

## Teaching Statement

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As a sociologist and a teacher, I am committed to developing students who think creatively and respond intelligently to the questions and challenges posed by our world. I believe that students learn best when they formulate real questions about society and conduct in-depth research to answer them. An effective course balances systematic instruction with the opportunity to engage in empirical investigation. By balancing these goals, I aim to create a supportive environment that develops students' ability to see the world through a sociological lens.

I structure my courses to expose students to the core knowledge of the subject. I work hard to incorporate assignments that motivate students to complete the readings and ensure they glean the key points. For example, in an introductory sociology class, I regularly administered short answer and multiple-choice quizzes that tested students on their comprehension of the important facts and concepts in the readings. An electronic test bank and an online grade management system made this feasible in a class of 60. In a seminar class, I had students submit weekly reading reports to gauge how well they were keeping up with and understanding the material. This meant I could tailor classroom activities to fill in gaps in their learning. In a statistics class, I used a web-publishing system to quickly update homework questions to target areas of learning that required reinforcement.

Through my courses, I aim to cultivate students' ability to challenge common perceptions of society. For example, I began one class period by showing several recent newscasts, which contained story after story of various violent crimes that had taken place in the city. I then polled students on what they felt about violent crime rates – were they going up or down? They were genuinely surprised to learn that violent crime rates have declined significantly over the past 20 years. In small groups, students asked why newscasts were structured to give the opposite perception. They realized how a lot of journalism is not about reporting accurately, but appealing to different markets and creating polarized debate.

Sociology provides an important a set of tools to studying society. In my teaching, I want students to learn these skills by applying them to real problems. Imaginative research has emerged through this approach. In a deviance class, one group of students created a video documentary to present their ethnographic work on drag queens. This presentation communicated their research findings in a creative and compelling way. Part of the success of this project came because I broke it into smaller parts. This ensured students remained on track and allowed me the time to work with them one-on-one. Because they received feedback at each milestone, they could begin to master all phases of the research process.

I also believe it is critical for students to develop the ability to build interconnections among different disciplines. An example of this comes from a course I taught on the sociology of gender. I gave students the opportunity to read Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. I tasked them with explaining how this novel illuminates and challenges social scientific theories of gender. One student commented that this activity put a face to the theory of how race and gender combine to amplify the impact of inequality. Reading this book made the theory come alive.

In the classroom, I use a variety of methods to encourage student learning. My most effective sessions mix lectures with class discussions, video clips and small group exercises. One student remarked about my teaching, "Always wanted to come to class! I liked the mix of lectures, discussions and videos."

While only a snapshot, I hope I have communicated the depth of my commitment to becoming an effective teacher and mentor to students. I am dedicated to bringing the insights of sociology to students and giving them the tools to better understand the world they inhabit.