Evidence of Teaching Excellence

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Teaching Philosophy

“If your brain hurts, you’re doing it right,” I tell my students as I encourage them to engage in the process of sociological inquiry. Students in my class do sociology; they don’t just memorize it. My goal is that they think like sociologists as often and as deeply as possible, and I create ways to make that happen.

The Craft of Teaching

The old saying “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach” to me, is an affront to the craft of teaching. The saying implies that teaching requires no skill, no action. On the contrary, becoming a good teacher is a process just like becoming a good painter, a good furniture maker, or a good social analyst. Like other crafts, teaching is something that takes time and devotion toward growth and expertise. I believe that the craft of teaching requires a combination of passion, knowledge, patience, confidence, quick wit, and a willingness to make mistakes. Sometimes the best lessons and ideas grow out of the failed attempts of others. Like the chef who fiddles with her recipe until it’s just right, I fiddle with my recipes for teaching about the social world. Although I’m no chef, I do teach like I cook. What I mean is this:

Some menu items become faithful standbys. Spaghetti, for example, requires basic ingredients that are inexpensive and the meal is quick and easy to make. But the meal is both filling and delicious. It always works and it’s easy. My pedagogical spaghetti, if you will, includes some basic exercises that are intellectually satisfying and sociologically engaging, no matter how many times I dish them up. If my goal is to fill bellies and minds, these standbys work dependably.

But it’s not always spaghetti. There are staple ingredients I keep in my pedagogical pantry that I always have around and use, but I find different things to do with them. A cook can try a lot of different things with rice, noodles, beans, and tomatoes, for example. And the experimentation sometimes leads to delicious inventions. Good teaching requires some experimentation; it is an important part of the craft of teaching because a willingness to fail is also a willingness to succeed.

A key way I determine if something works or not is through reflections on teaching. Sometimes I write them, sometimes I verbalize my reflections to a gracious colleague who lends an ear, and sometimes I just think about it. These reflections are important to my development as an excellent teacher; I use these reflections not only to examine how something went over in class in general, but also how I can improve an exercise, paired readings, handling students’ comments, lecture notes, or discussion questions.

I know how to teach well because I have studied how to be an excellent teacher alongside studying how to be a sociologist. Because of my training in pedagogy and my intense devotion to high quality teaching, I believe that I can teach almost any undergraduate course – even if I am not an expert in that field - because I have cultivated a good teaching practice. A furniture maker whose specialty is chairs, for instance, can most certainly build a table because the skills and tools of the craft are similar. Because I take the craft of teaching so seriously, I have built a strong foundation in both the discipline and expertise in teaching.
I believe that learning can be transformative in ways that can enhance students’ lives and the lives of others in obvious and complex ways. Critical pedagogy informs my overall approach to and belief in the power of education. Most importantly, I believe that education is at its best when it creates sustained learning, intellectual growth, and the discovery of the utility of knowledge. I agree with Ken Bain¹ (2004), who wrote: “the best teachers assume that learning has little meaning unless it produces a sustained and substantial influence on the way people think, act, and feel” (p. 17). Learning sociology is a unique practice because it requires meaningful conversation about the course material. I encourage my students to continue these conversations with whoever will engage them. It is my hope that these conversations will help students see the world through a sociological lens and ultimately find ways to work for the betterment of society.

**Pedagogical Approaches**

I try to get my students to do something every class period. When students are actively engaged in exploring, applying, or debating the material, they will learn more than if I expect them to ingest the content passively. I practice Inquiry-Guided Learning² (IGL) which involves stimulating critical thinking skills and sociological investigation through inquiry. Typically, students’ relationship to questions involves one correct answer to the teacher’s question. In an inquiry-guided classroom, I encourage students to focus on asking questions, especially questions for which answers are not immediately available. This frustrates students at first. But in a short time, most students become proficient in sociological inquiry and often find that their questions lead to more questions. I tell my students that questions are like shovels; they are tools to dig deeper. And sometimes, one scoop just isn’t enough.

In addition to IGL, I practice active learning, which is always intellectually active, but also sometimes physically active. I believe that active learning is essential learning. It makes it stick. If students get to work asking sociological questions and examining the social world, instead of me telling them about it, they will learn more. I regularly “off-load the content” so students can more actively and deeply engage the material. I strive to make sociology accessible and relevant to students and I encourage them to apply sociological material to their surroundings and experiences. I think it is important that students do the majority of the thinking and wrestling with the content, learning to minimize their reliance on me. By engaging students in active learning, I teach them how to think sociologically about the social worlds they inhabit. Next I describe a few in-class exercises I use to achieve this type of sociological engagement.


