

Teaching Statement

In my classes I cultivate a challenging environment in which we constantly question our presuppositions and responses, while keeping a focus on being reflexive and critical in our thinking. We are not relativistic, but vigilant in never taken anything for granted. I nurture my students' specific research ideas, topics, and areas of inquiry, while encouraging their overall intellectual development. In all my courses, I expose students to a wide range of perspectives and methods for exploring the specific topics and problems at hand. As someone who believes in a theoretically driven social science, I view the role of theory as the foundation for sociological inquiry and the guiding framework through which one approaches the study of social life. As such, I view sociological theory as arising out of our attempts to provide explanatory frameworks that link specific aspects of our social life to larger macro processes. Sociological theory attempts to assemble ideas or concepts to generate knowledge about the social world. This knowledge is then used to explain, analyze, and critique the social world. Through critique I show my students how as individuals and groups, we are always caught up in networks of connections associations that embed us in contexts not of our own making or choosing. Simultaneously, I have them consider how this historical context is also a contingent one, whereby the world is not locked in place, but can become other than what it is in its current configuration.

Teaching Goals:

With a regular 6-course-teaching-load, I have particular goals that I strive to accomplish in every course I teach at both the undergraduate level and graduate level: (1) to sharpen students' analytical skills by developing their critical abilities to evaluate different theoretical models and to recognize the ways in which theorists use concepts to understand various aspects of theoretical knowledge (2) to facilitate students' capacities to trace out some of the core issues, dilemmas, and mutations of sociological theory from previous theorists as they are reworked and re-contextualized into contemporary theories; (3) to aid students in thinking dialectically by using one thinker to complement and extend the theory of another and by placing these thinkers in dialogue with each other; (4) to encourage students to ask what are the relationships between theory and method are in terms of how certain theoretical paradigms lend themselves for better or worse use with particular methodological approaches; and (5) to strengthen students' use of sociology in order to explore the utility of sociological theory for social and cultural analysis.

In conducting my classes, I never view students as empty vessels needing to be filled with information, rather as agents who are responsible for taking an active role in their own learning process. At first, some students struggle with this discursive pedagogical style. For example, rather than asking how Marx's state of human alienation is defined in capitalism and waiting silently until a student recalls the explanation in the assigned text, I suggest three interpretations and thereby force the students to consider each viewpoint before deciding. I wait for the selection of one of the answers, and then suggest that the answer may help us in some ways, but question if this is the entirety of Marx's idea. For each response I then pose the other responses as counterpoints, forcing the students to think through the different options until they realize that all three answers are both valid and useful. They recognize that answering questions like this requires a rethinking of one's own position and how that position

relates to other possible answers that may not only be plausible, but also correct. I encourage students to reflect upon the diversity of worldviews in a multicultural world, rather than thinking that their view of the world is the only valid one, or that “common sense” is in any sense “common.” At first this teaching strategy may seem disconcerting to some students, where they object to the style of defending different options and the absence of simple “right answers,” but it assists students in developing a more critical orientation when evaluating opinions and measuring beliefs against evidence. Most of my classes involve a multi-stage research or critical analysis paper. This approach promotes a constant involvement in thinking through course materials outside of class and in relation to their own ideas.

Linking teaching and research:

A central value in my teaching is linking my teaching to my research. It is often the case that my research drives my teaching as much as my teaching drives my research. For example, my research for my book on immigrant restaurant workers animated and structured the course readings for my class on the sociology of food (Spring 2019), and conversely, the article on Foucault and medicalization was the product of numerous discussions in my graduate Sociological Perspectives theory course reading some of Foucault’s lecture courses. The synergy of teaching and research has been rewarding and productive for both sides of my profession. As a result, students are exposed to the latest research I am doing, the latest theoretical work I am grappling with, and to pull them in not simply as an audience, but as active co-conspirator participants thinking through the same problems as I.

Teaching and curriculum:

Since arriving at DePaul, I have been called upon to play a central role in sustaining our core curriculum and intellectual community centered on the teaching of both classical and contemporary theory at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. With the 6-course-load, I usually teach the two-course graduate theory sequence each year, as well as one or two sections of our undergraduate theory course per year. In addition to this heavy contribution to the core requirements, I have also taught a diverse array of electives for the department as needed: *Race and Ethnicity*, *Mass Media and Culture*, *Urban Ethnography*, *The City in the Future*, *The Sociology of Food*, and *The Sociology of Consumption* to name a few.