

Teaching Statement

As a course instructor for *Introduction to Sociology- Social Inquires, Social Movements, Race & Ethnicity in Canada*, and *Social Inequality* at the University of Toronto, as well as a teaching assistant for over 22 courses spanning across sociology, criminology and gender studies, I have had the opportunity to formulate what it means to be a good teacher. For me, being a good educator first and foremost means being a good listener, having compassion, and being able to adapt learning outcomes and materials to the students that you have. In my classrooms, I participate in what Dr. Laura Mauldin calls an “ethos of care”. I encourage students to come and speak with me if they need assistance, to be kind and encouraging to other students in the course, and to be kind to themselves throughout the learning journey. On the first day of my courses, I make a point of having students fill out an anonymous survey asking what they are most excited for in the course, what topics they want to speak about, and what they are the most anxious about. Taking their responses, I ensure I am tailoring my lectures to topics students are excited about, giving them extra resources such as further readings, podcasts, or documentaries about the topics that they may be interested in, and ensuring we have plenty of time for class discussions about these topics. When it comes to their anxieties, I also spend extra time ensuring that students have opportunities to speak to me about what they are nervous about. I do so by extending my office hours and spending class time allowing students to ask questions about the course and their assignments. I find that students are typically anxious about final assignments or papers. Therefore, I not only make extra time to go over expectations in class around these assignments and provide extra office hours before the assignments are due, but I also provide in-class opportunities to work on these assignments where I am available to answer individual and group questions. In my classes, communication and compassion are key to my teaching philosophy, wherein students are listened to, and the course is tailored to fit the needs of the class.

My teaching philosophy has been heavily influenced by my own experiences as a student. I have been fortunate enough to have attended three different universities during my academic career for the different stages of my education from my bachelors, master’s and PhD, which has shaped my own teaching. At St. Thomas University, a small liberal arts university, I was exposed to small class sizes and seminar lectures which made up the cornerstone of my education. At Dalhousie University, I was taught the importance of taking an interdisciplinary approach to subject matters, connecting students to similar problems which could be answered by a variety of theories. And at the University of Toronto, I was taught the importance of equipping students with empirical examples and data, allowing them to make conjectures about data and guiding them along their own learning. It is these different experiences that I bring with me to my own teaching and has influenced how I think about education and best practices when dealing with students. I have been fortunate to have great educational mentors at all the institutions I have been affiliated with who have taught me what it means to be a good educator. In my teaching, I combine one-on-one instruction, encouraging every student to meet with me individually during office hours or scheduled meeting at least once during the semester, interdisciplinary methods encouraging connections between sociology, criminology, political science and policy when teaching theory, and empirical data, providing students with empirical studies on course discussions, to help facilitate learning.

My goals in teaching are threefold. First, to help students establish and grow their ability to analyze texts, second, facilitate critical thinking by helping students unpack the world in which they live, and three, give students the necessary tools to apply their learning outside the classroom by making theories more accessible. As an instructor and teaching assistant in the social sciences, I believe it is imperative to show students how the theories and issues that we are learning about relate to their everyday lives. Therefore, all of my evaluation components in my classes build on this motif. I provide a mix of reading reflections, final term papers, in-class participation questions, and creative assignments to evaluate student engagement and learning. A strategy that I use when teaching, and to assist with engagement and comprehension of difficult lessons is by showing real world examples of how particular issues arise and continue to play a part of the social structures in which the students exist. For example, in my Race and Ethnicity in Canada class, we spent a week learning about environmental racism in which racialized people are often subjected to increased rates of pollution and chemicals. To show students how prevalent this problem was we looked at examples from their own communities and watched the documentary *There's Something in the Water* (2019) which highlights three examples of racialized communities in Canada which have been impacted by chemical runoff from factories and the introduction of waste facilities in their communities. I then asked students to write critical reflections on this documentary in accordance with class lectures. Showing these real examples of environmental racism allowed students to pinpoint areas in Canada that they knew of or had even been in which this new concept that they had just learned was playing out. Relating abstract concepts to real world experiences is a strategy I use in my teaching which grounds students in the reality of the social world. I also use assignments to help foster similar learning objectives. For example, as part of reading reflections in my courses, I allow students to reflect on how the readings help them understand their own lives and lived experiences. I also provide alternative evaluation components to gauge student learning. For example, in my Social Movement class, students submit a “creative assignment”, where they are asked to use an alternative medium (song, painting, sculpture, etc.) to express social movement strategies and tactics. Students have found this assignment fun and have responded enthusiastically.

I feel the most affirmed and engaged with my teaching when I also know that I am working as a team, with students, teaching assistants and course instructors, depending on my role. As an instructor and teaching assistant I know that it is my responsibility to lead students and help them unpack hard concepts. However, I also know that I learn just as much from the students as they do from me. Each student brings their own unique perspectives, insights, and background to the material we are engaging with. For example, in my second year Social Inequality class, I introduced students to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), a text that is widely discussed in undergraduate and graduate classes alike. After my introduction to parts of the text, and after watching a YouTube video of Judith Butler speaking to the text, I opened the floor to students to see how they interpreted and felt about the material. The class delved into a lively discussion about the complexities of gender with many students being able to relate it back to their own lived experiences. During this discussion, I too learned a great deal about the text that I had already been engaging with for years. Working as a team helps to facilitate all the class's learning, including the instructors.

EDIA (equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility) practices are also extremely vital to my own work and to my teaching philosophy. In 2021 I was one of the Graduate Student Representatives for the Anti-Racism and Equity Committee at the University of Toronto's Department of Sociology. In this role, I worked with a team of faculty and graduate students discussing how to implement anti-racist practices when developing courses and syllabi. In my own teaching, I also prioritize EDIA practices in a variety of ways. First, in my syllabi I try to emphasize and highlight marginalized voices. Also, within my courses, I start my lectures and tutorials by introducing these authors to the class, summarizing their work and affiliation so that students can further engage with the authors we are learning. Accessibility is also a major concern for me as an educator. I always provide all teaching material to students so that they can follow along with course lectures at their own pace. This includes all PowerPoint slides and my own lecture notes. I also provide a 24-hour grace period for all assignments in case students require some extra time to complete their work on top of any accessibility related extensions they may have acquired. For my courses, I also have an open-door office hour policy. This means that students are informed at the beginning of the course that if they require any extra time for assignments or assistance in course work or understanding course material, that I am always available to help. I tell students that in addition to my weekly office hours, they can also book a meeting time with me, either in-person or virtually, so that they never fall behind.

I teach all my courses, and approach all my teaching assistant positions with grace, humility, and extreme compassion. As educators, we often may not know the stress that our students are under. It is therefore our job to create a learning environment in which students feel comfortable to express their own learning objectives and feel supported in their education.