

TEACHING INTERESTS AND EFFECTIVENESS

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TEACHING INTERESTS

I am interested in teaching introductory courses such as Introduction to Sociology and Social Problems, as well as methodological courses such as Research Methods, Survey Methodology, and Secondary Data Analysis. I am also interested in teaching a number of substantive courses such as: Sociology of the Family, Racial/Ethnic Diversity and the American Family, Fertility, Gender, Social Psychology, Social Demography, Bio-Sociology, and Family Policy.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My teaching philosophy revolves around stimulating critical thinking skills in an active learning environment and providing an open forum to discuss relevant issues. I strive to be challenging, yet respectful, of students' ideas and opinions and facilitate a classroom environment of scholarship and debate. In all of my classes, I make a concerted effort to promote teaching excellence by (1) making the class relevant to the students through coursework and the inclusion of technology, (2) welcoming diverse opinions, and (3) informing world views through scholarship.

While many of my students enroll in introductory courses because they are interested in the material, a large number are simply filling general education requirements and have little motivation to engage with the topics presented. As an instructor, I have found that one of the most challenging aspects of teaching is making courses relevant to these students. I try to engage my classes through the use of classroom assignments, technology, quality text books, slideshows, movie clips, and personal stories to illustrate important points. For example, when studying gender socialization in my Introduction to Sociology Course, I often have my students work in groups during class time to analyze the top 5 US newspapers and identify the role of women in print media. Students then answer questions such as how many women are mentioned, quoted, or photographed relative to men? What is the context of their inclusion in the paper? On what page did they appear? And, how does this differ for men? Alternately, I have had the class do a content analysis of the top rated sitcom to assess the presence and role of minority characters. Students were asked to identify the differences in clothing, language, jobs, and status in this constructed reality and to discuss whether these programs are likely to increase or decrease racial tensions. I have found that students respond well to this type of hands-on instruction, as seen in the comment "I think the most effective tool used were the assignments, which definitely helped me to evaluate what I've learned and apply that new knowledge to my environment."

I am also committed to teaching with technology in the classroom and utilize PowerPoint slides and video clips on a regular basis to engage students visually. When studying deviance and conformity, for example, I may begin the lecture with a slideshow overview of the topic and key points, and then I will have my class watch the archival videos from the famous Milgrim experiments and discuss the ethics of research and importance of authority in our lives. Students respond well to the inclusion of media in the course, as voiced in these comments: "Cass's PowerPoints were exceptional. They illustrated the concepts extremely well", and "This is first class that I've actually learned and acquired more in class rather than out of class. I really liked the slide presentations."

Second, I am committed to welcoming diverse opinions in my classroom. I was particularly pleased by the comment of one of my students who could value the classroom's environment of respect while disliking the alternate view presented by other students. According to this student, "I thoroughly enjoyed this class and the professor. Class members were a bit ridiculous at times but it added to the learning and thought process of the whole class experience." Similarly, I look for ways to incorporate diverse opinions by bringing all students into the classroom discussion, rather than relying on the most talkative members of the class. This approach can

facilitate learning, as mentioned by this student, “Cass helped me learn to speak up. I don’t feel like I am very good at expressing myself so I would seldom comment in class. However, Cass called on me several times when I wasn’t even raising my hand, and I’m glad she did because it forced me to participate. This made me feel more a part of what we learned about and helped me to learn it better...She was also good at helping us see all sides of the issues we discussed.” In addition to creating a welcoming intellectual environment, I work hard in my classes to learn the students’ names and their interests and to interact with them on a personal level. According to one student, “This was my favorite Sociology class I have ever taken. Cass ...cares so much about student learning and is a friend as well as a professor. Her teaching style is so conducive to a comfortable learning environment, which made it easy to understand even difficult material. She expects a lot out of her students but provides the means to get it all done. This class was so well organized and it was so much fun. I would take it all over again if I could.”

Finally, I structure the lectures and presentations in my class to inform world views through rigorous scholarship and critical evaluations of the links between culture, institutions, and individual roles. Throughout my courses, students are engaged in ‘Thinking Sociologically’ and often work on group projects aimed at helping them to critically perceive the social world around them. For example, I have had students work together to develop budgets for a fictional family living in poverty and then introduce life changes—such as the birth of a new child, the loss of a job, or a raise—and have students evaluate the ability to move within one’s social class. In one of my favorite class projects, a student-initiated assignment was developed wherein two students, one Hispanic and one White, attempted to rent apartments by calling listings in the college newspaper. The two male students kept track of their ‘callbacks’ and the information given to them by landlords. The Hispanic student was told more often than the White student that the room had already been taken or was unavailable, even when the same room was offered to the White student later that day. As a class we discussed the social implications for this project and I talked personally with the students involved to make sure they were able to deal with outcomes of their very interesting and informative study. For many students, training in ‘Thinking Sociologically’ has a significant effect on the way they see the world: “This was probably one of the most interesting classes I have ever been in. I really loved the class and felt like I learned so much. It has really affected my way of thinking.” Similarly, one student commented, “Because of this class and the way Cass taught it, I look at things differently. I pay more attention to things happening in the world. I feel motivated to help in some way. I’ve never had a class influence me as much as this one.” Oftentimes these shifts in perception can influence the students over time, such as when non-Sociology majors come to embrace the concepts discussed in class: “I have decided that I should peruse a minor in Sociology due to this class” and “I really loved this class and now I am checking into having a minor in Sociology.”

