



# Lehigh Valley Research Consortium Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2010

## Message from the Director

Dear Friends,

Summer is a time of renewal and growth in nature but also for the LVRC - our community-based information system has grown to include indicators from 2003 through 2008, with 2002 and 2009 data available in some areas. In addition, over the last several months the LVRC has released several studies of the Lehigh Valley and surrounding regions as we have engaged in intensive community-based research and service-learning projects.

In mid-December, we released our second annual *State of the Lehigh Valley, Community Trends at a Glance Report*. This report considers the current economic downturn in light of trends in education, public safety and public health. In February, we released a study of the Wall Street West – WIRED initiative. The report analyzed the extent to which this federally funded program increased funding for workforce development and training in a ten county region in Eastern PA. We include a summary of major findings inside this newsletter. A full copy of the report is also available on our website, <http://www.lehighvalleyresearch.org>. Also on our website is an update to our 2007 *Gambling Behaviors and Perceptions* study. In 2009, with the Sands Casino open, we found that more residents than in 2007 supported gaming in the Lehigh Valley and more optimism about its impact on the quality of life in the region.

In addition to community-based research projects, with the support of the LVRC, faculty and students from our local colleges and universities have partnered with local non-profits to support programs and services, while incorporating these experiences into classroom instruction. In this edition we focus on a management class at Muhlenberg College, which worked with Valley Youth House to develop a training program for respite providers serving children with autism.

Visit our website to examine trends across a wide variety of socio-economic issues affecting our municipalities, counties and school districts.

Regards,

Michele Moser Deegan, Ph.D.  
*Director Lehigh Valley Research Consortium*  
*Associate Professor Political Science*  
*Muhlenberg College*

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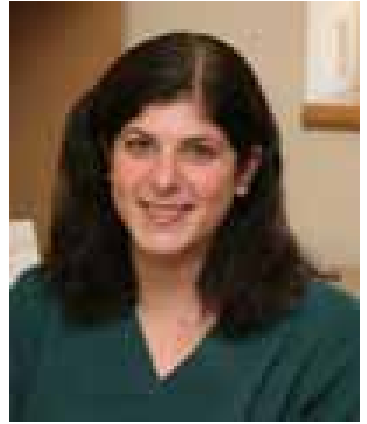
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## Faculty Spotlight - Dr. Debra Wetcher-Hendricks

Dr. Wetcher-Hendricks is an Associate Professor and the Department Chair in Sociology at Moravian College. Her specific area of expertise is social research, specifically quantitative analysis. As a member of the LVRC Executive Board, she uses this knowledge to assist with database organization and for statistical applications of data.

At Moravian College, Dr. Wetcher-Hendricks regularly teaches Basic Sociological Research and Advanced Research Methods as well as other topical courses including Sociology of Gender, Media Technology and Society, and Social Controversies. She holds memberships in the American Sociological Association and the International Chinese Statistical Association. In addition, her biography has appeared in the 2008 through the 2010 editions of Marquis Who's Who in America, 2008-2009 and the 2009-2010 the Marquis Who's Who of American Women and the 2010 edition of Marquis Who's Who in the World.



In addition to her mention in these publications, Dr. Wetcher-Hendricks' work has received attention in journals such as Teaching Sociology, Academic Exchange Quarterly, and College Teaching. Her most notable publication, a justification and derivation of a correction for attenuation for part and partial correlation coefficients adjusted for covarying error scores, appeared in Psychological Methods. Currently, Dr. Wetcher-Hendricks is writing a textbook, tentatively entitled, Analyzing Quantitative Data: An Introduction for Social Scientists, to be released by Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Dr. Wetcher-Hendricks' was raised in the Lehigh Valley. Prior to acquiring her teaching position at Moravian College, she obtained her M.A. in Social Relations and her Ph.D. in Applied Social Research from Lehigh University. She held various jobs in the community, ranging from a news assistant at the Morning Call to a visiting professor at Northampton Community College. Her most substantial contribution to community affairs outside of the academic realm is her membership on the Northampton County Children Youth and Families Advisory Board.

