

Teaching Philosophy

I organize my courses to encourage active engagement with sociological theory and research, which I believe is vital to a comprehensive college education. First, I seek to help students improve their critical thinking skills so that they can effectively understand, analyze, and critique social science research. Second, I design my courses to help students improve their ability to communicate their ideas in a clear and organized manner. Third, I structure my time in the classroom to include a balance of lecture, discussion, written reflection, and activities to allow students with different learning styles to achieve understanding of the material. These efforts have resulted in awards and recognition at both the department and university levels.

Encouraging Critical Thinking

Every time I step into a classroom, I focus on providing students with tools they can use to understand, organize, and critique social science research and develop a perspective from which they can better understand and engage in the complex social world in which we all live. I design activities and discussion to motivate students to apply the theories and concepts we discuss in the classroom to their daily lives.

For example, in my *Gender and Work* class, I foster critical thinking by directing students to gather specific information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics related to men's and women's occupational participation and pay rate. I ask students to suggest some narratives about why, for example, there are so few men in elementary education or women in construction work. We discuss these various narratives and connect them to norms of masculinity and femininity as well as discuss the salaries associated with various positions and thus the impact these gendered divisions of labor have on perpetuating the economic potentials of men and women.

I also expect students to critically examine the media by which they are surrounded – TV shows, movies, commercials, print advertisements, and social media. I encourage them to submit examples of gendered representations of topics we discuss in class, such as the motherhood penalty or gendered expectations surrounding fitness or who is responsible for the unpaid labor of childcare and housework, and then we use their examples to deepen understanding of relevant concepts. Using current examples from students allows me to model critical analysis of media they are experiencing in their daily lives and encourages students to evaluate their surroundings using a sociological lens.

Developing Clear Communication

Sociology majors graduate and pursue a wide and varied range of careers, but no matter what field they pursue, their ability to communicate is essential. Therefore one of my responsibilities as an instructor is to help students develop their written and verbal communication skills – especially when working through complex sociological ideas.

One method through which students can evaluate sociological theory is through writing. In my *Sociological Theory* class, I require students to pick a social phenomenon and construct a written argument that addresses that social tension through the eyes of two theorists discussed in class. I receive a broad range of paper ideas and work closely with students to identify an existing underlying social tension relevant to their lives. By midterm, students write an argument explaining their topic from the perspective of one social theorist, and I provide extensive written and verbal feedback. In the second half of the semester, I coach students on how to edit and rework their writing, and they both revise their original argument and make an additional argument from the perspective of another theorist about the same social phenomenon.

Students routinely report that this semester-long process of writing multiple drafts facilitated by my feedback and evaluation from their peers, gives them a deeper understanding of social theory and demystifies the writing process.

Another way students learn is by doing individual or group work and presenting what they've learned to the class. In one assignment, I ask students to identify a clip from a TV show or movie that exemplifies a character performing *emotional labor*. In small groups, they answer a series of discussion questions applying concepts from the academic research they have read for class to the clip they chose and then design a short presentation to communicate the most pertinent aspects to their classmates. I provide clear feedback on both the content and the style of their presentations. Finally, students individually write a reaction paper comparing two of the clips that were presented in class. This project not only sharpens their verbal and written communication skills, but also provides students with a range of examples of the focal concept.

Teaching to Diverse Learning Styles

As I deliver course content, I am constantly thinking about how to best engage the students and encourage them to develop their sociological perspective. One way I support ownership of course material and a broadening of students' world views is to vary my teaching style during each class period to reach students with diverse learning styles. My classes often include a lecture component where I emphasize the important aspects about the day's reading material. Within that structure, I also facilitate both class-wide and small-group discussions, assign short reflective low-stakes individual writing tasks, and incorporate activities that illustrate course concepts.

One strategy that draws on a different set of skills than note-taking is to ask the class to spend five minutes crafting a written argument either for or against a particular statement. For example, when we discuss Durkheim's notion of social solidarity in the *Sociological Theory* course, I ask students to make an argument for or against the statement "In the US today, social solidarity is in decline." This exercise requires students to think about terms defined by Durkheim, their own understanding of social life in the US, and to practice building a written argument. Afterwards we discuss their ideas and work through their arguments in both small groups and as a whole class as a way to model critical thinking and clear communication.

When teaching about Goffman's presentation of self, I illustrate the terms *impression formation* and *impression management* through an activity in which students engage in a mock "speed dating" activity. After several rounds of introductions, students write field notes about how they decided what information to emphasize or omit in their brief interactions and how their presentation of self was influenced by the impressions they formed of others. Then we relate these lived experiences to broader concepts of symbolic interactionism. These pedagogical strategies engage students with diverse learning styles, which results in better learning outcomes.

