

Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching is guided by a belief that creating citizens is one of the most important functions of schools and institutions of higher education. I am committed to creating an inclusive and democratic environment in which all students can learn, and use equity-minded pedagogies to intentionally address inequities in student experiences and outcomes. I am a student of the scholarship on teaching and learning which I draw on to inform my instructional practices, course design, and engagement with students in and out of the classroom. And, I believe that I have a professional responsibility to students to be engaged in the substantive areas that I teach to ensure that my courses contain an informed curation of content that draws on the broad diversity of knowledge that social science has to offer.

Creating Citizens

I design courses to explicitly have students connect course material to their lives, reflecting my view that sociology is not only an academic discipline but a way of thinking about society and our position in it. I emphasize both the importance of how critical analysis and engagement produces new knowledge at the same time that these create social citizens. This approach reflects my view that students learn best when they are provided with opportunities to actively engage and interrogate the course material, and that developing an analytical orientation is a primary learning objective with long term implications for individual students and our democratic society more broadly.

Fostering an Inclusive and Democratic Environment

I strive to create an inclusive and democratic classroom environment where all students feel that they can learn and contribute. While remaining critically reflective of my own practice, I do this by: having an awareness of systemic inequities that can inhibit individual student success as well as negatively impact classroom dynamics; establishing and enforcing expectations for students; and organizing course content in a clear and accessible way. In my classes, I emphasize that we are all knowledgeable in different ways, and we all have something to teach and something to learn; that respect for each person's experience means never demeaning or trivializing another's point of view; and that each of us will not only share our current thinking, but will be asked to rethink the assumptions and knowledge we each brought into the classroom.

Using Equity-Minded Pedagogies

I have a student-centered pedagogy that uses active learning to engage students with theory and empirical research and teaches them to think critically while exploring different ways of understanding the social world. I do this by: providing students with opportunities to learn about different perspectives and different types of evidence; connecting their own knowledge and experiences to the material in ways that validate their own knowledge and encourage critical reflection; and providing them with analytical tools to use in thinking about and analyzing various perspectives and sources of evidence to build arguments and understanding. I structure each class meeting as a participatory learning opportunity using a mix of short lectures, activities, and discussions. This approach to teaching is informed by research on equity-informed high-impact teaching practices which identifies the ways that collaborative and active learning opportunities have especially positive impacts on students from historically under-represented groups.

For the past four years, I have been active in Iowa's "Big Ideas" initiative to bring active, interdisciplinary learning to our first-year general education program. Each fall I co-teach, with a colleague in history, a course in this program on "Economic Security and Equal Opportunity in America" that combines historical and social scientific approaches in an active-learning environment. Informed by research at our institution (and nationally) that has identified lack of social connection, sense of belonging, and academic engagement as some of the most common factors affecting first year retention especially for students from historically under-represented groups, the course is designed to provide new students a highly interactive, collaborative, active learning experience.

Integrating Research in Teaching

Being a scholar with broad interests in social inequality, education, and public policy, I make connections to my own research, and also describe how research is motivated, conducted, and used by non-academic audiences to influence public opinion or policy. When possible I provide first-hand accounts from my own and colleagues research to provide students with an in-depth understanding of social science research, including: how research projects start, how they build and progress, how there are anticipated and unanticipated outcomes, how a final research product is produced, and the iterative nature of knowledge production.

Undergraduate Teaching & Mentoring

I have designed and taught three different undergraduate courses two of which meet my current institution's General Education Requirements. I have consistently received overwhelmingly positive student evaluations in each of these courses, and written comments from students indicate that I am seen as knowledgeable, organized, able to explain material clearly, and helpful; and that my classes are eye-opening and engaging (see Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness for numerical summaries and written feedback from students for each course). In addition to my course-based undergraduate teaching and supervision of undergraduate honors theses for the Departments of Sociology, Ethnic and Public Policy, and Political Science, I have taken a particularly active role in creating research and internship opportunities for undergraduates, and serving as a mentor and internship supervisor (see below for more information).

Social Inequality

This course meets the General Education Requirement for Diversity, Values and Society. In the course students learn sociological ways of thinking about social inequality including key concepts and theories sociologists use to understand inequality in a number of different spheres of life. Students learn how social inequality differs across racial, gender, and class boundaries within the US, as well as how the US situation compares to other countries. Students also gain an analytical understanding of social inequality as they learn about the dynamics that characterize various forms of inequality and the primary mechanisms involved in the production of inequality.

Equality, Opportunity, and Public Policy in America

This course meets the General Education Requirement for Social Sciences. This course is part of the university-wide Big Ideas initiative which encourages the design of team-taught, interdisciplinary general education courses that use student-driven inquiry to teach students about issues of enduring and broad

interest. This course focuses specifically on the role of government in ensuring economic well-being and equalizing opportunity. Students learn the process through which social scientists and policy scholars examine social issues and policies. They learn to evaluate data, identify patterns, and generate hypotheses or expectations; to synthesize different types of information; and to develop policy positions and support them with evidence and reason. A unique aspect of the course are public panels of practitioners representing different roles in the policymaking process at the end of each substantive unit. Students are able to ask the panelists questions, and each year 1-2 students obtain employment from these initial conversations.