## Building Collaboration and Community Through Service-learning Courses Context and Community: Applying the Principles of Management

Through a LVRC course development grant for Fall 2009, Muhlenberg College's Principles of Management classes taught by Dr. Trish Boyles had the opportunity to create a context for understanding what they were learning in class and help out the Allentown-based Valley Youth House organization. The Valley Youth House "provides a first line of defense for troubled young people and their families. Protection from abuse, neglect and family disintegration is achieved through a strategy involving prevention, crisis intervention, and long term help." In partnering with Muhlenberg, the VYH was looking for assistance in developing a training program for respite providers serving children with autism.

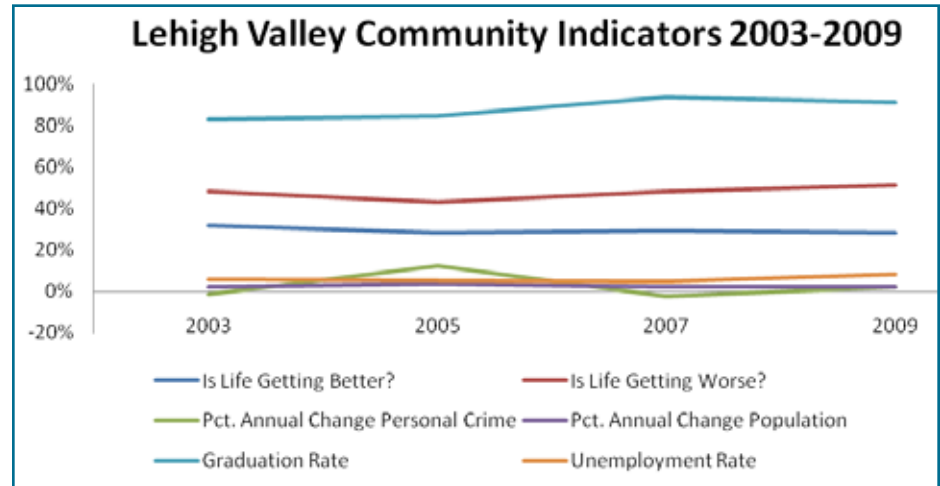
Management students began by exploring the research on training programs and training program development. Small groups conducted needs assessments to determine what was working for VYH's current training program and what changes needed to be implemented. Then each section of Dr. Boyles' class was divided into subunits, including Communication, Logistics, Content, and Evaluation. Each subunit had a manager that was responsible for updating other unit managers on the progress of their "department." This not only encouraged student initiative, but also created a context in which students could better understand and apply theories of management

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## Community-Based Information System

The LVRC's community-based information system provides a multidimensional view of the Lehigh Valley over time. In this graph, we combined data on perceptions of the quality of life in the Lehigh Valley with measures of the economy, public safety, and education. This quick comparison provides a snapshot of the region and helps us to better understand changes in quality of life perceptions in the Lehigh Valley.

According to survey data from a random sample of residents taken by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion from 2003-2009, the quality of life in the Lehigh Valley has declined since 2005. In 2005, 43% of residents felt that life in the Valley was getting worse, but by 2009, that number jumped to 51%. Conversely, in 2003, 32% of residents believed life in the Valley was getting better, dropping to 28% in 2009. Much of the explanation for these trends may be due to the deep recession, which began to affect the region early by 2008.