Service Learning

In addition to promoting academic knowledge and critical discussion, I have incorporated service learning into my courses as a way to help students link the issues we talk about in class with real life events. My interest in service learning developed as a teaching assistant for a Social Problems course where I consistently heard students complaining about the number and complexity of ‘unsolvable issues’ we would discuss in class. Service learning provides a way to combat apathy at the local level and gives students the opportunity to respond to crises with action rather than despair. As an adjunct faculty member, I helped develop a service learning curriculum for the Sociology Department that paired students with community programs (e.g. United Way, Community Action , and the local food bank) who specialize in servicing people who are dealing with issues commonly discussed in introductory courses (e.g. poverty, housing segregation, crime and delinquency). As part of this, I created a resource book for all Sociology students which listed options for community service. I also incorporated service learning into my classes by providing extra credit if students participated in a minimum number of service hours, kept a journal of their daily effort, and wrote a final paper outlining their experience and the efficacy of the program at reducing the social problem in question. As a capstone experience for a large class of over 50 Social Problems students, the Sociology Department and Service Learning Center funded a banquet and poster session for students who participated in service learning and their families. The inclusion of service learning has been a valuable addition to my teaching approach.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2009, Su Instructor, *Introduction to Sociology Online*, Pennsylvania State University

2007, Su Instructor, *Family Sociology*, Brigham Young University

2007, Su Co-Instructor, *Introduction to Sociology*, Brigham Young University

2004, W Instructor, *Introduction to Sociology*, Brigham Young University

2004, W Instructor, *Modern Social Problems*, Brigham Young University

2002, Su Instructor, *Introduction to Sociology*, Brigham Young University

2002, Su Instructor, *Modern Social Problems*, Brigham Young University

2002, Su Instructor, *Modern Social Problems*, Brigham Young University

2002, Sp Instructor, *Modern Social Problems*, Brigham Young University

2002, W Instructor, *Research Methods*, Brigham Young University

2001, F Instructor, *Modern Social Problems*, Brigham Young University

2001, Su Instructor, *Essentials of Self Esteem*, Brigham Young University

2001, W Instructor, *Research Methods*, Brigham Young University

TEACHER TRAINING

2000, W Co-Instructor, *Research Methods*, Brigham Young University

1999, F Co-Instructor, *Modern Social Problems*, Brigham Young University

1998, W Teaching Assistant, *Research Methods*, Brigham Young University

1997, W Teaching Assistant, *Research Methods*, Brigham Young University

1996, W Teaching Assistant, *Research Methods*, Brigham Young University

1996, Su Teaching Assistant, *Essentials of Self Esteem*, Brigham Young University

1996, F Teaching Assistant, *Social Psychology*, Brigham Young University

Below I have posted 100% of the comments from my last five courses. All emphasis, spelling, and grammatical errors are original.

1. FAMILY SOCIOLOGY, SUMMER 2007 (4 COMMENTS)

I thought that this class was great overall. The organization of the course was exceptional. Facilitating lectures were also useful for future coursework in graduate school.

Thanks for a great class!

This was my favorite Sociology class I have ever taken. Cass is the most incredible teacher and I am so glad I had the opportunity to take this course from her. She cares so much about student learning and is a friend as well as a professor. Her teaching style is so conducive to a comfortable learning environment, which made it easy to understand even difficult material. She expects a lot out of her students but provides the means to get it all done. This class was so well organized and it was so much fun. I would take it all over again if I could.

She was GREAT! Very genuine, very helpful, and very informative. She had great knowledge of the subject matter and made all of the material fun and interesting.

2. INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY, SUMMER 2007 (16 COMMENTS) *CO-TAUGHT WITH S. DORIUS

I had a good experience in this class. They were very good instructors overall

Shawn and Cass were great at teaching the material. This is first class at BYU that I've actually learned and acquired more in class rather than out of class. I really liked their slide presentations and quizzes before class. The quizzes got my mind going and they answered questions to the quizzes as well. I have decided that I should peruse a minor in sociology due to this class. These are A+ teachers! All the best, (name withheld)

Good class...great teachers.

