she noted, Welsh is a “super-sophisticated researcher and an excellent writer.”

“I joined the team at its inception about two years ago,” Welsh recalled, “after I had completed fieldwork for my dissertation on prisoner reentry. Since my scholarly expertise is on this ‘back’ end of the justice system—prison and what comes after—working on a project focused on the ‘front’ end really helped me to think more expansively about what contact with the criminal justice system means.”

In addition to New York City data, the research team examined arrest trends in New York State’s five other major



Megan Welsh



From left to right are Richard Aborn, president of the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City; Police Commissioner William Bratton; Professor Preeti Chauhan, and President Jeremy Travis.

cities—Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers—as well as the rest of the state outside the urban centers. “Originally, we weren’t going to include upstate cities,” Chauhan noted, “but they were added at the suggestion of [NYPD] Commissioner Bratton.”

Using data from the NYPD, the state Division of Criminal Justice Services and the U.S. Census, researchers found that in New York City and the other five major New York cities, significant increases in the number and rate of misdemeanor arrests occurred from 1980 to 2013, with young minority men being most affected by the increase. In New York City, the researchers found, there was significant variation by precincts in terms of whether, and to what extent, they experienced increases in misdemeanor arrests.

Before the report was released, it was presented to relevant agency heads for their feedback. “The meeting with the stakeholders played an important role in shaping our analyses,” Chauhan said.

Welsh, who will soon be relocating to California for a teaching position at

San Diego State University, said her involvement with the project “really broadened my thinking on the criminal justice system. We’ve rightly paid a lot of attention to serious, felony-level crimes and how they are processed, but in terms of the overall scope of the public’s contact with the justice system, felony arrests are a relative drop in the bucket compared to very low-level encounters with the police, such as stops, summonses, and misdemeanor arrests.”

What makes the misdemeanor justice project so exciting, Welsh said, “are the conversations about public safety and police-community relations that it has sparked in reference to these sorts of encounters—specifically, about how quality might be emphasized over quantity in terms of police contact with the public.”

The study was funded by a \$272,000 grant from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. The full report is available online at [http://johnjay.jjay.cuny.edu/files/web\\_images/10\\_28\\_14\\_TOCFINAL.pdf](http://johnjay.jjay.cuny.edu/files/web_images/10_28_14_TOCFINAL.pdf)

# Beyond Mere Prejudice:

## *Does Dehumanization Affect Justice Outcomes?*

Is there a distinction between prejudice and dehumanization, and can disproportionately dehumanizing accused criminals of different races lead to disparities in criminal justice outcomes?

Those are among the questions being investigated by two John Jay faculty members—Assistant Professors Charles B. Stone of the Department of Psychology and Karin Martin of the Department of Public Management—as part of a \$27,000 CUNY Collaborative Research Grant.

“What I think is very interesting about this is finding instances of prejudice versus dehumanization that might impact [legal] decision-making, the punishment [suspects] might get,” said Stone.

In a recent proposal outlining the project, Martin and Stone note a distinction between prejudice and dehumanization of certain groups of

people that transcend mere semantics. Their proposal cites previous research that shows evidence of cognitive differences in the brain scans of those who are more likely to dehumanize a group. Prejudice is a response more rooted in emotions, they contend.

“The traditional view of prejudice is a dislike of somebody or some group based on a more emotional response; dehumanization is actually a cognitively different mechanism that results in someone failing to recognize members of a certain group or race as having any human qualities whatsoever,” explained Martin, who, like Stone, has taught at John Jay since 2013.

World War II provides a classic example of dehumanization being utilized by both sides for propaganda purposes, Stone pointed out. “We weren’t fighting Germans; we were fighting Krauts. We weren’t actually fighting people.”

The researchers hope their project will show whether dehumanization results in harsher punishments for members of certain groups. “My main motivation [for pursuing this research] is the horrible, perennial disparities we see in the criminal justice system in terms of arrests, bail and imprisonment,” said Martin, who has examined the role of racial bias in police decisions to make arrests or use force in Los Angeles.

Dehumanization, she added, can have “fatal consequences in daily life.”

The three-phase study will incorporate on-line surveys about prejudice and dehumanization that will help attract a cross-section of respondents.

Stone and Martin hope to show that black defendants are the most likely targets of dehumanization, and that dehumanized offenders of some races receive harsher penalties than members of other groups convicted of the same crimes.



Assistant Professor Karin Martin



Assistant Professor Charles B. Stone

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## *‘Strength in Numbers’ Offers a New Model for Developing Undergraduate Researchers*



Professor Ric Curtis

A research approach pioneered by John Jay College that uses “strength in numbers” to generate information about drug use in students’ neighborhoods could have a positive effect on efforts to involve larger numbers of students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs, according to a recent paper by Professor Ric Curtis of the Department of Anthropology.

