

Teaching Philosophy

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As a teacher, my main goal is to convey core sociological concepts, theories, and perspectives to my students in a clear, effective, and relatable way. More than that, though, I aim to inspire students' creative and critical engagement with the social world. I believe sociology provides the conceptual tools necessary for students to understand their own experiences and engage with social issues they care about. Sociology challenges us to contextualize everyday events within larger social and historical patterns. This is particularly difficult in contemporary American culture where our primary reference point is the individual. It is a great contradiction: as society has become more global and interconnected, the more loudly we proclaim our individualism. Yet, unconditional individualism confuses and obscures the systems and institutions that sociology makes its central focus. I see my task as inspiring students to comprehend "the social" by thinking through how structural and historical forces condition social inequalities and personal experiences.

While I primarily use lectures to deliver more historical or theoretical material, my lectures are interactive and built through exchanges with students. I provide students with handouts at the start of class to provide structure to my lectures and promote good note-taking. I also use a variety of media in class, such as documentaries and YouTube clips, as well as graphs or data visualizations from the *New York Times* or Pew Research to enhance my lectures and illustrate course material in different ways that validate student's learning preferences. Class discussion, however, is the cornerstone of my pedagogy. I emphasize discussion in my classes because it promotes a variety of positive student engagement strategies. I aim to be attentive and responsive to student concerns and will formally and informally solicit feedback from the class and different points in the semester and respond accordingly. My approach to classroom discussions has evolved in response to student feedback. Previously, I would help facilitate student-led discussion for the full class. More recently, I have moved towards engaging students in small group discussions. This shift in how I organized class discussions was in response to feedback from students who felt more comfortable exploring their ideas out-loud in smaller groups rather than in a full class setting. This shift to small group class discussion has promoted student's confidence in the class and helped students meet new people in class, building a community across the campus of people they know.

Emphasizing classroom interaction and discussion means it is important to create an environment where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. Underrepresented students already face a variety of barriers to their success and, unfortunately, sometimes the classroom setting is one of them. I strive to create an inclusive classroom by promoting mutual respect, dignity, and civility. To me this means creating a relaxed environment where students are free to express diverse perspectives. It also means working with students who are more reserved and varying assessment measures and course content to accommodate students of different backgrounds. Sometimes course assignments can privilege students with access to knowledge of how university's work. I aim for an inclusive pedagogy by being aware of assumptions of the "hidden curriculum" in my class. I spend time, for instance, walking students through how to read an academic sociology article and how to annotate readings. In my syllabus, in addition to including statements of diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility, I also include a range of diverse scholars in order to center the perspectives of a diverse range of students. Student's diverse experiences and backgrounds enrich the classroom and allow for students to learn from each other. Sociology can sometimes touch on topics which may elicit controversial or insensitive comments. Thus, I make certain to set clear ground rules for class discussion. I will also intervene to unpack insensitive or discriminatory comments other students might make and turn those situations into learning opportunities.

In addition to emphasizing interaction and discussion, I also stress writing in my courses. Writing is not just about expressing thoughts; it is fundamentally about producing and refining ideas through the process of thinking through writing. To cultivate "thinking through writing," I assign a variety of different writing assignments and work with students to develop their writing skills. I will assign lower-stakes "writing-to-learn" assignments where students respond to prompts or questions based course material with the aim of giving students room, without worrying about being "right," to work out their thoughts on

readings prior to class. These writing assignments also prepare students ahead of time for class discussion. In line with my belief that sociology should make the role of society in one's own life more apparent, I also provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own experiences. Learning to think sociologically begins when students can reassess their experiences of the social world using new interpretative tools. For instance, in my Schools and Society course, students relate to the readings by reflecting on how schools have socialized them in a variety of ways. Additionally, I will also try to find contemporary examples of class themes to build writing assignments from. For example, in my Urban Sociology course, students were given a *New York Times* article about the return of tech workers to the Bay Area after pandemic lockdowns. Students needed to explain to an imagined friend, using readings from class, why tech workers would need to return to the city. This type of assignment not only highlights the contemporary relevance of the course, but it also promotes stronger writing by asking students to explain a specific event sociologically to a clearly identifiable audience.

I also use writing to teach and reinforce methodological skills. In nearly all of my courses, there are usually papers built around qualitative and quantitative methods. For instance, in my Schools and Society course, students observe a school board meeting (this has been virtual due to the pandemic). They produce ethnographic fieldnotes about the meeting and then write a memo. In my Economy and Society course, students were provided with anonymized interview transcripts which they coded and wrote an analysis. And in Introduction to Sociology, student conduct interviews with someone about an aspect of their identity. I provide students the scaffolding of a research question (“What is it like to hold X identity within Y context?”) that students build off to understand the sociological significance of social identities. Students spend time in class doing practice interview with peers and students work in groups to build interview guides. One student, for example, interviewed a family member who is a nurse to understand their occupational identity in the context of a pandemic. Another student interviewed her close friend about her Jewish identity in a time of increasing anti-Semitism. This assignment teaches sociological thinking by emphasizing the importance of understanding action in context, but it also serves to teach students about how qualitative sociologists collect data through interviews.

In addition to building assignments around a qualitative methodological tradition, I also build assignments around quantitative reasoning and other methodological traditions in sociology. For example, in Schools and Society, students used a number of online databases, such as the Census, the National Center for Educational Statistics, Civil Rights Data Collection, and the Educational Opportunity Project, to compare two school districts. Student had to research and produce tables using these data and interpret the statistics to tell a compelling and sociologically-informed analysis of inequality and privilege in American educational institutions. Likewise, in my Sociology of Immigration course, students use similar online data to build comparative statistical profiles of an immigrant population in America. In Introduction to Sociology, students use Census data as well as other online data to research their hometowns and compare it with a neighboring town or the state generally. Students then reflect, using their sociological imagination, to understand how their communities have shaped them. Finally, in Urban Sociology, students pick an aspect of urban inequality to study in the context of an American city of their choosing. Students research the existing literature and, in consultation with data science librarians, produce GIS maps illustrating the spatial dimensions of inequality. The project culminates in a final StoryMap website with embedded maps and analysis. The result is not only a visually impressive, but through this project students also learn a major methodological tradition in the field of Urban Sociology.

Teaching is one of the most rewarding aspects of academics. I approach my role as a teacher seriously and hope to inspire students to sociology through my passion and enthusiasm for the subject. A liberal arts education, and a sociological education in particular, is important not only for student's future careers, but for becoming engaged democratic citizens. Max Weber famously wrote in “Science as a Vocation,” that each person who feels called to scholarship “must qualify not only as a scholar but also as a teacher.” I believe in this teacher-scholar model; that teaching and research each reinforce the other and are complimentary in the pursuit of self-clarification and knowledge of the social world. Sociology is my chosen vocation and I take Weber's edict seriously. It is that calling that motivates me to continue to improve as a teacher and a sociologist.