

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I've developed my pedagogy over six semesters teaching at Berkeley in Sociology, including three semesters as an instructor of record for original advanced undergraduate sociology seminars. I've mentored several sociology, anthropology, and urban planning students on their honors theses. I've also given multiple guest lectures to undergraduate courses and served as a grader for several lecture courses where I was able to observe various professors teaching. During this time, I've received the Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor award and Teaching Effectiveness award from the Graduate Division, the university's two highest teaching honors. I have also published an article on teaching social theory with colleagues in *Teaching Sociology*. As a Graduate Student Assistant, my overall rating average from student evaluations was 4.68/5 (the departmental average was 4.36) and as an instructor of record my rating was 4.86 (the departmental average for professors was 4.54). At the heart of my teaching approach is fostering a learning process that is *collective, inventive, and relatable* in a style that is open and accessible without sacrificing academic rigor.

My seminars are based on the belief that individual learning and understanding are premised on a process of collective growth, differentiation, and the mutual revival of singularities. Therefore, discussions are student-driven, reading responses are directed horizontally between students, and all course members participate in the development of each other's final papers or projects. Each of my courses require students to submit short weekly reading responses. While many students have experienced these assignments as verifications of reading completion, I stress that they rather serve as footholds to make weekly discussion more effective and collective. As I move through the set of open-ended questions that organize each discussion, I draw upon individual student responses. This helps include those who may be shy to raise their hands or take more time to think and to buffer those who express their ideas relentlessly. As my students wrote in their evaluations, "Chris guided us to a better understanding, though did so in a way that involved us coming to the answers," "made sure everyone is present in discussion," and "made students know that their thoughts matter and contributed to the overall understanding of readings."

I also integrate collective practice in the final papers. In my urban sociology class and qualitative methods workshop, students worked on a group ethnography, took field-notes from a single contested public space, shared them in a collective field note bank, discussed their observations and interpretations in class, and finally wrote individual final papers based on this group work. I always integrate peer-review exercises at multiple points; from fostering comments and questions around student presentations to providing feedback on abstracts and outlines for final papers. As one student wrote, "The feedback and critique on individual research projects and hearing about how other's research was unfolding was terrific." These strategies aimed at building knowledge collectively not only improve students' work through the process of reflection and critiques of others work, but also reorients the spirit of the course away from merely pleasing the professor and instead towards cooperative goals of understanding texts and social issues that in turn raises the bar of students' investment and quality of work completed in the class.

Through these collective exercises, I guide students in critically analyzing texts stressing that the sociological research they are reading is a practice of construction as much as discovery, which cannot be reduced to a simple reading-off of the real. This principle motivates a variety of teaching strategies. For some courses, I assign two presentations per reading: one student advocates for the author's key thesis while a second presents a critique of this thesis based on logical inconsistency, lack of supporting evidence, or perspectives from other course readings. This process teaches students how to read both sympathetically with and critically against a given text. To concretize the architecture of an author's thesis and a work's multiple readings, I often ask students to diagram a book's argument in place of a weekly reading response. We then work in small groups to synthesize

aspects of individual diagrams into a collective, more detailed diagram on the board.<sup>1</sup> Students insert quotes and citations, argue over directions of causal arrows, and improvise new relations between concepts. At the end of the exercise we would have four distinct drafts of the book's arguments on the board, and students would present, compare, and discuss contradictions, missing links, and shifts in emphasis between these representations. I also bring in guest speakers/authors of the works we read. In my poverty ethnography course I had Niki Jones, Teresa Gowan, and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski come in to discuss their research process and findings. During the final class, I brought in a research subject of Forest Stuart's ethnography on policing Skid Row to give his perspective on the book. These exercises reveal to students the creative process in both making sociological research and thinking critically about the scholarship. It also keeps the class fresh, as one student wrote in their evaluation, "Every single class felt like a new, exciting experience because of Chris' facilitated discussions."

After establishing some consensus around the key arguments of the texts being discussed that day, I strive to make them relatable on two dimensions – on the one hand, to other readings and theories covered in the course, and on the other, to the students' contemporary world. This is an approach my colleagues and I call "teaching ethnographically."<sup>2</sup> I teach course material and concepts as a useful lens for deciphering my students' own world – the institutions they inhabit, the media they consume, and the cultural, economic, and political systems in which they are embedded – and do so by bringing the thinkers we are reading into conversation with each other on these issues. We practice this through in-class exercises, student presentations, and final papers, which ask students to analyze and critique contemporary policies, social movements, cultural artefacts, and social developments through the concepts and theories of two or more authors covered in the course (See Herring et. al, 2016 for specific egs.). Doing so moves student beyond simply learning sociology, to being trained in the craft of sociological thinking and research. As one of my students of social theory wrote, "Today, I look at the world through a social theory lens. I see power dynamics, exploitation, control, monitoring, subjugation, consciousness-raising, and solidarity constantly. I can see and apply theory everywhere."

Teaching is why I am in academia today, and I wouldn't stay a day longer in it if teaching was not a part of it. Teaching a social science and humanities course at a prison in upstate New York during my undergraduate studies was a transformative experience. Sitting at my desk on Gold Street at the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development the year after, I realized I couldn't imagine a rewarding career that did not involve teaching, and so I applied to grad school. When I stalled my NSF fellowship in my fourth year to teach, many of my colleagues and professors, who tend to spend inordinate amounts of energy trying to secure release time from teaching, did not understand. While I've increasingly come to appreciate the other functions of the professoriate during my time at Berkeley, in the end, teaching remains at the core of both my academic practice and public praxis in relation to my politics and community. It is certainly the most pleasurable and meaningful part of the job.

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss this exercise in more detail in my essay "Sketching Social Theory Collectively" published on the UC Berkeley GSI Teaching Resources Library: <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/herringc-2015/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Living Theory: Principles and Practices for Teaching Theory Ethnographically" with M. Rosaldo, J. Seim, and B. Shestakovsky. Teaching Sociology. 2016.