

Kristi M. Fondren, Ph.D. -- Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My general teaching philosophy emphasizes principles of student-centered teaching and the integration of research into the classroom. I try to impress upon students various ways of seeing what many take for granted in life. While I acknowledge students do not have to agree with sociology, I believe they should, as educated citizens, be aware of the diversity of perspectives on any one issue that sociology offers. In my classes, I emphasize the usefulness and relevance of sociology to the past, present, and future.

The classroom is a learning community with active listeners and learners. I view the classroom as a learning community where the students are just as responsible for the course outcomes and dynamics as am I. If teachers are to be effective facilitators of discussion, they must be active listeners. After all, students tell us how to teach them in the questions they ask. I aim to engage students in active learning by making it meaningful to them in an environment conducive to learning. I have often rearranged classrooms so that students face one another which significantly improved student interaction. Classroom discourse is not limited to face-to-face interaction and is a huge component in the online courses I teach as well.

Teachers should foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills in their students. I believe students completing an undergraduate course in sociology should gain critical thinking and problem-solving skills. One of the biggest shortcomings to me in education is that many students are not being taught how to think critically. I find the older students become, the quieter they are in the classroom which leads me to believe that students have become disengaged from the learning process. One-page response papers have been particularly effective in my Gender Studies class as students think critically and share their reflections on assigned readings from scholarly journals. Students learn what we examine for. If we test for facts, students will learn to memorize facts. If we design assessments for problem-solving, they will learn to apply what they have learned and become better problem-solvers.

Teachers need to use multiple methods for instruction and assessment to address diversity in the classroom. Because students represent different learning styles, I use multiple teaching methods. Rather than performing as the “sage on the stage,” I aim to stimulate active learning through in-class discussion, written activities, group exercises, and applied projects. I also emphasize written and oral reports rather than relying solely on traditional multiple choice exams. For any given assignment, the nature of assessment may vary by student. For example, rather than using one form of assessment for a given project, I may allow students to choose the format to articulate what they have learned in a way that is meaningful to them. In my Sociology of Sport class, I provided students a list of required elements for a project comparing the educational experiences of athletes and non-athletes. As long as the required elements were present, students could show me what they learned by presenting an oral report to the class, providing me with a written report, or through a poster presentation. Grading rubrics are provided for each type of assessment.

Teaching is an ongoing, reflexive process. In an educational marketplace where education is delivered via ever advancing technologies, there exists the possibility that the art of teaching will become less skilled. I believe pedagogical methods are developed and refined through a reflexive process that integrates practice and reflection on practice. While my standardized student evaluations have been consistently strong, I regularly assess my teaching effectiveness. I collect my own student evaluations so that I have the opportunity to gauge student learning and improve with each class in real time. As I reflect on my experiences, my strategy is to strive, everyday, to add value to our organization and to our product.