

Teaching Portfolio
Keith Bentele

I. Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Of many fond memories of being an undergraduate sociology student, one experience that made a profound impression on me was having to read William Domhoff's book *Who Rules America?* for an Introduction to Sociology course. At the time, the world of politics was an intimidating and seemingly incomprehensible mess to me. Domhoff's book and the excellent instructor provided a rough framework for understanding the major elements of what was driving U.S. politics. As a politically engaged individual, I had an incredible feeling of finally being able to anchor my more specific knowledge and life experiences in a broader, and actually intelligible, context. More than anything else I want to provide my students with a similar experience, one that hopefully recurs beyond the classroom and not just in the area of politics. I know from experience that the confidence that comes with feeling like one has a handle on an issue or subject can be extremely empowering for students. In a nutshell, the goals that inform my teaching are a desire to provoke concern about social issues in students while simultaneously equipping them with intellectual tools that will make these issues more accessible and conceptually manageable. Ideally, this latter process will enhance critical thinking skills, empower students, and underline the power of a sociological perspective.

Within my courses I frequently flush out the theories that are being covered with what may be considered weighty examples. Poverty, racial inequality, abortion politics, voter suppression, immigration and the War in Iraq have all been covered in my courses. While it may be a cliché technique, disabusing students of comfortable fictions about their social world and discussing issues that are indisputably serious has been extremely effective in terms of catching students' attention and an excellent way to entice them to want to learn more about certain issues. In addition, this approach assists in highlighting the power inherent in, and the importance of, the social processes being described. Beyond getting the attention of the uninformed or apathetic students, I find taking on many of these more controversial and contemporary issues directly is beneficial in a variety of ways. As opposed to being apathetic, I often find that many students feel

overwhelmed, unprepared for, and somewhat helpless in terms of understanding current political and international events. By presenting a sociological/structural perspective on issues and fostering practical research skills, I hope to help student develop confidence in their own intellectual strengths.

I strive to provide a learning experience that, ideally, will encourage critical thinking and self-directed learning. In addition to providing space and time within class for students to debate and critique the ideas and theories presented, I try to set a good example myself by presenting opposing arguments and critiques of theories being discussed. I should caution that I do not attempt to achieve a false sense of balance between perspectives. Rather I find that being honest about agendas and the theoretical and political dispositions of authors (and even myself) in a frank and reflexive manner creates a level of trust in the classroom that has resulted in an extremely effective educational environment for students, particularly when those students are coming from different social and political backgrounds. I have received positive comments and expressions of appreciation about this specific aspect of my course from students with very different political dispositions. (The fact that I have repeatedly taught a Political Sociology course with a focus on contemporary issues is a large part of why these dynamics loom large for me.) Further, within the writing assignments in most of my classes students are asked to do research on a political or social issue of their choosing and to provide a critical assessment of the utility of course theories to making sense of their topics of interest.

Secondly, as a consequence of my own educational socialization I place a strong premium on self-directed learning. I try to structure incentives and opportunities for students to interact with my course on a deeper level and to seek out information on their own. For example, within my Political Sociology course I encourage my students to engage more actively with current events in a variety of ways: every quiz has an extra credit question about current political events, each paper requires them to do research on a political issue or event of their choosing, and I have a course weblog which consists primarily of links to articles on current events that I find relevant to course material or

discussions. In addition to material posted on the course weblog, most weeks I provide easily assessable optional readings for students who want to explore issues in more depth. Finally, I try to provide students guidance in terms of finding reliable journalism and genuinely academic sources. Unfortunately, this is becoming increasingly confusing for some students with the proliferation of blogs, Wikipedia, and agenda-driven quasi-academic think tanks. The relatively small amount of time and effort it takes to help students get oriented in this environment is abundantly rewarded in the form of the increased confidence students have in both their research skills and themselves as more savvy consumers of information.

Within the classroom, I work to provide various opportunities for participation and try to create a comfortable and respectful environment for discussion. In order to provide “easy” opportunities for participation I post questions that accompany each reading some of which are later discussed in class. This allows individuals who are shy or uncomfortable with speaking the opportunity to think ahead about what they may want to say before class. Further, when I am going to encourage class discussion of a more sensitive or contentious issue I make sure that through the readings and lectures I have provided a firm grounding in the basic empirics of an issue. For example, spending some time on the history, structure, budget expenditures, and rates of fraud within social welfare programs before having a discussion about welfare spending can lead to surprisingly constructive discussions and conversations about the origins of the myth of welfare queens as opposed to arguments about their existence. As we would expect, in many cases differences in socially constructed understandings of issues are often much larger than genuine moral or value-based disagreements. I push this idea explicitly within the course in order to both illustrate the concept of social construction and to encourage more considerate and respectful class discussions.