Poverty, Inequality, and Public Policy

This course examines the nature and extent of poverty and inequality in the United States, provides an introduction to public policy, and explores current policies that affect poverty and inequality. Students learn to critically analyze alternative perspectives on the causes of poverty and inequality, and connect these theories with the associated public policy responses. Students also learn to evaluate various policy solutions and compare research evidence of policy effectiveness in reducing poverty and inequality.

Student Internships in Education and Social Policy Research

In my role as Director of the Social and Educational Policy Research Program at the Public Policy Center, I launched an internship program for undergraduate and graduate students which provides them with opportunities to participate in social and education policy research, and engage with the community around these issues. I worked to ensure the internship would be a paid internship to ensure greater equity in access to this high impact practice. To date, I have provided 23 University of Iowa undergraduate students and 6 non-UI students from historically under-represented backgrounds (through the Summer Research Opportunity Program) opportunities to engage in this work. Under my supervision, student research teams have made important contributions to the ongoing community research partnership with the Iowa City Community School District. It is especially gratifying to see students introduced to social inequality and social policy in one of my courses develop a career or academic interest in educational or social policy, complete the internship, and then move on to related employment or postgraduate training. These students routinely identify the internship—and the opportunity to participate directly in the research enterprise—as the defining experience of their undergraduate years.

Graduate Teaching & Mentoring

I have designed and taught five different graduate courses covering stratification, race and ethnicity, political sociology, and teaching sociology in higher education. Feedback from graduate students has been very positive in each of the courses I have taught (see Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness for numerical summaries and written feedback from students). Written comments from students indicate that I am clear, dedicated to student learning, and well-prepared; that the required assignments are beneficial to their learning and preparations for comprehensive exams; and that the courses themselves are well-organized and comprehensive. In addition to teaching graduate courses, I am the primary advisor for six graduate students, and to date have chaired 5 MA theses committees, and am currently chairing three dissertation committees. I also provide internship opportunities for graduate students and organize a weekly writing group (see below for more details).

Social Stratification

This course provides an introduction to the leading theoretical perspectives in the study of stratification, focuses on major questions and debates in the field, and provides a survey of key empirical findings from classic works and recent research. The course covers the main areas of social stratification including: intergenerational mobility and status attainment; educational inequalities; labor market inequalities; and economic inequality.

Teaching Sociology

This course provides preparation for teaching college-level social science courses through exposure to various topics related to the context and practice of teaching and learning in higher education. The course involves reflective writing assignments on student learning, pedagogy in diverse learning environments, identifying the scope of and content of teaching and learning in sociology, and a teaching philosophy statement. The course also includes observing and assessing classroom teaching, and hands-on assignments including the construction and design of a course syllabus, and the design of a discussion and an active learning module. Given my belief that diversity, equity, and inclusion should be at the forefront of how we approach teaching and learning in higher education, I have designed the course to have the first three weeks focused on diverse learning environments including issues such as faculty and student identities, diverse and critical pedagogies, and ensuring diverse and representative content. I have found that organizing the course in this way encourages graduate students to approach their own teaching with a philosophy that is conscientious and reflective in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Racial Stratification

This course provides students with an understanding of how sociologists conceptualize and theorize about race and ethnicity, how these conceptualizations and theories are operationalized in social science research, and how racial and ethnic inequalities are produced and maintained.

Social Policy and Inequality

This course explores the interplay of the state, citizenship, welfare states, social policy, poverty governance and inequality. Drawing on both theoretical and empirical works, the course is designed around three core agendas. First, it provides an overview of attempts to theorize the state in relation to other social institutions. Second, it examines the inclusion and exclusion of groups as citizens, the role of citizenship, and the relation to social provision and the welfare state. Third, it provides an opportunity to investigate the complex ways that welfare states, social policies, poverty governance and social inequalities shape one another.

Inequality Seminar

This course was designed around a weekly speaker series that included several nationally regarded scholars who presented cutting edge work in the area of social stratification from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The course consisted of attending the weekly presentations, reading a set of background materials and 1-2 pieces of current research of the presenter, and discussing the presented research.

Graduate Student Mentorship and Advising

As with undergraduates, I also provide graduate students opportunities to have internships in education and social policy research. To date, graduate students have participated in a study of experiences of parental leave policies at the University of Iowa, a study of racial disparities in experiences of the UI campus and other Big Ten institutions, and several have contributed to the research-practice partnership work with the local school district. In addition to providing several graduate students each year with internship opportunities, I also organize a weekly writing group for a group of 8 graduate students. The group meets weekly to provide feedback on one member's writing, and provides an opportunity for shared professional development related to writing and publishing in academic and non-academic venues.