

For me, teaching sociology is a challenging exercise in citizenship. Sociology calls us to be aware of what is going on in our social worlds and the different ways people experience them, to evaluate claims with rigor, and to communicate our conclusions with clarity. It calls us to transcend our narrow situations and received understandings to work out better-grounded pictures of how things are and can be. This is just what healthy participation in civic life requires.

As a teacher, I treat students as fellow citizens, aiming to help them use tools of analysis and dialogue to think and act on public issues. At the end of a course, I would like to see my students knowledgeable about a realm of social life; attentive to how factual claims about that realm can be made, presented, and assessed; and adept at expressing their reasoning. Whether students take these capacities into the academe or elsewhere, all will have opportunities to exercise them as they form opinions, vote, and take part in movements and dialogues.

Awareness

Cultivating awareness means *engaging* students with facts and perspectives. I have found that it helps to complement scholarly texts with media articles and case studies to help students grasp concepts concretely as they wrangle with real-world examples. When I lecture, I support myself with pictures and diagrams more than text, so that students spend their time working things out more than recording them. I use images and media segments to foreground concepts, reflect participants' standpoints, and elicit students' interpretations. An image of performers playing workers on factory lines from the opening ceremony of the London Olympics gave a background for discussing the agrarian and legal changes that pushed labor into manufacturing in nineteenth-century Europe. Covering the environmental justice movement, I drew on videos in which movement members expressed their own standpoints and social analyses better than I might do myself. I proceed by working with students to tie these images and narratives together with analytical concepts.

Analytical Evaluation

When we read accounts of cases or encounter statistics, we need bases by which to evaluate them. I urge students to recognize the social elements that influence how people make factual claims. To do so, I adapt a conceptual toolkit I was introduced to as a teaching assistant in a course on racial and ethnic movements. We asked students to identify the interests, values, factual claims, rhetoric, resources, and power that different groups of participants mobilized. Looking at controversies through this lens helps us focus on the ways different groups experience and act on the issues, rather than, as many of us are conditioned to do, assert the claims we sympathize with. It also drew us to address the ways personal experience and statistical regularity can each help and hinder us in understanding social life.

In that vein, I believe statistical literacy is one of the most valuable things sociology can provide for students. In introductory courses, I make a point of introducing basic statistical reasoning and challenging students to interpret statistical analyses. Even if they never take another social science class, students will be equipped to understand what is behind a statement like, "minorities are on average exposed to 38 percent higher levels of outdoor NO₂ than whites in the communities where they live." This isn't just a matter of pointing out how any stat can mislead, but of recognizing and creating statistical representations that illuminate.

Communication

Awareness and analysis contribute to citizenship when we bring them into dialogues. My classes are rich with dialogue. One of my favorite activities is to have students discuss news

articles, working out together how each piece does or doesn't reflect concepts we have covered. In a lesson on environmental justice and the precautionary principle, I gave groups of students different articles about communities facing environmental concerns. An oil pipeline leak, a proposed iron mine upstream from an Ojibwe reservation, and the mining of sand for use in natural gas extraction had all recently raised controversy in Wisconsin. Each group discussed whether and how environmental injustice and the precautionary principle might apply to the situation at hand. Students presented their groups' conclusions to the class, and we had a broader discussion. This exercise let students apply concepts on their own and helped those who have difficulty speaking before the whole class to contribute. In the future, I want to take this approach further through issue-oriented and community-oriented courses that engage beyond the classroom.

The challenge is to keep the dialogue open for everyone. This is about more than pausing in lecture to ask questions. I want to show how rigorously examining what is going on can lead to uncommon conclusions, working creatively with students' responsiveness and resistance. That demands of me that I neither deny nor enforce my own inclinations and that I engage in dialogue with the empathy I want students to show. These exercises work on the basis of norms for dialogue that we develop together in an early class meeting.

How do I know if these things are working? Joining discussions gives me a direct reading on how well I am communicating core concepts as well as a chance to get to know and converse with all students. I also use a written check. I provide students with a booklet and encourage them to use it to record comments and questions that come to their minds. At the end of class I prompt students with a question about that day's content. Answers go in the booklet. Not only does this help ensure that lessons reach their targets, or prompt me to review in the following class; it also keeps me in a two-way dialogue with each student. It also enables me to address concerns and pushback that I otherwise might not become aware of.

I take the same approach to teaching written communication, working through proposals and successive drafts through written feedback and office hours conversations. In graduate teaching, I make term papers a means for students to advance professionally. I urge students to treat assignments as pathways to theses or publications and assign early drafts that I respond to in the mode of constructive peer review.

Facilitating discussions and helping students craft their own accounts, I have learned to engage students in discussions of contentious topics and to challenge them to approach these topics with the tools of sociological analysis. This is a process of self-discovery, too, as students alert me to my own blind spots and presumptions. I don't know how far these efforts will go beyond the classroom, but at the very least they give students chances to practice dialogue. On good days I see students working through preconceptions to think analytically and empathetically about community, inequality, and sustainability, and I find myself doing the same. If I do the job well, students will have useful knowledge and skills and be readier to listen, speak, and act in civic life.