

# TEACHING/LEARNING MATTERS

Newsletter for the American Sociological Association Section on Teaching and Learning

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## Chair's Corner



**Jay Howard**  
**Professor**

**Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**  
**Acting Dean, College of Communications**

The ASA annual meeting is almost here. I look forward to interacting with you in Philadelphia as we collectively seek to build on the Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology's past successes in keeping teaching and learning a high priority in American Sociological Association.

Chair-elect Melinda Messineo, Ball State University, and the program committee have put together a great lineup of section-sponsored sessions. You can read more about them elsewhere in this newsletter. However, I want to call your attention to the Mentoring Roundtables on Monday, August 13, 2:30-4:10 in Pennsylvania Convention Center, Level 100, 104B. This is the second year for this innovative approach to our roundtable session. We will have five tables featuring faculty presenters from community colleges, liberal arts institutions, comprehensive institutions, research institutions, and who hold

teaching positions at research institutions, libraries & data centers, and post-docs. Attendees will rotate from table to table to get a sense of what faculty life is like at each type of institution. *What is the teaching load? What are expectations for promotion and tenure? What are students like? What are the service expectations for faculty? What's most rewarding about the role? What's least rewarding?* This is an ideal opportunity for graduate students and early career faculty who may be contemplating a change to gain sense of career options. So if you teach graduate students, please encourage them to attend and participate. If you're considering a position change, this session will be very insightful. In addition, the session is a wonderful opportunity for newer section members (and potential members) to network with experienced section members. Who knows a panelist might even offer to buy you coffee and continue the conversation one-on-one!

Another opportunity to network with section members is the Joint Reception of the Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology and Alpha Kappa Delta, Monday, 6:30-8:30, in Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 5, Salon C. This is a chance to reconnect with old friends and make some new ones.

Also don't miss the Hans O. Mauksch address by Meg Wilkes Karraker, University of St. Thomas, "Service Sociology for a Better World," Monday at 10:30 in Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 9. Immediately following is the section Business Meeting in the same location. Among other agenda, we will be recognizing the following award recipients during the business meeting:

2018 Hans O. Mauksch Award: Dr. Susan J. Ferguson, Grinnell College

2018 Scholarly Contributions to Teaching and Learning Award: Dr. Mary Scheuer Senter, Central Michigan University.

2018 Carla B. Howery Award for Developing Teacher-Scholars: Dr. Edward Kain, Southwestern University

2018 Graduate Student Contribution to the Sociological Scholarship of Teaching &

Learning Award: Daniel Bartholomay, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.

Please join us as we congratulate our colleagues on their achievements!

Finally, I wish to welcome newly elected members of the Section on Teaching and Learning Council:

Chair-Elect (1-year term begins in 2018): Alison Better, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

Council Members (University) (3-year term begins in 2018): Sarah Epplen, Minnesota State University, Mankato

Council Members (4-year school) (3-year term begins in 2018): Elizabeth Borland, The College of New Jersey

Council Members (Community College) (3-year term begins in 2018): Megan Allen, Blue Ridge Community and Technical College

Graduate Student Representatives (2-year term begins in 2018): Jacobs Wayne Hammond, Washington State University

Secretary/Treasurer (3-year term begins in 2018): Stacy Evans, Berkshire Community College

Thank you to everyone who agreed to run for council. The section depends on the voluntary efforts and commitment of our members who give generously of their time and expertise. We could not do it without you!

## Editor's Introduction



**Daina Cheyenne Harvey**  
**Troublemaker, College of the Holy Cross**

Greetings fellow teachers, learners, and whomever else is reading this. We are only a few weeks from Philly. This issue is filled with great ideas for assignments, teaching tips, and other lessons learned, so read it from front to back and bring it with you to ASA.

Please make sure you know the what, where, and when of our section-sponsored activities. Melinda Messineo and her committee have worked hard to put together this year's events.

As Jay notes in his column (which you probably just finished reading), the Mentoring Roundtables should be particularly interesting. I would also encourage you to come to our reception on Monday at 6:30 in the Marriott (Level 5, Salon C). It is always a good place to meet your heroes. And as a final word of encouragement, I will say that the highlight of every ASA for me is the Hans O. Mauusch address. I not only learn a lot there, but I always come away feeling tremendously happy and grateful that I do what I do.

In this issue you will find ideas from Jerry Krase on teaching visual sociology, important advice from Adelle Dora Montebianco on co-teaching, a piece from Suzanne Fournier Macaluso on allowing students to choose their assignments, and Allen and Hammond's advice for teaching sensitive topics. Also, Celeste Atkins writes on making assignments relevant to students, Jill Grigsby explains the importance of stressing to students the benefits of slow and deliberate observation, and a trio of teaching assistants from Stanford write about "Statistics Bootcamp." The final two items in our newsletter

include some good advice from Matthew McLeskey on adjuncting and reflections on teaching economic sociology from David Pinzur. Enjoy!

