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Statement of Teaching Philosophy, Goals and Strategies

General Philosophy of Teaching:

I believe that teaching is an experience that teachers at every level should be dedicated to pursuing as a field of inquiry for its own sake. As I believe teaching is my responsibility, I have striven to develop an innovative and improved teaching style throughout my teaching career. My general philosophy is centered on encouraging critical thought, stimulating self-reflection, evoking emotional response, welcoming challenge, and inviting laughter within a framework of analytical development. I truly believe that my teaching provides an alternative ‘laboratory’ in which students learn to create and generate new ideas and perspectives which challenge their pre-existing world views. I explain to all students that my teaching philosophy reflects my experiences--as teaching reflects the experiences of any teacher--and that my information should be subject to the same detailed analysis and rigorous critique as we do with every source of information. My teaching philosophy causes students to learn, inspires me to self-reflect and improve, and enhances the overall process of teaching and, therefore, learning.

I believe that my teaching philosophy and style serve to promote scholarship by generating interest in the subject matter of sociology. I believe that learning and teaching are interactive experiences best undertaken in an open classroom where students are free to challenge both me and the required readings. My teaching philosophy is embedded in post-modern and conflict pedagogies. As well, I do believe that my use of ‘plain language’ and dialogue within the classroom, combined with my passion for learning and sociology, effectively combine to serve as a process of improved learning. However, I view this process as an ongoing one in which I need to stay current in the field and must understand my students’ world views. I find this the most challenging as I must continually refine course content, my organization and presentation of the information, and regularly endeavor to discover the best way to effectively teach my students.

Generally, I prefer to not give students traditional examinations as I believe they simply serve to test an ability to recall information. I continue to provide generalized examination questions well in advance so that students may demonstrate their ability to interpret, understand, discuss, and

critique relevant information. My experience is that, while students do not initially appreciate this approach and are reluctant at first given more traditional forms of evaluation, they retain significant amounts of the material long after the examination is completed--they actually learn about the subject matter and develop analytical research and critical thinking skills. I continue to try and develop alternative means of evaluation such as in-class discussions, presentations, group work, written assignments, and fieldwork research assignments.

I believe that my philosophy is a practical one and, as a result, I have included rapidly evolving technology as another tool for teaching my students. I now use multimedia presentations in the classroom to stimulate interest in the discipline of sociology. I use computer based digitized video and audio presentations (both in class and on the web); critical thinking exercises which are based on an interactive (web based) and slide show (class based) approach; and, I prepare summaries and questions for the students to review on my web page. While I believe these technologies are useful for introducing sociology to students, I also believe that these technologies should serve to improve teaching and learning, and should not be used as an end unto itself: It is my belief that interpersonal interaction with other students is necessary to develop skills notwithstanding the advances made in technological tools.

Teaching Goals:

I encourage students to consistently evaluate how they know what they know and to question information provided to them by media, instructors, other students, their families, and texts. One of my primary goals is to shape the learning experience at a very high level of standard. I present students with multiple perspectives which provide students with a means to critically evaluate and challenge their own truths. Another goal is to develop an atmosphere of learning which gives legitimacy to alternative truths of women, people of color, gays and lesbians, and people from different cultures and class backgrounds. Also, I provide students with dominant discourses on substantive issues so that they can develop alternative and sometimes very innovative competing explanations. I believe that writing is one of the most important skills that a student can learn so that their critical ideas can realize their fullest potential in communication with others. Finally, my goals include fostering intellectual development so that students may effectively take what they learn and use it to improve our community.

Teaching Strategies:

A central focus in my sociology classes is for students to fully understand and be able to explain the dominant and competing sociological theories. I also want them to develop the ability to apply these theories to real world situations. I continually challenge students to not accept information uncritically and to refuse to be passive participants in their learning process.

I typically combine medium to present information so that students are stimulated and continue to be interested in the subject matter. Each assignment and examination is returned to the student with comments and suggestions for improvement. Generally, I will meet with any student at any time to discuss matters related to assigned work or anything else related to their university studies. I have utilized films and videos, mainstream popular culture literature, group projects, presentations, outside speakers, questionnaires, multimedia presentations, and a web page to enhance the learning environment. I believe that my teaching has benefited from the avoidance of the lectern: I move around the classroom so that I am not at the center or front and this encourages discussion as students can have a dialogue with me and each other. At the beginning of every course, I reassure

students that regardless of their backgrounds, their perspectives are valuable and that we all should provide an opportunity for discussion irrespective of their perspectives. Through teaching, training, instructional development, and collegial advice, I have continued to improve and craft my skills.