Finally, I work to remain attentive to student concerns and suggestions about the course by asking for feedback mid-semester in class and by asking the students to fill out a class evaluation form that is more extensive than that provided by the university. As a result of this feedback I have tried to be more aggressive about addressing student

concerns about bias in the classroom and I have learned that a careful balance needs to be struck between stoking concern in students in order to spur interest and unintentionally demoralizing students. In response to the first concern I have introduced a number of explicit discussions about bias in the classroom into my course early in the semester. I have found these discussions to be extremely helpful and particularly effective in reaching students who enter the course with strongly held political beliefs. I try to address the second issue this by ending each section of the course with a discussion of political or academic proposals for addressing the issues discussed. Additionally, I end most of my courses with a discussion of social change and/or social movements in order to emphasize the possibility of social change. I believe that one of the keys to the effectiveness of my teaching style is that I am constantly striving to keep my courses current and to remain responsive to student input and concerns.

II. Teaching Experience

At the University of Arizona graduate students may teach independently after completing their Master's degree and taking a semester-long teaching seminar. I have taught, and worked as a teaching assistant for, the following courses:

| <u>Courses Taught</u> | <u>Graduate Teaching Assistant</u> |
|--|--|
| Social Issues in America (2 Semesters) | Social Issues in America (6 Semesters) |
| Introduction to Sociology (1 semester) | |
| Social Research Methods (1 semester) | |
| Political Sociology (9 semesters) | |

III. Teaching Interests

In addition to the courses I have taught, I am interested in and prepared to teach a number of additional courses including:

Stratification, Race & Ethnicity, Social Movements, Social Theory, Applied Sociology, and Quantitative Methods

IV. Teaching Awards

In 2007, I received the Department of Sociology's William K. Bunis Graduate Student Teaching Award. (The letter of notification for this award is on the following page.)

Department of Sociology
Office of Undergraduate Studies and Advising
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
P.O. Box 210027

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TUCSON, ARIZONA

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May 3, 2007

Keith Bentele
Department of Sociology
The University of Arizona

Dear Keith:

On behalf of the Department of Sociology and the Undergraduate Studies Committee, I want to congratulate you on winning the departmental 2007 William K. Bunis Graduate Student Teaching Award! Your Teaching Portfolio underscored the excellence you have consistently achieved as an instructor in the Department. The Committee was particularly impressed with the intellectual organization of your courses, the creative teaching strategies you use in the classroom, the high student evaluations your courses received, and the depth of your commitment to undergraduates.

Your success is a key element in the overall efforts of the Sociology Undergraduate Program and reflects positively on all the faculty and students in the Department. To commemorate your achievement, enclosed is an award certificate. You will also receive **\$250.00** cash award, to be credited to your Bursars Account (see Sharon with any questions)

Best wishes for an enjoyable coming summer and equal success in your future professional endeavors.

Sincerely,



Don Grant
Professor of Sociology
Director of Undergraduate Studies

V. Teaching Effectiveness: Student Evaluations – Quantitative

The table below presents average student responses on the 10 questions provided on the University of Arizona’s official student evaluations. For the Political Sociology course I have provided the average response for the past 5 semesters. On the following pages I have provided the score for the “overall teaching effectiveness” question for all of the courses I have taught or been a TA. The course codes for the TCE (Teacher Course Evaluation) History are as follows: SOC 315 – Political Sociology, SOC 275 – Social Research Methods, SOC 101 – Intro to Sociology, INDV 102 – Social Issues in America (LEC indicates courses where I was the sole instructor, DIS indicate courses where I was the TA). Students are asked, “What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?” with a score of 1 indicating “almost never effective” and a 5 indicating “almost always effective”.

| | Political Sociology Fall & Spring 2006, 2007, & Spring 2008 (n=179) | Social Research Methods Summer 2006 (n=16) | Introduction to Sociology Spring 2005 (n=44) | Social Issues in America Summer 2004 (n=13) |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Overall rating of teaching effectiveness [almost always effective (5) – almost never effective (1)] | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.8 |
| Overall rating of the course [one of the best (5) – one of the worst (1)] | 4.0 | 3.8 | 4.1 | 4.2 |
| Amount learned [an exceptional amount (5) – almost nothing (1)] | 4.2 | 3.9 | 4.1 | 4.4 |
| Overall Instructor Comparison [one of the most effective (5) – least effective (1)] | 4.0 | 4.3 | 4.1 | 4.5 |
| Usefulness of the in-class activities [almost always useful (5) – almost never useful (1)] | 4.3 | 4 | 4.7 | 4.8 |
| Usefulness of outside assignments [almost always useful (5) – almost never useful (1)] | 4.2 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 4.5 |
| Usefulness of course materials [almost always useful (5) – almost never useful (1)] | 4.2 | 4.1 | 4.3 | 4.8 |
| Students treated with respect [strongly agree (5) – strongly disagree (1)] | 4.7 | 4.9 | 4.8 | 4.8 |
| Difficulty level of the course [extremely difficult (5) – extremely easy (1)] | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.2 | 2.9 |
| Value of time spent on course [almost all valuable (5) – almost none valuable (1)] | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.5 |