Finally, I'm ready to retire. This is my fourth year doing the newsletter and I'm weary of breaking any records set by previous editors, I'm looking at you Corey Dolgon. So, please contact me if you want to join our editorial team.

## August 2017 to August 2018 STLS Officers / Council Members

### **OFFICERS**

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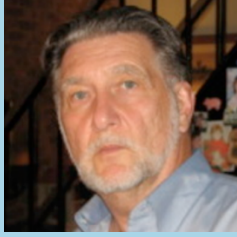
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**Graduate Student Concerns:** Barbara Prince

**Sage Awards:** Keith Roberts

**Pre-Conference Program Planning:** Kathy Rowell and Greg Kordsmeier

## Seeing Places Change



**Jerome Krase, Emeritus and Murray Koppleman  
Professor, Brooklyn College CUNY**

As a visual sociologist, I am pleased to see the increased use of visual media in the classroom. However, sometimes one needs to stretch the imagination to find a firm connection between the “visual” and the “sociology.” Most often images are used to illustrate a concept or to perhaps emulate a finding more interestingly than by using a chart. I frequently use visual images, especially video and photographs, in my urban sociology classes because I do a lot of research and writing on how urban change, such as by gentrification, is expressed in their appearance.

For example, I take my students on field trips through census tracts whose most recent data they have studied and ask them to relate the data to what it is they see on the street. This simple approach about describing neighborhoods gets students to think about, and discuss, the societal dynamics of everyday life that play out in front of their eyes. For example, when they notice someone who looks like they are sleeping rough, they are led to contemplate what it is about the world in which they live that stages this scene.

As part of my teaching visually repertoire, I recently conducted visual workshops on urban change in Krakow, Poland and Boston, Massachusetts. The local subjects were the Jewish Ghetto of Kazimierz, and the one-time Italian American ethnic enclave in the North End. Both neighborhoods are experiencing more and less rapid gentrification. As movie-goers know from the film *Schindler's List*, most of Kazimierz's Jews were transported to Nazi death camps and murdered. For the Italian-Americans of the North End the displacement has been much gentler. Before both field trips I shared my own prior photographs of the neighborhoods. For Krakow they

were taken in 1997 and for Boston it was 1983. At the start of each field trip, I gave brief orientations on the areas to graduate students of Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska and Anna Sarzyńska of the Jagiellonian University, and those of James Pasto of Boston University. We then went out to see and record the visual changes. Side by side below are two examples of the visual data for each place.



Remnant of Business Sign on Deteriorated Building in Kazimierz, Krakow 1997. Photo Credit Jerry Krase



Remnant of Business Sign on Building undergoing Upscale Renovation in Kazimierz 2018. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Since I've been doing this kind of visual data collection for decades, I use my own “before” photos, but faculty and students can easily find equivalent images in local municipal or historical archives as well as via on-line searches. It is of the utmost importance for the instructor however to connect the “then” and “now” images, to other sources of sociological data and, when available, historical and ethnographic studies of the neighborhoods. For the North End, William F.

Whyte's Street Corner Society (1943) would be perfect.



Jennies Italian Cuisine, North End, Boston 1983. Photo Credit Jerry Krase



Replacement for Jennies Restaurant, North End, Boston 2018. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Beyond gentrification, as represented in some of my publications below, visual connections can easily be made in reference to globalization, immigration, as well as economic up- and downturns. Giving your students the opportunity to, as Michel de Certeau wrote, create the city in the act of walking (1985: 129), with a camera in hand would be (excuse the pun) sociologically “eye-opening.”

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### 10 Questions to Ask Your Co-Teacher



**Adelle Dora Montebalco**  
**Assistant Professor of Sociology**  
**Department of Sociology and Anthropology Middle**  
**Tennessee State University**

Co-teaching is a professional effort in which teachers “share the planning, organization, delivery, and assessment of instruction, as well as the physical space” (Bacharach, Heck, and Dank 2003). In the truest form of co-teaching, nearly all tasks are shared: the instructors co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess as cooperatively as possible. Co-teaching is becoming more common (Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg

2008)—it has even been discussed in this newsletter (Barthlow and Friesen 2017)—and the question of how to do it well merits more conversation. It is easy to fall into the trap of romanticizing co-teaching: you might imagine it as another set of hands for grading and a willing ear into which you pour curriculum development ideas. However, a successful co-teaching relationship takes emotional and practical work just like any other relationship—including a marriage, to which it has been compared (Kohler-Evans 2006). I recently jumped into the deep end of co-teaching as a postdoc at the University of Texas at El Paso, where in two years, I co-taught 6 classes—3 courses (Introduction to Sociology, Social Determinants of Health, and Research Foundations)—with 7 different co-teachers (faculty and postdocs, often outside of my discipline). I was inspired by this previous experience to adapt some common pre-marriage questions, often used to assess potential personality clashes or day-to-day tensions, for use between co-teachers. Here are 10 questions that you and your co-teacher should ask each other before jumping into this complicated, challenging, yet rewarding relationship:

- 1) How do you handle conflict, both in the classroom and with colleagues?
- 2) How should grading be divided?
- 3) What kinds of conversations do you have with students during office hours?
- 4) What do you admire about me as a teacher, mentor, researcher, and/or colleague?
- 5) What are your pet peeves about teaching?
- 6) How will we make decisions together?
- 7) How do you prefer to communicate?
- 8) What would you do if a student said something negative about me?
- 9) What are your other professional responsibilities during the semester, and how might they conflict with your co-teaching responsibilities?
- 10) How ambitious or flexible are your teaching goals?

