

Teaching Philosophy

As a sociologist, I teach guided by the principles of C. Wright Mills' "sociological imagination." That is, I focus on helping students see connections between *personal troubles* and *public issues*, and understanding the link between biography and history. For example, when I teach Qualitative Research Methods, I encourage students to research topics that are personally meaningful. For example, a student, Ridhi, who emigrated from India and whose parents were discussing the possibility of arranged marriage for her, decided to interview young Indian-American women to learn about attitudes about love and marriage. This gave her an opportunity to talk with other women in the same position as her and learn from them.

In my Sociology of Popular Culture (SOC 19) class, which I began teaching in Fall 2023, I have students do a Show and Tell assignment, where they share a favorite cultural object with the class. Here, students must connect this cultural object with one of the sociological perspectives we cover in the course. For example, a student presented their Show and Tell on AirPods, and showed not only the social functions of AirPods (i.e., building collective identity; creating social boundaries), but also social dysfunctions (i.e., less social interaction/changing the nature of listening to music; planned obsolescence and increased waste). This allows students to think critically understand cultural influences in creating popular culture.

My teaching philosophy is based on collaborative learning and course development. Over the years, I have grown more attentive to generating course content based on students' interests. For instance, on the first day of my Sociology of Sexualities (SOC 477) class this semester, I handed out Post-It notes for students to write a topic or two they wanted to learn about and then had them post those on a white board. After class, I went through them and either confirmed I was covering that topic or added material. I've kept the Post-It notes on my desk all semester as a reminder to stay focused on students' interests. Also, when I learn something new from students, I incorporate it into class. For example, in SOC 477 this semester, I initially had intended a brief mention of asexuality. But, when a student noted interest in this, I included more information. In my SOC 19 class, each semester I begin by asking about students' favorite popular culture. This semester 10 of the 18 course readings are new and cover the interests of current students, including TikTok, anime, and video games. I believe students learn more and are more engaged when material is not only based on their interests, but when they recognize their interests are valued and incorporated. Similarly, I focus on making sure ALL of my students feel seen, heard, and valued in class. I do this by learning their names quickly, using their names frequently, talking with them before, after, and outside of class, and consistently communicating my availability for support. Students often come to me with issues in other classes or even personal issues and I am glad they know they can do so and that I care about them as people, not just as students.

Another way my teaching philosophy has evolved over the past twenty-five years, is recognizing the benefit of giving students more information and time for graded assignments. For example, in my upper level and honors classes, I always tell them the essay question they will need to write about before exams. I also allowed my students a page of notes in my Men and Masculinities course to use during their exam. I feel like giving students this information shows respect for their time and encourages better and more focused study habits.

A final aspect of my teaching philosophy is embracing diversity in student learning. In all of my classes with research assignments, I offer options. For example, in SOC 19H, students have a research project which they work on throughout the semester. Among other options (sample assignment guidelines are included in this packet) students may opt to do a critical analysis of a cultural object. They must come up with a research question and either survey fans or critically analyze a television show, a musician, a film, or other object they propose. This semester one student is looking at how the TV show *Friends* is viewed by people born outside of the U.S. and how it influences those individuals' ideas about American life. Other student projects include: materialism and consumption on *Gossip Girl*; the music of Zach Bryan; and the cultural impact of the *Barbie* movie. Students may choose to a paper, presentation, video or podcast for this assignment. This allows students to leverage their strengths.