**Upper-Division Undergraduate Courses
Statistics for the Overall Teaching Effectiveness Question**

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TCE History for

| TERM | SUBJ CODE | CBS NUM | SECT NUM | SECT TYPE | COURSE ID | EVAL CODE* | RESP/ENROLL | % RESP ** | SECT MEAN | STD. DEV. | 95% CI OF SECT MEAN | COMP GROUP MEAN*** | 95% CI OF COMP GROUP MEAN |
|------------|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 2008-SumI | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 18189-00 | I | 17 / 23 | 73% | 4.5 | 0.72 | 4.1- 4.8 | 4.3 | 4.2- 4.4 |
| 2008-Spr | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 57497-01 | I | 37 / 48 | 77% | 4.5 | 0.65 | 4.3- 4.7 | 4.2 | 4.1- 4.2 |
| 2007-Fall | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 55921-01 | I | 30 / 44 | 68% | 4.6 | 0.56 | 4.4- 4.8 | 4.2 | 4.1- 4.2 |
| 2007-SumII | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 24987-00 | I | 16 / 20 | 80% | 4.0 | 0.89 | 3.5- 4.5 | 4.3 | 4.2- 4.4 |
| 2007-Spr | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 50315-01 | I | 42 / 57 | 73% | 4.0 | 1.01 | 3.7- 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.1- 4.2 |
| 2006-Fall | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 51013-01 | I | 36 / 55 | 65% | 4.3 | 0.77 | 4.0- 4.5 | 4.2 | 4.1- 4.2 |
| 2006-Spr | SOC | 315 | 002 | LEC | 64577-01 | I | 36 / 45 | 80% | 4.3 | 0.59 | 4.1- 4.5 | 4.2 | 4.1- 4.2 |
| 2005-Fall | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 49439-01 | MM | 0 / 61 | | | | | | |
| 2005-SumI | SOC | 315 | 001 | LEC | 17925-00 | I | 28 / 36 | 77% | 3.8 | 1.06 | 3.4- 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.2- 4.4 |

*** Eval Code:**

I - Individual paper. O - Online paper. TI - term member paper. T/O - team member online. A - TCE packets just arrived, statistics have not been calculated yet. MM - Materials were sent, but no materials were returned. MU - Materials were sent and were returned unused. MC - Mixed call numbers (materials for different course-sections were returned in the same packet). CE - possible wrong course information (materials in packet didn't match identification on packet). IE - possible wrong instructor (instructor name on materials crossed out and/or corrected). LES - Evaluations were conducted before deadline according to date on monitor card but packet was received after deadline. LEI - Evaluations were conducted after deadline and packet was received after deadline. OT - Other problem possibly invalidating result. ME - Student monitor failed to sign monitor card or no monitor was used. PR - The number of responses is greater than enrollment.

**** % Resp**

Results for sections with low percentages are likely to be biased (such sections are **ed). OIRPS recommends not using these results in P&T decisions. The response percentage should be above 50% for all classes and higher for small classes. A rubric for evaluating response rates may be found at <http://aer.arizona.edu>.

***** Comp Group:**

The comparison group consists of courses taught during the past six years (fall and Spring semester only) enrolling five or more student at the same level in the same subject area (determined by course subject prefix).

VI. Teaching Effectiveness: Student Evaluations – Qualitative

The following are student comments from course evaluation forms for two of my courses. In response to the form question: “What did you especially like about this course?”

Political Sociology - Spring 2006

I like how easy it was to talk to the teacher, very approachable and door always open.

I like how you engaged the class in discussions and tried to get people to participate in our discussion.

The movies and lectures were interesting. I really appreciated the amount of information based on current events presented in class. Good job, thank you for your hard work.

It was interesting and new information was presented both intelligently and enthusiastically. I enjoyed it as one of the few real learning opportunities I’ve had at UofA.

I really enjoyed the content of the class; while I am a republican I have many liberal beliefs. In either case your course gave me insight into things and trends which I dint (sic) even know existed. I feel that everything we learned about was viewed threw an unbiased view and that’s probably what I enjoyed most about the class.

I like the content of the class and the topics discussed. It’s nice to relate academics to real life events.

You designed and organized the class very well. Courses like these can be all over the place but you kept a good pace with the way you broke it down.

Introduction to Sociology - Spring 2005

I like that Mr. Bentele was actually interested in what he was teaching, made the class more interesting because he always had good examples.

He had a very effective teaching style and really helped people understand the material through his lectures.

I especially enjoyed Mr. Bentele himself. He combined education with enjoyment. It was obvious that he is passionate and well informed about the subject matter and always had a smile on his face. He was very open-minded to questions, comments, suggestions, etc. and made me feel a part of the class.

Enjoyed the class, led me to declare a sociology minor

Interesting course material, readings. I learned a lot about social issues and current events that I never knew before.

Exceptional teacher, related well to the students. Best interests of students in mind always! Thank you.

I like that it really challenged your previous knowledge about what you learned about U.S. structure. The teacher focused on really helping us learn something instead of just worrying about assigning grades.