Discussing the answers to these 10 questions offers instructors an opportunity to responsibly and critically reflect about the kind of daily co-teaching experiences they each want. While another article suggests that co-teachers complete a joint teaching philosophy (Morelock et al. 2017), this important effort likely does not help co-teachers discover what their day-to-day teaching will look like. Co-teaching usually requires a full semester of frequent interactions, and doing it well

requires a high level of reliance and trust. I do not believe it is a deal breaker if the answers you and your co-teachers come up with are in conflict; simply articulating the answers will help you identify mutual expectations, better preparing you to handle any potential friction.

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## Using Free-Range Assignments in a Social Problems Class



**Suzanne Fournier Macaluso, PhD**  
**Abilene Christian University**

Many universities offer a course titled “Social Problems” that introduces students to the idea that the problems faced by people in society are structural rather than personal. The typical social problems course may be included in the general education requirements and thus attracts students from a wide variety of backgrounds. This has certainly been my experience as both a graduate student teaching at a large research university, and now as an associate professor at a small private liberal arts institution. One of the problems with the social problems course is helping students connect to the material and see the relevance to their own lives. One of the ways that I have sought to help students connect is through the use of free-range assignments. Fang, Shewmaker, and Self (2015) describe free-range assignments as those in which “teachers give students the freedom to choose their own methods of assessment to demonstrate competency in a particular area of learning” (p. 120-121).

In the Fall of 2016 I was teaching a section of social problems with 24 students enrolled. Those students represented eleven different majors and included students in their second year of college to those about to graduate with their bachelor’s degree. The variety of student backgrounds and interests encouraged me to branch out from the typical assignments to something more personalized. I do not use a traditional textbook, instead opting to use monographs that allow students to see the application of sociology to various social problems. On the first day of class, as we discussed the syllabus and course expectations I asked students to brainstorm ways that they could demonstrate that they had read the assigned material and could show that they

understood the sociological theories as applied to various social problems. During that class period the students identified ten types of assignments that we called “book responses.”

The types of assignments that the students came up with were: a written book response/report, a photo essay and reflection, a podcast, a persuasive speech, an analysis of song lyrics, an original poem and reflection, original artwork and reflection, a public service announcement, interview with an expert in the field, and an auto ethnography/personal account. After identifying the types of assignments, I then asked students how long the assignments should be (how many words, minutes, etc.). The assignments were graded as pass/fail using specifications grading as articulated by Nilson (2015). Following our class meeting I developed a somewhat standardized set of requirements for the ten assignments. Students were then able to select the type of assignment they wanted to complete for each of the four books.

I received only one traditional book report, numerous original poems and pieces of art, and some incredible personal accounts. Most importantly, I received comments like this from students in the course that semester:

This class was one of the most transformative classes I have ever taken. I was shocked by the amount I was able to learn in such a short time about the world around me. I felt like I was in a safe environment to share my opinions and the topics discussed in class opened up new conversations among my peers and family members. The topics discussed were relevant to what is currently happening in our culture, and I am knowledgeable enough about each problem to discuss each topic in full with my peers. Additionally, I have able to bring awareness to many people about the issues that are present in our culture.

Allowing students to choose their assignment gets them excited about the material and helps them to make meaningful connections between the course material and their experiences. The grade distribution for the course was very similar to previous semesters, students were also assessed using quizzes and in-class discussion each semester, but students were excited to show me their project and share it with their classmates as opposed to dreading the assignments.



Sample of artwork received in response to the book *Unequal Childhoods* by Annette Lareau. In their reflection, the student says “The tree in the painting represents the parents, and the sapling is the child. The adult tree demonstrates the strategy of concerted cultivation by holding a watering can above its sapling. Water is often infused with fertilizers and minerals, and the can is the total collection of all the possible resources the upper and middle class parent is able to give to the child.”

### References

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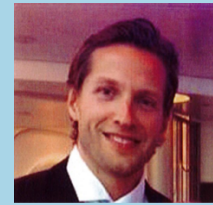
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## An Intentional Approach to Teaching Sensitive Topics



**Eric Allen, Ph.D. Candidate, Washington State University**



**Jake Hammond, Ph.D. Candidate, Washington State University**

Sociology instructors inevitably engage in classroom discussions of sensitive topics. At times, these discussions can incite conflict. Some may even create an environment that feels hostile. Discussions can turn contentious when the content elicits an emotional reaction, student values and interests differ, or the topic is associated with an identity (e.g., religious or political) (Yale CTL 2018). In the midst of a deeply polarized political environment, sociology instructors are tasked with balancing the need for critical discourse with the goal of creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment. This is challenging work, and our best efforts are likely to involve significant forethought and a deliberate method. Drawing from Moore and Deshaies (2012), we outline four practices that can help instructors facilitate productive discussions of controversial topics.

