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Teaching Statement

The bulk of my academic career came after a few years in public and private sector employment. Reentering academia as an older student with some work experience, I feel I approached education as little more than busy work; something I could do successfully but not particularly enjoy. Over time, I began to attribute these feelings to the traditional lecture and assignment style of many courses. I saw this approach as lacking any real opportunity for collaboration or offering direction toward a meaningful goal. These early concerns have influenced my pedagogical approach as I now strive to involve students in a collaborative space where together, we can think critically about systems of power, knowledge, and practice through various styles of learning. By utilizing a variety of classroom strategies, I find students respond more to the work I'm assigning, my passion for sociology, and my love of teaching. I sought out opportunities to teach as early as possible in my graduate career and took on outside positions to teach courses I wouldn't have been able to at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). As a result, my extensive teaching experience in a range of academic environments has allowed me the opportunity to incorporate various techniques and take ownership of my pedagogical approach.

As an instructor, I believe in democratizing the classroom, so in a seminar setting, I make it clear to students from the beginning that the onus is on them to lead discussions. In courses with medium and smaller class sizes, I use small group work to cultivate this accountability when possible. Drawing on the work of Rabow and colleagues (1994), I believe a structured discussion of readings among peers can facilitate the basic understanding of the an author's work for some learners while allowing more advanced students to synthesize literature and apply concepts to empirical situations. I've had the opportunity to successfully apply these techniques to a variety core courses such as social inequality, sociological theory, urban sociology, introduction to sociology, and both quantitative and qualitative social science research methods. While such an approach may be less effective in very large classes, I've had some success in larger classes using similar techniques with students in pairs. I've come around a bit on the lecture format when class size requires such an approach or materials are particularly dense and a sequenced explanation that includes structured examples can ensure a greater understanding. That being said, I try to use lecture techniques only when I believe it is the most effective approach to comprehension. I am committed to incorporating various media, games, labs, and so on to keep students involved and help them retain what we discuss.

I have taken particular ownership in my approach to teaching research methods where I look to integrate lab exercises and outside field work into a rigorous lecture and discussion schedule aimed at preparing students for advanced research opportunities. In these courses, I strive to offer students a realistic glimpse of field work which requires a high level of organization and continual engagement with concepts. While it is challenging for students, the synthesis of work in and out of the classroom offers direction toward a meaningful goal

and gives them the opportunity to build on what they learn by incorporating feedback and correcting problems before final completion of the project. This approach has been effective in preparing undergraduates for their senior research projects as well as producing high-level work appropriate for submission to local or regional conferences. I take a similar approach to assigned work in other classes, constructing projects that build toward something of substance for the student. In introductory courses, I often emphasize individual positions within larger social structures. The "Differential Outcomes and Socialization" activity, included in my teaching portfolio and published in *Trails*, exemplifies this approach by requiring students to critically discuss how the education system has influenced them. When teaching intermediate level courses, I will often assign a literature review or small analysis that can contribute to a larger project later on while emphasizing important aspects of writing quality research. While I expect a great deal from advanced classes, I regularly build toward a major project as is evident in the "Mini Mini Ethnography" assignment series also included in my teaching portfolio and published in *Trails*.

In addition to refining my approach, my teaching experience has given me the opportunity to work with students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, at public and private universities, in large and small class settings. For example, Northeastern Illinois University is ranked as one of the most ethnically diverse universities in the country. UIC is also ranked among the nation's most diverse and has been recognized as a top 25 LGBTQ-friendly campus. Moreover, working at urban universities like DePaul University and UIC has exposed me to a large number of first generation college students and the challenges they face in their academic progress. By clearly communicating high expectations for all of my courses while encouraging an ongoing dialog both in and out of the classroom, I have been fortunate to mentor students from a variety of backgrounds and help some of them go on to graduate school. I've used these same skills to offer support to younger graduate students in my department and as the instructor of a seminar course that included both undergraduate and graduate students. Currently, I am finishing an independent study with three undergraduates and one younger graduate student where we heave cleaned and analyzed previously collected survey data and developed a manuscript based on the findings.

As I build on my early experiences, I anticipate high expectations and engagement in and out of the classroom to be a foundation of my approach to both undergraduate and graduate instruction. My extensive teaching experience in a range of academic environments has helped me uncover effective approaches to comprehension and student engagement. Class time is active. I like to keep moving and I ask students to engage in class discussions, break into groups, present topics to the rest of the class orally, bring in various media, and reflect on what we've done. I take time to explain how smaller projects will connect to larger ones and remind students of office hours if anything remains unclear. As my teaching portfolio highlights, my approach doesn't always make me the most popular teacher in the department but students often tell me how much they've learned. I take pride in these evaluations as core courses such as introduction to sociology, sociological theory, and both quantitative and qualitative social science research methods serve as a foundation for higher-level work later in their academic careers. I look forward to integrating my pedagogical approach and research interests into the development of new courses as well. I am particularly interested in expanding social movement courses to incorporate new work on technological innovation, fandom, and contemporary political consumption. In addition, I believe a significant amount of my work on symbolic and cultural value can be utilized in courses on work and organizations; the economy; media culture; and others.