The approach gets its name from the large amount of data compiled by students who survey and conduct interviews with respondents about perceptions of drug use in their neighborhoods.

More than 700 John Jay students in 23 course sections have conducted over 12,000 interviews with family, friends and neighbors in nearly every New York City neighborhood since the project was expanded in 2012 to include other disciplines such as mathematics and science, according to the paper, “*Strength in Numbers: A New Model for Undergraduate Research Training and Education in The Social and Behavioral Sciences.*”

The student researchers administer a 35-question survey to two respondents, who are then asked to recruit two more subjects, who then also take the

survey under researchers’ supervision to ensure the integrity of the interview subject chain, Curtis said. Each student must also conduct three unstructured, in-depth interviews and compile all of the findings in an ethnographic report, he added.

Curtis said the project has been a popular one with students, and has increased their interactions with peers and professors. “They want to talk about the findings,” he said. “They are hungry to participate in some kind of intellectually engaging activity. This project allows students to engage in an intellectually satisfying enterprise.”

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# Seeking Industrial Application of 'Greener Chemistry' Approaches

A John Jay College chemistry professor is conducting "greener chemistry" research to design more abundant materials that would replace expensive and scarce precious-metal compounds used in the production of sustainable energy.

Assistant Professor Guoqi Zhang, a member of the Department of Sciences, described his "extremely complex" work in a recent paper titled, "Non-Precious Metal Catalytic Asymmetric Reduction of Unsaturated Bonds: A Supermolecular Approach."

His team's work is being funded with a \$55,000 grant from the American Chemical Society, as well as a \$30,000 CUNY Collaborative Research Grant in Science and Engineering. The CUNY grant program aims to increase collaboration between researchers at the University's 23 colleges.

"We are developing technology for future biomass conversions to get energy, and this is connected to the effort to develop sustainable energy sources," Zhang explained.

The China-born chemist said that the asymmetric catalytic reduction process involves metal complexes with organic components. These earth-abundant metals, which include copper, cobalt and iron, are utilized as a catalyst for reductions of biomass-derived chemicals that might be used to produce sustainable energy, Zhang said.

The problem with these traditional metal catalysts is their use of precious metals that are expensive and finite in supply, Zhang noted, which prevents them from being used on an industrial scale.

Zhang and a team of six students from John Jay and the CUNY Graduate Center are developing non-precious metals that will play the same role in the asymmetric catalytic reduction process as precious metals do. "The goal is to develop materials based on these [precious] metals," he said.

If this process can be perfected, it would be more cost-effective and would pave the way "for a more sustainable way to produce new biofuels and chemicals," said Zhang, a John Jay faculty member since 2013, who began this project as a post-doctoral fellow at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico.

"It's greener chemistry because a lot of energy is used to extract the precious metals from the earth," he added.

A recent honoree of the American Chemical Society who has reams of published research to his credit, Zhang has lent his expertise on metallurgy to the law enforcement field as well: He and his team are adapting chemicals with fluorescent properties to use in the detection and identification of toxic metals not only in the environment but in the human body.



Professor Guoqi Zhang

"The advantage of using fluorescence is we can do imaging and observe color changes or intensity which can indicate whether or not the metal is toxic, and we can measure the concentration," Zhang noted. The resulting process would make identification quicker, more portable and nearly pinpoint accurate, he added.

## 'Strength in Numbers'

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The "strength in numbers" approach might also help increase the numbers of students who choose to enter STEM programs—by exposing students who might not ordinarily enter those disciplines to the basic research procedures that are part and parcel of STEM, Curtis noted.

"Students who have difficulty in math don't have to do much math, but they do gain exposure to statistical analysis. It exposes them to a variety of disciplines—anthropology, sociology, criminology, criminal justice,

psychology—and this reduces anxiety and increases confidence," Curtis pointed out.

Plans are underway to make the vast amount of data available beyond the John Jay community through a Web-based clearinghouse that would provide access to anyone interested, Curtis said, adding that the National Institutes of Health have expressed interest in the research model.

"Our step-wise model...is designed to cultivate engagement in meaningful

research and stimulate research interest for subsequent coursework and individual study," Curtis notes in the paper. "While wholly consistent with national concerns about science and technology education, it takes us beyond STEM to a new model of pedagogy based on concerns about how best to teach research and develop new ways to improve our education and training about many of the burning issues of America's urban neighborhoods."