First, prior to engaging in discussions of sensitive topics, instructors can lay important *groundwork* by creating a supportive classroom environment and by establishing clear ground rules for discussions (Moore and Deshaies 2012). Ground rules might include respectful listening, refraining from interrupting, critiquing ideas instead of individuals, committing to learning rather than debating, and avoiding blame, speculation and inflammatory language. Prior to discussion, instructors might also reflect on their own biases, points of confusion, and how their cultural and family background may have shaped their, and their



students', attitudes on the topic. Similarly, encouraging students to consider how their own perspectives may be shaped by various axes of inequality (e.g., race, gender, class) can encourage deeper discussions and promote the development of a sociological imagination.

Second, to keep the discussion focused and productive, it is beneficial to provide a concrete *objective* which grounds the discussion and links it to other course content (Moore and Deshaies 2012). Define precise goals for what you want students to accomplish during the discussion. For example, is the goal of the discussion to reflect on the range of perspectives class members hold on the topic? Is it to identify solutions to a common social issue, or to apply a course concept (e.g., social construction) throughout the discussion? Make your intentions clear at the beginning of the discussion and offer reminders when you feel the discussion diverging from your intended goal. Prior to discussion, it is also helpful to assign the class preparatory material which can inform the conversation. This helps to focus the discussion, gives students a common knowledge base, and can dispel misinformation on the topic.

Third, be an *active facilitator* (Moore and Deshaies 2012). Your goal as facilitator should be to neither dominate, nor passively observe, the conversation. Throughout the discussion, intervene when necessary to remind students to respect the rights of others with differing opinions, re-word questions or comments posed by students, correct false information, ask for clarification, review main points, or refer to relevant course materials and readings.

Finally, allow sufficient time at the end of the discussion to *summarize* main points and for students to provide *feedback* (publicly or privately via written work) (Moore and Deshaies 2012). This practice allows students to recall, review, and reflect to fully process their experience. Allotting time for the class to write comments can help ensure all students have an equal opportunity to share their thoughts on the topic, regardless of their comfort speaking in front of the class. This exercise may also help students understand the purpose of class discussions by linking the topics discussed with broader course goals and objectives.

While conflict is often avoided at all costs, it can be a beneficial element of a college classroom if it is

managed carefully (UC-Berkeley CTL 2018). As sociology instructors, we can utilize the power of the sociological imagination to help us navigate student disagreement and to offer a valuable perspective on contemporary social issues. However, engaging controversial topics may give even veteran instructors pause, so approaching these situations with intention is of paramount importance. Adopting the four

practices outlined here can help instructors turn potentially inflammatory discussions into meaningful learning experiences.

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### Making Assignments Relevant to Students



**Celeste Atkins, MA (Faculty – Cochise College,  
Doctoral Student – University of Arizona)**

Research in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning reveals that learning is positively affected by making

concepts personally relevant to the students. In fact, by making learning socially relevant, “we may improve student learning retention, since each concept has multiple points of entry, and therefore multiple points of interest that can serve as avenues for the retrieval of information (Chamany, Allen, & Tanner 2008). In a University of Arizona mini-course offered by the Office of Instruction and Assessment entitled “Designing Engaging Writing Assignments,” I discovered simple ways to rework standard writing assignments to make them more relevant to students and more engaging.

My upper division, intensive writing sociology courses on race and gender are focused on assessing how students understand the concept of the social construction of reality and more importantly, if they can identify it at work in the world around them. As Introduction to Sociology is not a required prerequisite, many students have not been exposed to sociological theory previously, so getting them to have a deep understanding in a course that is focused on race or gender can be quite challenging.

Previously I relied on a standard writing prompt asking students to explain the concept of the social construction of race/gender and give examples of how it works in the world. Most students performed adequately, but mainly they were regurgitating my lectures and examples. After the mini-course, I reworked the assignment using the following instructions:

One excellent way to explore and increase your understanding of a concept is to teach it to someone else. Please write a letter to a real or imaginary person (your friend, aunt, grandfather, parent, etc.) who has very traditional and conservative ideas about race. This person has not benefitted as you have from taking a sociology class. Help them out by explaining to them what you have learned about race.

An outstanding letter will illustrate a complete understanding of how race is socially constructed using concrete examples from your experience or that you have seen in the world. It will clearly explain racial microaggressions and their effects, and will

explain in depth why race is such an important focus of study in today’s society using concrete examples. The best letters will use concrete examples, not vague generalities.

