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Caleb Govoruhk

Cgovoruhk@Radford.Edu

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Two of Radford University's students and one faculty member presented at The Southern Sociological Society's 2015 Annual Conference in New Orleans, La., on March 26.

Dr. Lawrence Eppard, an assistant professor of sociology and Deryk Jackson and Madeleine Reda, both seniors majoring in sociology, presented the preliminary findings on their paper, titled "Status and Individualism" in New Orleans last month.

"The Southern Sociological Society is a major regional sociological society in the U.S. and their conferences regularly include presentations from leading scholars in the field," said Eppard.

Both Jackson and Reda assist Eppard with research projects through The Department of Sociology's Center for Social and Cultural Research.

"Madeleine (Reda) is assisting me through her sociology internship, while Deryk (Jackson) is employed as a work study through the Center for Social and Cultural Research and is assigned to work with me as a research assistant," said Eppard.

"They are both involved in recruiting participants, interviewing them, transcribing the interviews and analyzing the data."

Jackson did not always desire to major in sociology, he said. Instead, it was a decision that he made after taking courses with specific professors.

“I took my first sociology class with Dr. Wisecup,” said Jackson. “She was the first step in me becoming a sociology major. I loved the way she taught class, and the information that was presented opened my eyes to a whole new world of ideologies, theories and concepts.”

“After that, I just fell in love with the department and the subject,” said Jackson. “I think it is amazing how sociology can shape and answer a lot of societal problems that we face in our everyday lives, or at least make a person think differently on a matter. I can say that sociology has really changed and shaped the way I think about a lot of things, and I think that’s for the better.”

“The project examines the relationship between status and poverty/inequality attribution ideologies, examining how low-status workers both reproduce and resist dominant American ideologies relating to poverty and inequality,” said Eppard.

“We interview low status individuals and our focus is to see if they are as individualistic as people of higher social economic statuses,” said Jackson. “So far, our preliminary findings conclude that even though our subjects are of low status and provide many examples of structural reasoning behind some of our economic problems, they still answer very individualistically.”

Both Jackson and Reda will be graduating in a few weeks, not only with diplomas, but with high hopes for their futures.

“I (have) always wanted to go into a non-profit organization, so I could be a part of a place that gives back,” said Jackson. “I started volunteering at home at a non-profit that worked to help persons living with HIV/AIDS with things like medications co-pays, housing and transportation. Until that experience, I was totally unaware of a non-profit that specialized in such an area. I plan to continue my work in non-profits, same area, and eventually get my Master’s (Degree) in public health with a concentration in epidemiology, for the opportunity to advance my career further up the ladder.”

According to Eppard, their project will be finished over the course of the next year, and will be submitted to a scholarly sociology journal for publication. The trip to New Orleans was funded by Radford University’s Sociology Department, the Office of Undergraduate Research and the Scholar-Citizen Initiative.

“I have always been a generous guy, because I believe that if we all gave a little help to somebody who needs it, then the world would be a better place,” concluded Jackson.