### Comments? Questions? Suggestions?

Send them to Daniel Stageman,  
Director of Research Operations,  
Office for Advancement of Research,  
Room 601 BMW.  
e-mail: [dstageman@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:dstageman@jjay.cuny.edu)

# GRANTS UPDATE

**STEPHEN HANDELMAN** (Center on Media, Crime and Justice), \$199,988 from the Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation, for a “Reporting and Training Program for Journalists Covering Issues Facing the Mentally Ill and their Involvement in the Criminal Justice System.”

**ANN JACOBS** (Prisoner Reentry Institute), \$3,000 from the Harry J. Brown Jr. Foundation, for the Work Group on New York City Housing Authority Permanent Exclusions.

**DAVID KENNEDY** (Center for Crime Prevention and Control), \$366,666.67 from the Pritzker Foundation, for the project “Reconciliation and Truth-Telling in Chicago: Driving Real Change between the Chicago Police Department and Alienated Chicago Communities. Also, \$100,000 from Jackson County, Mo., for “Reducing Serious Violence in Kansas City, Missouri.” Also, \$376,846.25 from the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, on behalf of Birmingham, Ala., for “Reducing Serious Violence in Birmingham, Alabama.”

**BILAL KHAN** (Mathematics and Computer Science), \$22,198 from the National Institutes of Health, via the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, to study “Injection Risks Networks in Rural Puerto Rico.”

**EMILY McDONALD** (Anthropology), \$24,369.10 from the National Institutes of Health, via the Regents of the University of California, for “Countering Young Adult Tobacco Marketing in Bars.”

**REBECCA WEISS** (Psychology), \$4,711 from the American Psychology-Law Society, for a study of “The Effect of Language and Culture: Appropriate Normative Data in a Hispanic Sample.”

**PHILIP YANOS** (Psychology), \$11,016 from the U.S. Department of Education, via Rutgers University, for “Treating Hidden Barriers to Employment: Integrated Treatment for PTSD in Supported Employment.”

## Woolf at the Door:

### *Professor Pease Scores with Literary Companion Volume*



Professor Allison Pease

Properly appreciating Virginia Woolf’s landmark novel *To The Lighthouse* is no easy feat, but Professor Allison Pease has helped readers meet that challenge, aided by a multinational array of Woolf scholars who contributed to Pease’s latest book, *The Cambridge Companion to To The Lighthouse*.

Pease, a British Modernist by specialty, was recruited by Cambridge University Press to edit the collection of essays after having reviewed a sample contribution for the publishing house. Little did she know at the time that she was about to be appointed John Jay’s interim Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Despite the demands imposed on her personal and professional life by the 18-month literary project and the deanship, Pease found it hard to say no, and says she has no regrets about the daunting double duty.

“It was a fun project, and Cambridge is certainly one of the best publishing houses in English literature,” said Pease. “And, of course, I was honored to be associated with the scholars who contributed, some of whom I consider

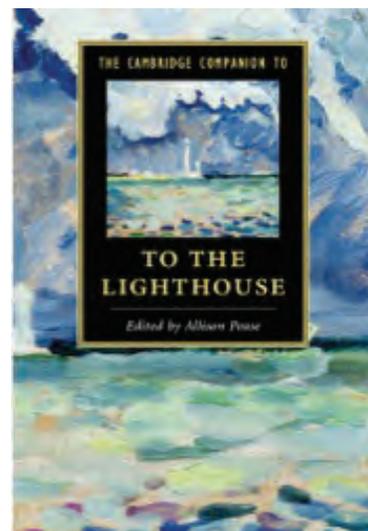
my scholarly idols.”

Pease solicited the scholars who contributed essays to *The Cambridge Companion*, noting that “some needed to be sold on the project, and some turned it down.” Still, with the formidable publishing clout of Cambridge to back her up, she was able to recruit a baker’s dozen Woolf scholars from the United States and abroad, including her English department colleague, Assistant Professor Jean Mills.

The contributors analyze *To The Lighthouse* from a variety of perspectives, including the use of language and form; time as a protagonist; generational differences; social class; feminism and gender; and, from Mills, the novel’s critical heritage.

“The contributors are happy with the book,” Pease observed, “and I’m confident that people will find this book incredibly useful.”

The book’s long gestation proved a boon to Dominika Szybisty, a young McNair Scholar whom Pease has been mentoring for the past two years. Pease was concerned about finding



time for the demanding editing assignment, particularly citation-checking, so she asked Szybisty, an English major, to do it. “She was outstanding,” said Pease, who made sure that the finished book included a glowing acknowledgement for Szybisty, a graduating senior who is going on to a doctoral program in English.

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### Coming Soon...

*50 Years of Research*—a publication highlighting significant scholarly and creative works that helped shape the college and made it a leader in educating for justice.