The increase in quality of submissions was amazing! Not only were students obviously putting more thought and effort into the assignment, they were also explaining the concepts in ways I had never considered. For example one student wrote to his grandmother:

*“You remember how when Hunter and I were little kids and we would play Cowboys and Indians? Well, when we would imitate sounds of Native American battle cries or songs we heard at Pow Wows we were acting in a way that would not be respectful of Native Americans. This is a really simple way to view what is known as a racial microaggression.”*

Another student wrote to his brother who was incarcerated in what the student referred to as “the Redneck Riviera” and explained:

*“...race does not exist. What exists, globally, is a condition for humans, groups, communities, nationalities to label themselves superior based on their perceptions of race as being something that has certain qualities, mostly negative, associated with a skin color, physical difference, or culture of a group of people. And that, globally, all these perceptions of a group of people being superior or inferior is taught to them by their family, peers, and society in general because that is part of their social fabric. In other words, “race” has been socially constructed and our perceptions of race effect our reality of ourselves and how we view, treat, and react to people that are ‘different’ from us.”*

The depth and creativity shown by students when they were tasked to explain or teach someone they cared about rather than just explain a concept to the instructor was phenomenal. I was actually brought to tears by some of the ways students connected race to their own experiences with homophobia or shared how their perception of the world had shifted. Although this format will not work for every

assignment, for me it illustrates how much more effort and thought students put into assignments that are relevant and personal to them.

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### Increase Observational Skills with Art



**Jill S. Grigsby**  
Pomona College

Many, if not most, of my students would prefer to read more quickly and write faster, in order to complete their work sooner. One of the goals for my undergraduate students is to demonstrate slow observation and its benefits. Medical schools have begun using this technique with art, and have found that it can increase medical students' skills in observation, description, and interpretation (Schaff, Isken, Tager, 2011).

When I teach Introduction to Sociology, my favorite painting for a slow observation exercise is "Cui Bono?" by Gerald Cassidy, from the New Mexico Museum of Art. Early in the semester, I lower the lights in the room, put an image of the painting on a screen, invite the students to look at it, and write down what they see in terms of colors and shapes. They are not to

provide any analysis at first, just observe. After observing and writing for a few minutes, we talk about what they see. From identifying the colors and shapes, we move to the buildings and people. Some members of the class think that the main figure in the painting is female, while others think that this person is male, which opens up a discussion of gender and gender ambiguity. I next ask them about the time of day and the time of year that the painting was made, so we look for clues among the shadows and landscape. We then turn to the location and the approximate date of the painting. Because our classroom is near a desert community, several students easily situate the painting in the southwestern United States, and some even can identify New Mexican pueblos, although some students also consider deserts in other parts of the world. The date is more difficult to ascertain from clues in the painting.

At the end of the discussion I tell them the name of the painting, "Cui Bono?" which loosely translated means "Who Benefits?" Gerald Cassidy painted it around 1911, at a time when tourism as well as mining and other economic invasions were beginning to threaten Native American communities in the southwest. The title of the painting and how the artist may have come to it leads us to further discussions of cultural capital, stereotyping, and power.

Throughout the rest of the semester I remind students of this exercise and the benefits of slow, careful observation. I also incorporate "observation" exercises into my classes using senses other than sight, such as smell or hearing. When I'm able to start my classes with one of these exercises, they provide an excellent way for students to make the transition from the world outside to the classroom inside.

### Reference

Schaff, Pamela B., Suzanne Isken, and Robert M. Tager, 2011. "From Contemporary Art to Core Clinical Skills: Observation, Interpretation, and Meaning-Making in a Complex Environment." *Academic Medicine* 86 (10): 1272-1276.

## **“Statistics Bootcamp” for Building Math Confidence in Incoming PhD Students**



**Emily Carian**  
**Stanford University**



**Rebecca Gleit**  
**Stanford University**



**John Muñoz**  
**Stanford University**

As teaching assistants for quantitative methods courses, we saw firsthand that incoming Sociology doctoral students have extremely varied backgrounds with math and statistics. While the goal of graduate methods courses is to build proficiency in the most commonly used statistical techniques of our discipline - both so students can use them in their own research and evaluate the research of others - some students are left behind. In many cases, students not only fail to

become proficient in statistical methods, but develop an apprehension of quantitative methods. The unfortunate result is that these techniques may not be equally accessible to all students as they progress through their careers.

With support from Stanford’s Institute for Research in the Social Sciences and our department, we designed and implemented a “statistics bootcamp” preceding the 2017-2018 academic year. The bootcamp had three objectives: (1) increase students’ understanding of and confidence with basic statistical concepts; (2) build students’ programming intuition and data management skills; and (3) encourage collaboration among the graduate student cohort.

We taught the bootcamp to nine incoming doctoral students over six days. The first session was a hands-on introduction to Stata software, to address the steep learning curve many students experience when programming for the first time. Each subsequent day had the same format: a two-hour morning session, a one-hour lunch, and a two-hour afternoon session. Each morning involved a combination of lecture and inquiry-based activities, and each afternoon served as additional practice and implementation in Stata. The activities were group-based, and lunch was provided to encourage students to eat together and build camaraderie.

