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Teaching Philosophy

My goal as an instructor is to facilitate the student's ability to learn and apply the principles of sociology to everyday life. It is exciting when I hear students express their ability to look at a phenomenon in a new way or to apply what they have learned to their life, career, or research ideas. I view teaching and learning as a process that is collaborative and reciprocal between myself and the students as well as between the students themselves. I achieve my goals in how I design my classes, interact with students, engage with diversity and inclusion, and how I prepare and learn as a teacher-scholar.

### Co-collaborative Teaching

The summer of my first class as an instructor of record the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, occurred. Reading the news stories and seeing the hate speech associated with these murders while I was preparing to teach sparked questions and reflection on pedagogy. Would I discuss current events that I know impact my life as well as my students and how would I approach class discussions. I believe that through reflection and the use of sociology, we can gain an understanding of the social world at a deeper level, but how would I go beyond the textbook to accomplish this? I decided to discuss the shooting, and in our class discussion, students talked about the broader social issues as well as their thoughts and concerns. It was during this period that I decided that I needed to have a strategy to not only discuss current social issues but to encourage such discussion and learning throughout the class.

I work to cover the fundamentals of the course through the lens of current events and student concerns. I have used several different activities and assignments that help students to identify and unpack the social factors involved in their lives. For example, I use current events to create prompts for students to discuss the issue within the subject of the class, I also use in class free writes for student reflection and integrate the broader social issue into class with videos or guest lectures discussing the topic.

### Reflect and Connect- Journaling and Artifact Analysis

A method I frequently use is a journal assignment. The purpose of the assignment is to allow for reflection on bias and discrimination in one's day do day experiences and to link prejudice and stereotypes to cultural influences and outcomes. Through the Diversity and Inclusion Fellowship at UGA in 2017, I adopted and reworked an assignment from Gibson (2011)<sup>1</sup>. I have used this assignment in my Medical Sociology, Gender and Work, and Introduction to Sociology classes. The student is required to reflect on a bias or stereotype that they have observed themselves enacting or have received. The second part is to identify a cultural artifact that illustrates a connection to the social. Students use memes, photos of billboards, podcasts, commercials, and songs- to name several. The results are that for many students, they began to adopt a method of connecting the micro with the macro in both their own lives and those around them. For example, during a class discussion on racial and ethnic discrimination, one student referred to their journal assignment. The student had realized that they held stereotypes toward a group of

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson. 2011, "The Diversity Watch: Finding Your Inner Isms" *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 35 (1): 158-16

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men and would cross the road even in broad daylight when the group was inside another property and nowhere near their path. Sharing this bias helped to drive a constructive conversation around the power of stereotypes and prejudice.

Giving Voice to Underrepresented Scholars and Groups

When designing my class, I strive to include articles and activities that address how social constructs influence people's lives and access to opportunities. The most profound learning experiences I have personally had were driven by listening to those who had vastly different social experiences than my own. I believe students learn best when they are encouraged to move beyond their social comfort zone and listen and reflect on the words and experiences of others. One way I do this is by looking for gaps in textbooks and traditional approaches to a subject. For example, when teaching medical sociology, I observed that concepts of race, class, and gender were often discussed in just one chapter. For my class, I divided this into three separate weeks, which allowed me to be more inclusive of the research I presented to the class. I included readings and discussions that address health disparities and barriers to health care that are experienced by the LGBTQ community. Breaking these areas into three separate weeks allowed me to include more information, and the discussions in class covered a wider variety of topics, experiences, and voices

I strive to include the voices of those that have often been underrepresented in conversations, both in academia and the public domain. To accomplish this, I frequently use videos of lectures or invite guest speakers who can share their own views, scholarly works or life experiences. For example, when teaching the Sociology of Health Care a few years ago, I invited a transwoman who was doing lectures in the south and had shown interest in visiting UGA. She came to class and told her story about transitioning while living in Texas and of navigating the court system as a transwoman trying to keep custody of her children. The discussion after her talk moved into the hallway to continue the conversation. Student reviews that year overwhelming reported that her visit was their favorite part of the semester and for many students, of their college experience. I am incredibly grateful for her coming to visit the class, and I continue to strive to facilitate these types of student experiences as a teacher.

Another way I engage with inclusion is in how I work with students as a teacher, adviser, and mentor. I make it a goal in my interactions with students to be as approachable and accessible as possible in a way that bolsters communication and support. I understand that adjustment to college life can be challenging and presents obstacles both for learning and living. Part of my professional commitment is to support students through my role as an instructor and advisor. I, therefore, make it a point to be aware of and share the resources and contacts on campus that may be of assistance to students, such as information about the career center and how to access the student food bank or counseling services, to name a few. Part of being a community member and building an inclusive environment includes knowing what resources are available to support our students.

This year I am a Future Faculty Fellow with the Center for Teaching and Learning. Through this fellowship, I have attended several workshops and lectures that I have informed the changes I have made to my classes. A central part of my approach to teaching is to search out and engage with opportunities to improve and strengthen my skills as an instructor. I strongly identify as a teacher-scholar, and I look forward to opportunities to continue to serve in that capacity.