It gave me a little more of a new perspective on things. Nickel and dined had the biggest impact

Love the class and the textbook! Because the textbook was entertaining to read, it made the class more fun to take; it turned into a fun class, not just another general ed.

Great teachers for this intro class! The instructors really portray sociology in an interesting way. I was personally not looking forward to the class, but by the end of the semester I have found the course quite interesting! And very enlightening. Great class, and very genuine teachers that care for their students. They were able to get on a personal level with the students and really accommodate to their needs while still making the course effective.

I think the most effective tool both teachers used were the assignments, which definitely helped me to evaluate what I've learned and apply that new knowledge to my environment. I would have appreciated more feedback on my papers, or even getting my last papers returned.

Great class! Thanks so much!

Cass was really good and was always willing to help outside the class. Shawn got on my nerves a bit because I felt like he was teaching his political views as fact. Overall I enjoyed this class, but I felt like almost all of the assignments were just assignments for the sake of assignments and did not really teach anything. My main complaint with the class was Shawn's political comments.

Good teachers! I enjoyed all the stories because they related to the subject matter and made it more understandable and relatable.

really great!!!

This was probably one of the most interesting classes I have ever been in. I really loved the class and felt like I learned so much. It has really effected my way of thinking.

I think that it would have been helpful to have writing assignments returned to students quicker so that we can assess our errors and do better on the following assignments.

Loved the class a lot. Very well organized and interesting information.

I learned so many new things in this class and about society, and everything was so interesting to me. I really enjoyed it.

Awesome class!!!

3. SOCIAL PROBLEMS, WINTER 2004 (10 COMMENTS)

I thoroughly enjoyed this class and the professor. Class members were a bit ridiculous at times but it added to the learning and thought process of the whole class experience.

The text book was awful, and it seemed the instructors' opinions were the rule in discussions.

If someone hadn't had time to do the reading for the quiz, it would be better for them to completely skip the class than it is to go to class anyway, take the quiz, and get a low score. They could get a higher score for an unexcused absence than for being in class and taking the quiz. That was dumb. Also the grading system of using checks was not a good one at all!

Because of this class and the way Cassie taught it, I look at things differently. I pay more attention to things happening in the world. I feel motivated to help in some way. I've never had a class influence me as much as this one. Cassie helped me learn to speak up. I don't feel like I am very good at expressing myself so I would seldom comment in class. However, Cassie called on me several times when I wasn't even raising my hand, and I'm glad she did because it forced me to participate. This made me feel more a part of what we learned about and helped me to learn it better. Cassie's powerpoints were exceptional. They illustrated the concepts extremely well. She was also good at helping us see all sides of the issues we discussed.

Course was extremely disorganized, teacher did a terrible job of following syllabus, syllabus was revised several times throughout the course, the format of quizzes changed several times and was confusing, teacher needs to pay more attention to students, and less time worrying about applications to doctoral programs, tests were poorly written with numerous grammatical errors, teacher made numerous changes to appease students who were complaining.

Cassie was a great teacher. I really enjoyed all of her insights and the way in which she conducted the class. She made class discussion as important part of the lecture. She really wanted us to gain something from the class as well.

Sister Dorius was awesome. I learned so much from her class. (esp with racism)
She is a wonderful instructor and deserves a raise. I hope she continues to teach forever because a lot of people needs to hear what she has to say. Thanks Sister Dorius for everything. If you are ever in Virginia let me know and I'll buy you and your husband dinner.

Great class and great instructor.

I loved this class, but the quiz schedule was somewhat disorganized and it hurt many people's grades because they were prepared some days for quizzes that never happened, and weren't prepared other days when they weren't aware of a quiz. The syllabus changed too many times and no one was sure which one to believe. I also wish she had given us some individual feedback on our work. I think the check grading system is not fair because everyone gets the same points with a check, even though the range of quality in "check" papers was very wide. Points seem to work great in all my other classes. I liked the book, and the instructor was really good.

The instructor gave me no feedback on our essay's and the grading procedure was unfair.

4. SOCIAL PROBLEMS, SPRING 2004 (3 COMMENTS)

I really loved this class and now I am checking into having a minor in Sociology. I hope you teach other courses and I am able to take them from you.

I loved the class. I learned so much. Thanks for putting in the time to teach us.

i loved your class, you are a great teacher

5. SOCIAL PROBLEMS, SUMMER 2004 (2 COMMENTS)

Good, informative class. I liked it because it is material that will actually be useful to us throughout our lives.

I have really enjoyed this course. The instructor is totally prepared for class with videos and slides. She feels strongly about the subject and has written comments on what she liked about my assignments. I appreciate her willingness to make sure she understood what I had been trying to explain.