Importantly, we designed our curriculum with an inquiry-based, visual approach, which research shows to be highly effective in reducing student anxieties, improving problem solving skills, and building foundational math knowledge (Barron and Darling-Hammond 2008; Boaler 2015). For instance, to illustrate the distinctions between population, sample, and sampling distributions, groups of students were provided with a bag of 52 dog pictures, representing the population at a dog daycare. Each dog had a score for how cute it was, ranging from 1-9 (detailed instructions [here](#)). First, students pulled all dogs from the bag, plotted the cuteness scores on the first of three blank histograms, and calculated the measures of central tendency. Next, they returned all dogs to the bag, picked just 5, plotted the observations on the second histogram, and again calculated the measures of central tendency. Lastly, they repeated the second process several times, plotting the mean scores on the

third histogram. As a group, students reflected on the differences between the three plots. Through the process of inquiry, students developed schemas for the three types of distributions - population, sample, and sampling - prior to being told their formal names and definitions.

Students completed a short survey regarding the bootcamp's effectiveness at three intervals: (a) the end of the bootcamp, (b) the end of their first statistics course, and (c) the end of the academic year (after completing three methods courses). Overall, students agreed that the bootcamp met its goals (Table 1). The bootcamp was especially effective at fostering a collaborative atmosphere among the first-year cohort. We look forward to using students' recommendations to further improve the bootcamp in its second iteration in September 2018.

With many Sociology departments focused on teaching graduate students quantitative methods, our goal is to ensure all students learn and feel confident in their statistical training. The bootcamp outlined here is our effort toward that mission.

Table 1. Mean scores for students' agreement that the bootcamp met its objectives.

### References

Barron, B. & Darling-Hammond, L. 2008. "How can we teach for meaningful learning." In Darling-Hammond, L. et al. (Eds.) *Powerful learning: What we know about teaching for understanding* (pp. 11-70). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Boaler, Jo. 2015. *Mathematical mindsets: Unleashing students' potential through creative math, inspiring messages, and innovative teaching*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

<i>Agreement on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)...</i>	<b>End of the bootcamp</b>	<b>End of the First Statistics Course</b>	<b>End of the Academic Year</b>
<i>My understanding of basic statistical concepts was improved by the bootcamp.</i>	4.4	4.0	4.0
<i>My confidence with basic statistical concepts was improved by the bootcamp.</i>	4.4	4.3	3.9
<i>My programming intuition and problem-solving skills were improved by the bootcamp.</i>	4.1	3.9	4.1
<i>The bootcamp helped me get an idea of how to manage data files to stay organized while doing research.</i>	4.2	3.9	4.6
<i>The bootcamp helped me feel an increased sense of collaboration and camaraderie with my cohort-mates.</i>	4.9	4.7	4.7
<i>n</i>	9	8	7

## If Adjuncting, Be Strategic



**Matthew H. McLeskey**  
**Doctoral Candidate and Sociology Instructor**  
**University at Buffalo, SUNY**

You see an advertisement for an adjunct instructor of sociology position at a local college in your e-mail inbox. Your assistantship (for those fortunate enough to have them) just expired and you have to figure out your financial security while finishing your Ph.D. You have only taught in your graduate program's department in your short academic career, and you think teaching a class at the small private liberal arts college will be professionally promising and perhaps even financially worthwhile. Teaching as contingent faculty, often called "adjuncts" hired term to term for one or two courses, can be beneficial or detrimental for graduate students' longer term prospects. Which of these defines your experience means knowing how to strategically navigate this rung of the higher education ladder.

According to Dr. Jesse Gipko, Dean of Instruction at Belmont College, "Graduate students should focus on adjunct positions that increase their skill sets, such as courses taught, and an opportunity to be a more effective instructor. The goal should be to build your curriculum vitae, and this can only lead to more professional opportunities." Adjuncting can provide numerous opportunities, but note the pay may not what you think for teaching just one course. Usually, an adjunct instructor can expect roughly \$1,000-\$3,000 per course. This sum accounts for contact hours in the classroom hours and, at times, some preparation time and office hours. Graduate students should be weary of what some call the "adjunctification" of higher education, or the

increased use of short-term contracts over full-time faculty (Jenkins 2014).

Consequently, graduate students should ideally view adjuncting as supplemental rather than primary income. It can take teaching anywhere from 4-8 courses per academic year, often at different institutions, to equal an assistantship; it would take even more to resemble a full-time salary. Furthermore, Cherwin (2010) notes how adjuncting necessitates facing the challenge of unguaranteed income because your course may be cancelled due to low enrollment. Graduate students can easily fall into a gauntlet of teaching multiple courses at multiple colleges to make ends meet – ends not including health insurance. While some institutions offer health insurance as an employment benefit for teaching more than one course, many do not. The kind of employment circumstances you enter into as an adjunct instructor merit consideration.