As shown here, the average unemployment rate for the Lehigh Valley was a low of 4.4% in 2007, climbing to 8.4% by 2009 and 9.8% in March 2010. Other trend data suggest that the region has held its own during this tumultuous period with no clear links to these perceptions. For example, trends in high school graduation rates from 2003 to 2009 show improvement, peaking in 2007 at nearly 94%, overall a 10% increase during this period. However, the reported change in the personal offenses (i.e., assault and robbery) spiked from 2003 to 2005, a 12.3% increase. Only four of the 25 municipalities reporting crime statistics to the State experienced a decline in reported personal offenses from 2003 to 2005. It's interesting to note that while crime increased in 2005 the unemployment rate was low and citizens expressed that they were generally satisfied with the direction of life in the Lehigh Valley, suggesting the little connection between crime and quality of life perceptions. It is also possible that the lack of a link between quality of life perceptions and crime is due to the fact that in general, the Lehigh Valley is a low crime region compared to other metropolitan areas of the state. The connection of perception about quality of life and crime may be changing however, particularly in our townships and boroughs.

The percentage change in personal crime from 2008 to 2009 reached a high of 20%, even with a decline in reported offenses in our three cities, as 12 reporting townships and boroughs saw increasing rates of reported personal offenses. Lastly, concerns about the effects of an increase in our region's population appear to have little, if any, overall impact on these indicators when looking at the region as a whole. Population in the Lehigh Valley increased steadily from 2003 to 2005 when the change in annual population peaked at 3.4%; most of this growth occurred in the several townships such as Lower Macungie and Forks. These data also suggest no clear link between population, crime and graduation rates as school districts have managed to meet Annual Yearly Progress graduation goals even though school district populations have increased. For more information contact Ryan Shollengerger, Lehigh University Community Fellow at [rts209@lehigh.edu](mailto:rts209@lehigh.edu).

### Mission Statement

The Lehigh Valley Research Consortium (LVRC) combines the expertise of researchers from institutions of higher education and community partners in the Lehigh Valley to examine various issues (eg., political, economic, social, health and environmental) in a regional context.

Through its efforts the LVRC functions as a community based information resource for Lehigh Valley governments, not-for-profits, businesses, and citizens. The LVRC operates within the administrative structure of the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges.

## Current Research

### WALL STREET WEST IMPACT ASSESSMENT COMPLETED

The collaborative effort between the Lehigh Valley Research Consortium and the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development, located in Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, PA, was completed in February, 2010. The research team, specifically eight faculty and research professionals along with four students, completed the impact assessment study of the Department of Labor's WIRED (Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development) initiative known as Wall Street West (WSW). The task was to assess the collective impact of 52 grants designed to strengthen the financial service-oriented competencies in the ten county region (Berks, Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill and Wayne) constituting the WSW area.

Researchers used both quantitative and qualitative measures within the context of eight methodologies (four surveys, interviews, focus groups, document review, and archival data) to evaluate the grants' impact on the economic, educational, and workforce development status of the region's financial service industry. The assessment effort was complicated by the development of two hurdles within the early progress of the WSW initiative: the lack of state funding for the planned fiber optics infrastructure that was to concurrently lure new businesses (potential employers) to the area, and the devastation of the economic recession. Out of necessity, WSW subsequently adjusted their strategic plan and re-aligned their funding criteria to place greater emphasis on workforce development and educational initiatives. WSW launched a complex web of programs that focused upon bolstering the human talent, innovative environment, and regional collaborations to strengthen and ready the region's financial service workforce.

Results suggest that this realignment yielded positive results on the workforce talent in the area, but the deeper economic indicators of progress were still bleak, as minimal growth of jobs and businesses greatly limited the full use of the developed talent. Still, evidence suggests the grants created many programs that have moderated the degree of setback within the industry and will assist in hastening the potential rebound effort the industry is mustering. Additionally, these educational and training efforts have assisted in strengthening applicants for financial service jobs hired within other industries (e.g., accountants and financial analysts). The documented challenges to continue the momentum include a long term view of assessing the impact and sustainability practices for each of the grant programs. Toward the latter issue, the research team created a sustainability framework that measured the degree to which some of the early completed grants embraced and implemented key principles of sustainability.