Teaching Preparation

The University of Georgia and the Department of Sociology have given me considerable opportunities to develop my teaching abilities through training, mentoring, and experience.

Before I began teaching my own courses, I took a semester-long course on teaching sociology. I also trained in the university-wide Writing Intensive Program (WIP) which aims to teach students the processes and conventions that shape academic writing in different disciplines. I served as a WIP-Teaching Assistant for professors in our department who created writing-intensive versions of *Research Methods* and *Sociological Theory* courses. I learned from their examples and from our discussions after class how to incorporate writing successfully into the

classroom. Through working with hundreds of students on an individual basis from sociology classes and at the Writing Center, I've developed skills and techniques that guide students toward better written communication skills.

This semester I am enrolled in an online course through the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL) called "The College Classroom: Teaching Inclusively" which provides techniques to contribute to the success of an increasingly diverse student body. The course emphasizes strategies for planning effective, inclusive teaching sessions and specific ideas for addressing hot moments, microaggressions, and difficult conversations in the classroom.

Finally, I served as the Lab Manager of the Laboratory for the Study of Social Interaction, where my duties included mentoring undergraduate students who were engaged in research for the first time. I worked closely with the faculty, graduate students, and teams of undergraduate students to conduct experimental social psychological studies, to code data, and to write up results, modeling the experimental research process.

Teaching Experience

I have had the opportunity to teach our department's required undergraduate *Sociological Theory* course for four semesters. I have also taught five sections of *Gender and Work*. This semester I am teaching an *Introductory Sociology* course and our department's class about the sociological study of the life course, *Lives in Time and Place*. I have experience in a wide variety of classroom settings, and I have developed strategies to promote learning in both large and small classes.

In addition to the classes I have already taught, I am also prepared to teach courses in a number of substantive areas, including courses related to the sociology of health, gender, family, and social psychology. I am also well-qualified to teach additional foundational sociology courses, such as *Research Methods*, *Social Problems*, and *Social Inequalities*.

Teaching Awards

In recognition of my successful teaching accomplishments, last year I was invited to serve as the teaching assistant for the graduate-level teaching preparation course ("*Teaching Sociology*") to help my fellow graduate students hone their teaching skills. I co-taught this course by leading discussions and presenting material about the essentials of teaching on topics such as "delivering effective lectures" and "teaching through writing" and "designing a course syllabus." I worked closely with students as they experienced being a teaching assistant and described the decisions I make in the classroom. As the students planned to teach for the first time, these discussions allowed me to refine my own pedagogical orientation and reenergized my love of teaching sociology.

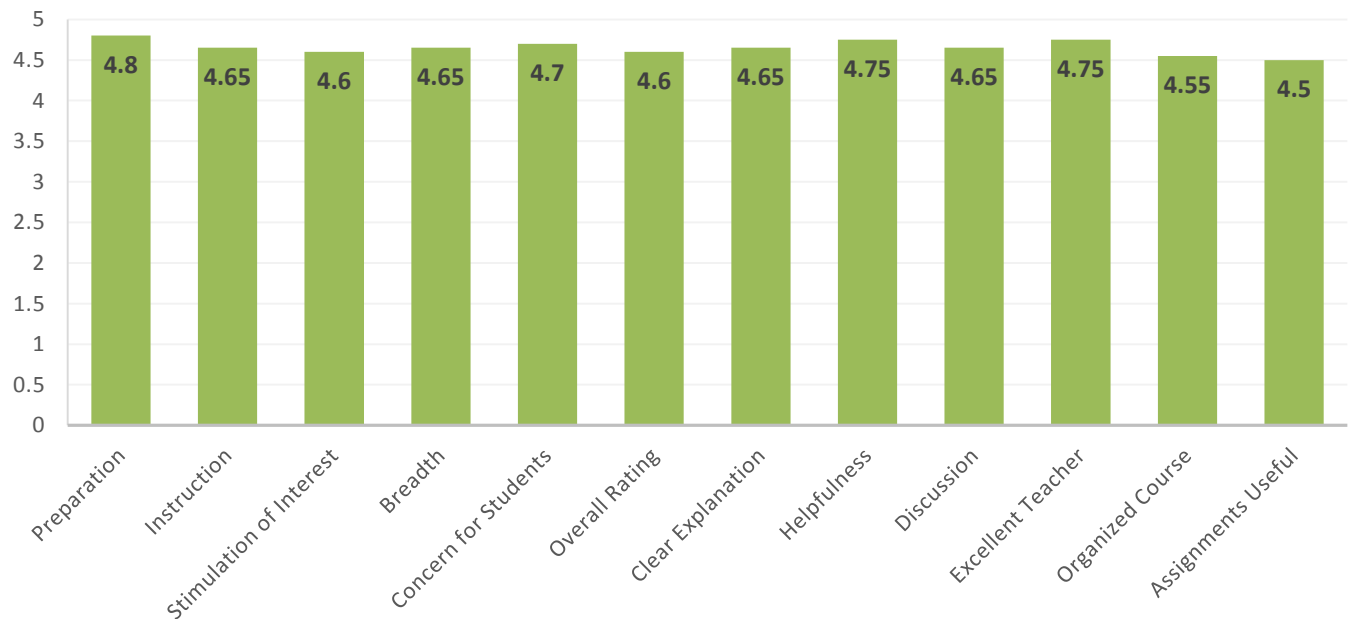
I have consistently received outstanding student evaluations for my effectiveness, preparation, and ability to guide classroom discussions. My teaching efforts were recognized by the University of Georgia when I was awarded the *Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award* from the Center for Teaching and Learning, an honor presented to less than 10% of the University's graduate student teaching population. In addition, I recently received the Department of Sociology's *Beck Graduate Student Teaching Award* for excellence in teaching.