Although, graduate students can still use adjuncting to their strategic advantage. For example, if offered to teach a course you previously taught, then your preparation time has been reduced significantly. This should make the low adjunct pay less daunting. If you have only been teaching larger classes at your doctoral-granting research university, then teaching at a small private liberal arts or community college affords opportunity to add teaching diverse populations and/or in smaller seminar settings to your teaching portfolio. While preparing a new course might be time-consuming, it might add an important class to your teaching portfolio (like a dissertation subfield area). According to Dr. Paul Durlak, currently Visiting Professor of Sociology at The College at Brockport, SUNY, "I would encourage graduate students to treat adjuncting almost like an internship. You can use your time in that department observing the work lives of the other professors. This can be very helpful if you're undecided about the type of institution you eventually want to work at." Teaching at a teaching-intensive institution can be helpful for knowing if you can thrive in that setting as full-time faculty.

Lastly, adjuncting also affords opportunity to be an academic in a setting where "graduate student" will not be your primary status – you will be another

colleague. Being a colleague at a new institution, even as just temporary faculty, might mean “you meet some wonderful people who take a genuine interest in your career and this leads to more opportunities down the road,” reflects Durlak. Some of these opportunities include increasing your collegial network, a vital element of professional life in the academe. Keep this in mind: graduation should be the goal here – let adjuncting be something to enhance your career rather than something that deters it. Teaching can be demanding. It takes time, energy, perhaps even a commute; these things can take away from your research productivity. It merits mentioning, though, how graduate students need teaching portfolios for the job market and some semblance of financial stability to make it the graduation finish line. Be strategic when venturing into the world of adjuncting. Let it be something that can help you get to where you need to go: eventually out of graduate school and onto something professionally bigger and better.

#### References

Cherwin, Kelly A. 2010. “The Challenges and Opportunities of the ‘Adjunct World.’” *HigherEdJobs*. 29 July 2010. Retrieved 12 July 2018. [<https://www.higheredjobs.com/Articles/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=208>]

Jenkins, Rob. 2014. “Straight Talk about ‘Adjunctification.’” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 15 Dec. 2014. Retrieved 12 July 2018. [<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Straight-Talk-About/150881>]

#### **Economic Sociology: Not Just for Big Schools Anymore!**



**David Pinzur, Loyola Marymount University**

In many smaller Sociology departments, topics related to Economic Sociology—such as consumerism, the

workplace, inequality—tend to be folded into courses on subjects like Theory, Gender, Inequalities, or Political Sociology, rather than covered in their own course. This is a lost opportunity. Not only is Economic Sociology a thriving sub-field (with 783 ASA section members as of 2017, on par with Sociology of Education, Family, Collective Behavior and Social Movements, and Inequality, Poverty & Mobility), but it covers topics of great interest and immediate practical consequence to students from a broad range of majors.

This past spring semester, I introduced a new Economic Sociology course, titled “The Future of Capitalism” at the medium-sized (approx. 6200 undergraduates) private university where I was lecturing. The course offered historical investigations of some of the most pressing issues in American capitalism, including wealth inequality, technologically-fueled job precarity, consumer debt, and financialization. We traced the institutional stories behind the current crises in these areas and explored how, and to what extent, our society can address them in the future. The course was cross-listed by the Economics Department and nearly half of the twenty-five students signed up through that listing; Sociology majors were nearly equaled by Economics & Marketing majors, creating the ground for fruitful interdisciplinary discussions of contrasting models of human behavior.

Course evaluations reveal that the students enjoyed a few core features of the class. First, the course material was current and personally meaningful. As we were studying the subtle institutional methods and not-so-subtle ideologies by which wealth inequality is perpetuated, the Republican tax plan was being debated in Congress as well as the news media; as we were studying the social consequences of the “sharing” economy, legislation restricting the operation of Airbnb was passed by the Los Angeles City Council. This immediacy let students see the stakes of the ideas we covered. It also meant there were a wealth of journalistic articles and videos that we could incorporate into the class, and which served as great fodder for in-class projects, discussion, and debate. Students also felt personally invested in many topics, none more so than the issue of credit and debt. Many

brought to the class stories of their own student debt burden and how it has impacted them and their families personally and professionally.

Beyond the personal connection to economic issues facing them and their families, students were drawn to the material as a way to explore their growing critical attitude towards capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Many students' opinions on capitalism have been swayed by the energy and organizing taking place around issues of wealth inequality and plutocracy, including the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement and Bernie Sanders's 2016 presidential run. Even students who are not politically active may be likely to believe that "the system is rigged" or that "CEOs are greedy." The value of a course devoted specifically to sociological analysis of the economy is that it gives these students analytical tools to move beyond simplistic assertions and on to a higher level of engagement on these issues. The course helps students move beyond a knee-jerk reaction to economic unfairness to see the methods by which this unfairness is made, and can be unmade.