The details of this rich, multi-faceted investigatory study should provide constructive guidance for future efforts by grantees and strategic planning by leadership successors to the initiative. In addition to providing evidence regarding the initiative's short-

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*This program is funded in part by a Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor*

### Contact Information

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Website: [www.lehighvalleyresearch.org](http://www.lehighvalleyresearch.org)  
Phone: 484-664-3848

## Evaluating Community Health in Allentown

During 2009, the LVRC carried out a community study among residents of the City of Allentown for Lehigh Valley Hospital. The purpose of the research was to identify the variety of concerns that might affect the health and well-being of city residents. These concerns included neighborhood safety, race relations, school quality and access to a variety of different health care services.

The LVRC contribution to the study included two parts: 1) Professor Chris Borick of Muhlenberg College carried out the 'quantitative' part of the research, a mailed survey to a randomly selected sample of Allentown residents. 2) Professor Judith Lasker of Lehigh University's Social Science Data Center oversaw the 'qualitative' part of the study, which included focus groups in East and South Allentown and interviews with people from four ethnic groups—Latino, African-American, Vietnamese, and middle Eastern. The results are soon to be released by Lehigh Valley Health and Hospital Network. and will be used to help inform local officials of the needs of city residents.

For information about this project contact Dr. Judith Lasker at [jnl0@lehigh.edu](mailto:jnl0@lehigh.edu) or Dr. Christopher Borick at [cborick@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:cborick@muhlenberg.edu).

### *Context and Community: Applying the Principles of Management continued*

learned in the course. In addition, students had to learn about autism, the range of disorders on the autism spectrum, and strategies for caring for autistic children. To complete the service-learning project, students were required to integrate and synthesize their knowledge about autism and organizational training programs, as well as utilize and apply what they learned about management.

At the end of the semester each class presented a comprehensive training program recommendation for Natalie Bojko and Michelle Forster of the VYH. Through their efforts students were able to specify training recommendations that were useful, innovative, and within VYH's very limited budget.

### *Wall Street West Impact Assessment Completed continued*

term impact, the report should contribute in three specific ways: 1) as a model for future, more proactive impact assessment efforts that could be designed and implemented as an intrinsic part of the plan, 2) as a framework for learning more lessons about the sustainability of present and near-future efforts in this area, and 3) as an input for any leadership transitioning, revised goals, resource allocation to programs where funding is available, and strategic planning for any additional region-based education / workforce development initiatives.

For more information about this study contact Dr. Robert Brill at [rbrill@moravian.edu](mailto:rbrill@moravian.edu)

### Advisory Board Organizations

Children's Coalition of the LV  
City of Allentown  
City of Bethlehem  
Community Action Committee of the LV  
East Stroudsburg University  
Intermediate Unit 20  
Intermediate Unit 21  
Lehigh County  
LV Arts Council  
LV Chamber of Commerce  
LV Convention & Visitors Bureau  
LV Economic Development Corp.  
LV Planning Commission  
LV Workforce Investment Board  
Nazareth Area COG  
Network of Young Professionals  
New Bethany Ministries  
Northampton County  
PPL Corporation  
St. Luke's Hospital  
Wildlands Conservancy  
WLV - PBS 39

*The LVRC operates within the administration of the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges.*

*For more information about LVAIC visit [www.lvaic.org](http://www.lvaic.org).*

## LVRC Colleges & Universities

Cedar Crest College	<a href="http://www.cedarcrest.edu">www.cedarcrest.edu</a>
DeSales University	<a href="http://www.desales.edu">www.desales.edu</a>
Lafayette College	<a href="http://www.lafayette.edu">www.lafayette.edu</a>
Lehigh University	<a href="http://www.lehigh.edu">www.lehigh.edu</a>
Moravian College	<a href="http://www.moravian.edu">www.moravian.edu</a>
Muhlenberg College	<a href="http://www.muhlenberg.edu">www.muhlenberg.edu</a>
Lehigh Carbon Community College	<a href="http://www.lccc.edu">www.lccc.edu</a>
Northampton Community College	<a href="http://www.northampton.edu">www.northampton.edu</a>

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