

Education in the social sciences helps students gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others and increases their critical thinking skills. Students who pass through my classroom are often fulfilling a general education requirement on the way to obtaining a degree in something else. Their experience in my course is meaningful, however, because it has the potential to shape how they choose to exist in the world. Will they be the kind of person who has reflected on their own story, the obstacles they have faced, and the resources and strengths they have leveraged, on the way to their current position? Will they be the kind of person who listens well to others, who understands each story is different, and who wants to learn from these other stories? Will they be the kind of person who looks at their relationships, family, workplace, and community with curiosity and a critical eye about how things can be made better? Will they be the kind of person who acts for positive change?

Sociology is a field that can lead to an answer of, “Yes!” to all of these questions above, and my goal is to be a sociology teacher who makes it so. I model self-reflection, empathy, and critical thinking – what I want for my students – in my teaching. In the classroom, I communicate information via personal storytelling more often than lecturing. Instead of slides, I come to class with blank outlines that we fill out together as class unfolds. I share my own experiences and connect them to course concepts so students can better understand complicated ideas through the lens of everyday life. I invite students to follow my example by creating space for in-class discussions in which we can learn from one another’s experiences. I also create assignments – such as “sociological imagination essays” in my Introduction to Sociology Honors course – that assess students’ ability to critically apply key concepts from course readings to their own stories and to things outside of the classroom that interest them (recent essays have covered a broad range of topics from anime, to Disney movies, Beyonce, Taylor Swift, sports, and current events). I want students to see sociology everywhere and to be inspired to use what they know far beyond a single semester. This is why I chose to become an educator, and why I fully embrace teaching general education courses. Some of the most life-changing classes I took as a college student – the classes that led to me changing my major and life direction – were initially dropped onto my schedule by an advisor who assured me they were *just* part of the general education requirements for my degree.

My classes at LSU are certified as communication intensive and service-learning optional. Many assignments involve honing and using multi-modal communication skills, and students can apply what they are learning off campus. This application helps students see how information can be embodied and enacted in ways that lead to positive change. Students in my Current Social Problems class are engaging in a city council simulation in which they represent residents of St. George (a real local city) as they create and debate proposals for solving local issues such as improving infrastructure to reduce flooding. Each semester, several service-learning students from across my classes help lead ESL classes for native Spanish speakers or volunteer at a soccer or after-school program. Some of these are current students; some are friends of current students who were invited by their peers to join; others are former students from previous semesters who have chosen to stay engaged. The communication skills and value for applied knowledge that students gain in my classes are transferable into any major field of study and future career, and I am committed to mentoring them beyond the semester when they take my classes. I often write letters of recommendation for my students as they take their next steps in their education and careers, and I do so with pride knowing that they have formed habits of being, thinking, and application that they will carry with them into these new places.