Teaching Responsibilities

At Bowling Green State University there are undergraduate, Masters and Ph.D. programs in sociology with specializations in demography and population studies, family studies, criminology and deviant behavior, and social psychology. As I was employed as an instructor with the Department of Sociology, my duties consisted of teaching undergraduate courses and providing instruction for directed studies. Introductory sociology, minority groups, deviance and social control, and juvenile delinquency are offered to majors and non-majors as service courses and as core courses for sociology and criminology majors (deviance and social control and juvenile delinquency are also applicable to the criminal justice major curricula).

At Wayne State University, I was responsible for teaching two undergraduate service classes as an Adjunct Professor primarily to majors from other disciplines. At the University of Windsor, I mainly had the responsibility of teaching advanced undergraduate classes as a Sessional Instructor for sociology, criminology, and labor studies majors and honor students. I have taught thirteen different courses over a period of five years which have included Social Problems, Introduction to Sociology, Introduction to Criminology, Law and Society, Corporate Deviance and Crime, Law and Criminality, Victimology, Foundations of Sociological Thought, Work and Occupations, Theories and Methods in Criminology, Deviance and Social Control, Juvenile Delinquency, and Minority Groups. There are copies of all syllabi within Appendix A, samples of tests in Appendix B, and samples of non-print teaching materials within Appendix C (available on CD-Rom).

Social Problems. I have taught social problems thus far eight times at Wayne State and consider this course among the most important courses in sociology. I believe that this course is important because it mainly introduces non-sociology students the role of the applied sociologist. I initially had the sole responsibility of delivering the course at 8:00 AM at Wayne State and popularized the section. More importantly, this course has been very useful in recruiting undecided majors into the discipline. I use both a standardized text and considerable supplemental readings and information to investigate atypical social problems from an international perspective to show how the sociological perspective has immense advantage over the psychological perspective. The core areas include: inequalities of age, class, gender, race, and sexuality; the economy; education; the environment; the family; sociology of health; the media; and, crime and justice. By the end of the course, I find that students understand sociology and have developed the sociological imagination.

Introduction to Sociology. I have taught this course once at the University of Windsor, once at Wayne State University (as “Understanding Human Society”), and three times as “Principles of Sociology” at Bowling Green State University. As with social problems, I believe that this course is one of the most important courses for the department as it introduces to students the discipline of sociology. My primary goal is to develop an analysis of human society combined with teaching basic study skills, analytical reasoning, and critical thought. I introduce students to sociological concepts and theories to show how they can be applied to substantive areas. In effect, my goal is to expand the students’ understanding from an individual based explanatory framework to a broader sociological focus--to show the students that sociology has application in the world outside of the academy. I find that my usage of ‘plain language’ and an empathetic understanding in the classroom

and beyond excites and stimulates the students so that their lived experiences become part of the learning process. As well, I believe that the use of multiple teaching methods and technology creates the correct impression that sociologists are at the “cutting-edge” of academia.

Evaluations of Teaching

One of the best experiences I have had teaching is the written feedback received from students. While I have realized that not every student will be equally satisfied with my teaching philosophy and style, a considerable number have given both constructive and positive written feedback. I have also used an informal and anonymous course evaluation within a number of my courses to determine which areas could be improved for the respective course. The information students have provided has enabled me to improve somewhat as a teacher over my teaching career. Some of my past students have reported that they considered my grading as fair, my lectures interesting and exciting, the course required readings difficult, the course required readings as exceptional, long answer examinations as challenging, web page as a very useful tool, written assignments as too advanced, and sometimes one or two have written that I am too critical, radical or Marxist. There are a number of written comments within Appendix D (available on CD-Rom).

The University of Windsor, Wayne State University, and Bowling Green State University each utilize standardized student evaluations of teaching. However, the scale and format varies considerably between the universities. As well, there are considerable differences between the evaluations to provide an equitable comparison of the universities. At the University of Windsor, the Student Rating of Instructors and Courses queries thirteen indicators: three items on the instructor and ten items on the course (additional comments are only included when a student requests paper to do so). At Wayne State University, the Student Evaluation of Teaching queries twenty-two indicators. Finally, at Bowling Green State University, the Faculty and Course Evaluation queries twenty-six items of which seventeen are used as primary indicators. There is a summary of the measures and the student ratings from each of the three universities in Appendix E (available on CD-Rom).

