

FAU Sociologist Studies New Zealanders' Responses to Oil Proposals



During her 2013-14 sabbatical, Dr. Patricia Widener, Assistant Professor of Sociology at FAU, lived in New Zealand studying how New Zealanders were responding to new oil proposals, both offshore and fracking, and the relevance of marine conservation, climate change and known oil-related disasters as points of articulation, debate and mobilization. Dr. Widener conducted 66 interviews, ethnographic participant observations of 44 events, and document analysis. Fieldwork was carried out in 23 towns or cities, encompassing 11 different regions on both the North and South Islands. The events lasted from two hours to three days and varied from annual environmental conferences, to community meetings hosted by local government or Maori leaders, to public demonstrations. Across the country, opponent and proponent groups mobilized to resist or to support the new project proposals. The search for petroleum continues; and the resistance to that search endures as well.

While in New Zealand, Dr. Widener was also invited to give two public presentations based upon her previous research. Both talks generated media attention. One public presentation, "Oil Injustice," was held at the Gisborne City Council, and was reported in an opinion piece in the *The Gisborne Herald*. The second talk, "Oil & Society," was held at the Centre of Sustainability (CSAFE) at the University of Otago, Dunedin, and was reported in the *Otago Daily News*. In addition, Dr. Widener was interviewed by a print journalist for a special feature on the social impacts of oil facilities and by a radio journalist for a weekly program called "Sustainable Lens: Resilience on Radio." Dr. Widener is still in the process of analyzing the data.