



Friday, February 1, 2002

Racial profiling topic of Feb. 7 colloquium

Albert J. Meehan, associate professor of sociology and director of OU's criminal justice program, will be the featured speaker at the next President's Colloquium Series event.

Meehan will discuss racial profiling on Thursday, Feb. 7, at 11:30 a.m. in the Oakland Center. His lecture also is part of Oakland University's African-American Celebration 2002.

Racial profiling is a controversial and complex subject that in recent years has gained considerable local and national attention. Meehan's talk, "Racial Profiling and the Police," will focus primarily on the issue of "Driving While Black" and its emergence as a social problem in the 1990's.

Defining and measuring the nature and extent of racial profiling has posed an important challenge to researchers, law enforcement executives and the community. Meehan will discuss current research approaches to studying this problem and present his own unique approaches to this line of research developed in cooperation with the police.

This research, conducted with colleagues and students from Oakland University, involves the analysis of automated computer records of police inquiries from patrol cars and official police records and outcomes. This data is correlated with roadway composition data collected for the same time period. The research found disproportionate surveillance and stopping of African Americans occurring as they drove through predominately white areas, strongly suggesting that racial profiling is sensitive to race and place.

"Simply accusing the police of racism misses the important underlying structural forces that are manifested by profiling behavior," Meehan said. "Existing patterns of residential segregation in communities factor into police behavior and decision-making in complex ways that are missed in the current debates that focus on the officer's motivation."

Meehan will discuss the implications of this research for the solutions typically proposed to address this problem, such as mandatory recording of traffic stops, the installation of video cameras in patrol cars and cultural sensitivity training for the police.

"Focusing on individual attitudes and behaviors will not solve a problem that has deep roots in residential living patterns and community expectations of the police," Meehan said.

The President's Colloquium Series at Oakland University was established in 1995 to showcase achievements of Oakland University researchers, to promote communication and collaboration among scientists and to recognize the outstanding work of Nobel Class scientists. The next series presentation will be March 13, when Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Virinder Moudgil will present breakthroughs in his research on breast cancer.

These events are open to the public, but reservations are required. To make a reservation, call (248) 370-4648

SUMMARY

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