Overall, my performance evaluations have continued to improve and have been relatively high within each of three sociology departments. However, I should point out that I believe my evaluation scores have not been as high as possible due to the high standards--extensive reading lists and strenuous written requirements--employed within my courses and the difficulty of the evaluation methods. I also believe that large class size and class meeting times have affected my ratings somewhat as I am still developing my rhetorical method in the large classroom. Nevertheless, I have continued to improve my teaching and the trends would support this assertion. After developing the web page supplemental lecture notes, I believe that the students, particularly those preferring a more traditional structured lecture format (as opposed to a more interactive and unstructured format), increased their evaluation rating of my teaching abilities. The following presents a combined mean of the primary indicators with the evaluations found within Appendix E:

TABLE 1:
Student Evaluation at Wayne State University
 (7 point scale)¹

	Fall 1997	Winter 1998	Fall 1998	Winter 1999	Fall 1999
Social Problems (8am)	4.20	5.44	5.62	5.39	5.65
Social Problems	5.65	6.04		6.25	
Intro. Sociology			5.38*		

TABLE 2:
Student Evaluation at the University of Windsor
 (5 point scale)

	S/S 1997	Fall 1997	Winter 1998	S/S 1998	Fall 1998
Theory and Methods in Criminology	4.50	2.97*			
Victimology			3.83*		
Work and Occupations			3.93		
Law and Society				3.83	
Introduction to Criminology					4.03*

	Winter 1999	S/S 1999	Fall 1999	Winter 2000
Law and Society	4.03		3.83**	3.83**
Foundations of Sociological Thought		3.80		
Introduction to Sociology			4.33	
Law and Criminality			3.57*	
Corporate Deviance and Crime				4.03

¹S/S denotes Inter-session and Summer Session. * indicates class size of 51-100 students.
 ** indicates class size greater than 100 students.

TABLE 3:
Student Evaluation at Bowling Green State University
 (4 point scale)

	Fall 2000	Spring 2001	Fall 2001	Spring 2002
Principles of Sociology	3.31*		3.28*	
Principles of Sociology	3.35*			
Deviance and Social Control		3.42	3.66*	
Deviance and Social Control		3.37*	3.49*	
Minority Groups			3.23*	3.28*
Minority Groups				3.35*
Juvenile Delinquency	3.37*	3.35*		3.39*
Juvenile Delinquency	3.59	3.62		3.49*

Responsibilities for Graduate Teaching Assistants

I have had responsibility for six graduate teaching assistants over the last four years of teaching (two senior undergraduates and four masters students). Each of my teaching assistants has been employed as assistants to aid with the large enrollment in my classes. While I would have enjoyed working with each of the graduate students to focus on developing their teaching and research skills, my responsibilities have simply required that I instruct the teaching assistants in the skills of evaluation and student consultation. However, I have had the opportunity of working with two teaching assistants and supervising their development as seminar leaders within the smaller setting used for supplemental instruction. As well, I found myself regularly discussing and advising each of my past teaching assistants and graduate students on problems faced in the development of their theses and other student related concerns.

Future Goals and Aspirations

My future goals and aspirations can be summarized as three specific temporal objectives. I have a number of short term, intermediate, and longer term goals. However, I think that my life's objective is one which pursues social justice. I entered into academia with the goal of continuing my efforts to effect social change from a more informed position. My experience in the labor movement and my youth within the inner-city has given me a first hand look at the injustices of social inequality. These experiences and injustices form the basis for my continued research inquiry and

dedication to teaching. In effect, I feel that my applied sociology work will lead to a better society for everyone.

I feel confident in my teaching and administrative abilities and believe that I have developed a standard which will continue to improve slowly over time. In order to continue improving, I regularly attend seminars and conferences to improve my skills. My experience with the advanced directed readings has really excited my desire to work directly with advanced students. I have also had the pleasure of doing research with students and have helped students present their works at regional conferences and pursue publication.

My short term goals are fairly straightforward steps in realizing my life's objective. First and foremost, I have set the completion of my dissertation as the top priority. I have found the research exciting and continue to find that each new corner leads to another social inequality question to be answered and investigated. I will complete my dissertation in the summer of 2007. I have presented a number of research papers at national conferences over the last few years and plan to continue developing different research projects after I complete my dissertation. My hope is that each of these new questions and endeavors will serve to focus and define my research agenda for the next few years.

My longer term goals are focused around my life's objective of effecting social change. I am currently involved with a number of community and academic bodies with like-minded objectives. My belief is that, as an applied sociologist, I will be able to work towards the development of an interdisciplinary field of inquiry which takes the university back into the community. I would hope to work towards fostering an applied approach reminiscent of the early applied North American sociologists.