Students harboring these critical attitudes included Economics and Marketing majors just as much as Sociology majors. This came to me as a welcome surprise: since economic sociology often positions itself in contrast to neoclassical economic dogma, I was afraid that I would receive pushback from Economics majors in the face of concepts that challenged their discipline's core principles. What I found instead was that many of these students were thirsty for an approach that could theorize the manifest failings of the modern economy, rather than dogmatically assert its ideal form. They craved an empirical, historical, institutional, cultural approach to the economy, which was sorely lacking in their mathematically-focused courses. Several Economics majors expressed their appreciation for the course's deep dive into social context: one review from an Economics and Psychology double-major stated it was the "most productive class" the student had ever taken and a second Economics major said it was their favorite class that semester.

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<sup>1</sup> Harvard Institute of Politics. Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service, 29th Edition: March 18 – April 3, 2016. Accessed at:

Naturally, teaching a course like this is not without its challenges. The most significant of these is what I call the "double-jargon problem"—the fact that many Sociology majors are confused by economic concepts like "securitization" or "liquidity," while non-Sociology majors are perplexed by terms like "ideology" or "institutions." Some forethought is necessary to make sure everyone can follow along. One way to ameliorate this problem could be to implement an interdisciplinary "buddy system," where Sociology majors and Economics/Marketing/Business majors pair up to help clarify their respective discipline's concepts introduced in lectures and reading. A second method would be to teach especially perplexing economic topics (e.g., financial markets and derivatives) as part of an extended case study (e.g. on the 2008 mortgage crisis). By presenting these complex topics using a single case, students are enabled to pull together a lot of overlapping empirical detail with which to ground their understanding.

My experience teaching this course at a medium-sized school suggests that Economic Sociology need not be relegated only to large universities. An Economic Sociology course can have broad appeal, pulling in Sociology majors who want to deepen their understanding of capitalism as a system as well as Economics, Marketing, and Business majors seeking an empirically-grounded theoretical perspective on the economy. The course could serve as a complement to departmental offerings on Inequalities, Sociology of Work, Political Sociology or Globalization. While departments may have previously considered economic sociology too much of a fringe sub-field and unlikely to draw enough interested students, I have found the opposite: students are hungry to learn this material and even small departments will likely find enough eager students to have a fruitful course!

[http://iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/content/160423\\_Harvard%20IOP\\_Spring%202016\\_TOPLINE\\_u.pdf](http://iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/content/160423_Harvard%20IOP_Spring%202016_TOPLINE_u.pdf)



**Congratulations to the 2018 SAGE Teaching Innovations & Professional Development Award Recipients!**

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### Section Goings on in Philly

**Mon, August 13, 8:30 to 10:10am, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 2**

New Research in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

**Mon, August 13, 10:30 to 11:30am, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 9**

Hans O. Mauksch Award and Address

**Mon, August 13, 11:30am to 12:10pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 9**

Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology Business Meeting

**Mon, August 13, 4:30 to 6:10pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 5**

The Science of Learning and Sociology: Foundations and Strategies for Improved Learning Workshop

**Mon, August 13, 2:30 to 4:10pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 5, Salon C**

Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology Refereed Roundtable Session

Roundtable 1 – Teaching at a Community College

Roundtable 2 – Teaching at a Liberal Arts - 4 year Institutions

Roundtable 3 – Comprehensive Institutions

Roundtable 4 – Teaching at Universities and Research Institutions

Roundtable 5 – Teaching Focused Positions at Research Institutions

**Mon, August 13, 6:30 to 8:10pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 5, Salon C**

Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology and Alpha Kappa Delta

**Tue, August 14, 10:30am to 12:10pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 3**

The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers and Online Learning

**Tue, August 14, 10:30am to 12:10pm, Pennsylvania Convention Center, Level 100, 111A**

GIFTS: Good Ideas for Teaching Sociology and for Publishing in TRAILS

### Announcements

**Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology Annual Conference**, October 11-13, 2018. Norfolk, Virginia. Theme: "Translating Complexity into Action." Open to all applied social scientists, as well as those looking to use their social science skills in applied and clinical areas. Participants include: academics, policy, program and project leaders, business consultants, health care and government professionals. The meeting will be a point of mutual learning and growth among practitioners in the field and professionals challenged with building systems for human improvement. AACS has a reputation as a student-friendly conference for both undergraduates and graduate students, featuring [student problem solving](#), [paper competitions](#), and mentoring opportunities. Papers, full sessions, workshops, and poster submissions welcomed. **Proposals that address teaching with an applied focus are also invited.** Professional development pre-conference (Thursday afternoon) workshops will be included in the conference registration fee. Deadline: June 1, 2018. For more information, visit: <http://www.aacsnet.net/> and explore the Conferences tab.

## Announcements

We are looking for a newsletter editor to join our team. If you are interested, please email Daina Cheyenne Harvey at [dharvey@holycross.edu](mailto:dharvey@holycross.edu).