Quantitative Teaching Evaluations

Items are rated on a 1-5 scale, with 5 indicating the most favorable rating.
Averaged survey item response across all semesters

	<u>Sociological Theory</u> 4 Sections; N= 176	<u>Gender and Work</u> 5 Sections; N=112
<u>Evaluation of Instructor</u>		
Preparation	4.8	4.8
Instruction	4.7	4.6
Stimulation of Interest	4.6	4.6
Breadth	4.7	4.6
Concern for Students	4.7	4.5
Overall Rating	4.7	4.5
<u>Learning Outcomes</u>		
Clear Explanation	4.7	4.6
Helpfulness	4.8	4.7
Facilitates discussion	4.8	4.5
Excellent teacher	4.8	4.7
Course is well-organized	4.6	4.5
Assignments & activities were useful	4.6	4.4

Average Teaching Evaluation Scores For All Classes



Representative Qualitative Student Comments

Overall Satisfaction

“It's rare to find a teacher who is both as articulate and passionate about her courses as Professor Culatta. She brings an energy to the classroom that inspires her students to learn and succeed. She is by far one of the best professors I've ever had at UGA. Her teaching method strikes just the right balance of lecture material, classroom discussion, and group activity. She also does an excellent job of involving the class and encouraging meaningful discussion.”

“Professor Culatta is engaging, always prepared, offers relevant assignments, and grades fairly. She clearly cares about her students and wants them to succeed, and is flexible with student needs. I have been privileged to have her as a writing TA, *Gender and Work* professor, and *Social Theory* Professor and she has been fantastic in all areas, even in theory which usually isn't supposed to be as interesting as she made it. She is everything I expected in a professor when I chose UGA. She is an incredible professor, and I am so glad I was her student!”

Connections to Discipline and Society

“It was challenging and thought-provoking material but in a good way that lead me to be extremely self-reflective in my final paper in a way that I haven't done before for a paper in college; and that reflection is something I actually plan on using in my future life and career situations.”

“Ms. Culatta is an exceptional teacher. She conveys concepts about theorists clearly, ties in current events regularly, and provokes meaningful discussions with the class. Due to Ms. Culatta's teaching, I have gained a better understanding of the theoretical foundations of sociology and can already see the positive impact it has had on my grasp of sociology, performance in other courses, and ability to think about sociological theory in relation to political and social events happening around the world right now.”

“Ms. Culatta is great. I am a new sociology major and she made all the information very interesting and easy to understand. She was always ready and willing to help her students. She has a true talent for teaching and I would gladly take another one of her classes again. The material in the class and the two papers that we had to write challenged me to apply the material to real life situations. This class helped me see how sociology/sociological theories can be used to solve real world problems.”

Instructor-Student Connection

“Professor Culatta is one of the best professors I have taken at UGA, mainly due to the fact that her enthusiasm and passion for the field of sociology just radiates to her students. It is apparent that she cares about her students and wants them to understand as much of the material as possible. Her style of teaching was a great mix of discussion, papers, exams, in-class assignments and other mediums to learn through. Her passion for teaching and the subject inspired me to want to teach as well and made me actually look forward to coming to a 9:00am class!”

“I had a lot of things going on in my life this semester and Professor Culatta was more than understanding, flexible, and accommodating, which really made me feel cared about and valued; a challenging thing for a professor to do at a university of this size.”

Instruction and Preparation

“Ms. Culatta was energetic, engaging, and she always came prepared, and was willing to help.”

“Such a well-structured class. Professor Culatta is extremely prepared as an instructor.”

“Her notes were clear and organized, and she explained her notes thoroughly.”

“Professor Culatta is a passionate teacher and extremely organized and well prepared.”