In-Class Exercises for Active, Inquiry-Based Learning

Jar of Sociological Fun

I have a canister that I call my “Jar of Sociological Fun” and I often fill it with slips of paper on which I write discussion questions, sociological problems to work on, or sections from the reading that need some untangling, discussion, and/or application. Sometimes I ask them to put questions or comments in the jar. It’s amazing how the canister adds mystery and excitement to what I could otherwise write on the board and lecture about. I can usually feel the energy in the room heat up as they pass the canister around.

Thought Collage

A thought collage is a simple exercise that asks students to dig through their book, articles, or notes to find something to write on the board: a quote; a discussion point; a question (for clarification or inquiry). Then, with me facilitating and contributing my expertise when needed, the students lead the discussion based on what they wrote on the board. This is a simple and effective way to get through a lot of course material. It also functions as a way for students to determine what is important and what needs further discussion. In essence, students typically write the same information that I would put in lecture notes, but their creation of and participation in this process keeps them engaged, focused, and invested.

Jigsaw

This strategy is used at all levels of education and in a multitude of ways. It is based on the idea that students can become experts on something and then teach that something to others. At least once a semester, I assign half the class to read one article (e.g., Anderson’s “Code of the Street” and the other half another one (e.g., Chambliss’s “Saints and Roughnecks”). In class, the students will work collectively with their “expert team” to identify important concepts, processes, and questions in the article. Then, they will teach this to the other group. Depending on the class size, this is done as a whole class, in groups, or in pairs. Students do exceptionally well at this; knowing that they will have to teach this to a peer changes and heightens their level of engagement as they develop expertise. This exercise also highlights the importance of learning from each other and acknowledging that we are all teacher-learners.

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Students are, at first, uneasy about these practices and they sometimes feel that I am not teaching them because I am not standing at the front of the class talking. I talk to my students about teaching and explain my reasoning for using various forms of active learning. Eventually they take comfort in the fact that they know I have a purpose and they just get to work as my sociological apprentices. They don’t just learn about sociology, they do sociology. And they excel at it.

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Teaching Goals

I will continue to:

- Read scholarship on teaching and learning including both non-disciplinary and sociological resources
- Publish papers in the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Update my skills on using technology in the classroom
- Attend workshops on teaching related items whenever possible
- Update course activities and selected readings to avoid what I call “yellow note syndrome”
- Stay abreast of sociological research and incorporate it into my courses
- Learn from students to improve my teaching

In my career I would like to:

- Improve my knowledge of different learning styles and my attempts to provide learning opportunities for all learners
- Develop or participate in interdisciplinary programming for first-year students
- Prepare and teach standard courses such as:
  - race and ethnic relations; racial inequality
  - women and men in society; gender inequality
  - stratification and social mobility
  - collective behavior and social movements
  - sociological theory
  - urban sociology
  - popular culture and media
  - political sociology
  - qualitative methods and/or research design and data collection
- Develop and teach courses such as:
  - sociology through autobiography
  - social psychology of social movements
  - social psychology of inequality
  - intersectional privilege and oppression
- Engage students in both collaborative and independent research
- Mentor students who want to attend graduate school
- Work as a bridge between the college/university and the community by participating in and supporting student-led civic engagement projects
- Design, attend, and facilitate an alternative spring break travel seminar
Turning Weaknesses into Teaching Goals

We all have weaknesses and blind spots. Fortunately, I am pretty good at acknowledging mine and working to improve them. For this, I value students’ feedback and evaluations – both formal and informal. One time I had fallen into an uncharacteristic habit of using PowerPoint to lecture. As I normally do, I gave my students an informal course evaluation about halfway through the term. The near unanimous comment was one I’ve never gotten before. They said I was boring. “Boring?” I asked them during the post-evaluation discussion. They assured me it was true. And they begged me to abandon the PowerPoint and make them “do some group activities or something.” I didn’t use PowerPoint again. And I’m glad. Although it is a valuable technology for certain things, it does not fit my general teaching style. Because students were willing to admit this to me, and I was willing to learn from my mistakes, I have become more conscious about the ways I deliver material as well as how students are responding to those delivery methods. Although I didn’t like to be called boring, I am a better teacher because of this.

Teaching Evaluations (Qualitative), 2007-2011

I have compiled and examined the qualitative portion of teaching evaluations for 5 years’ worth of teaching at NC State. For the sake of brevity, I selected comments from students that represent patterns in comments students made about the various strengths I have as a teacher. After each pattern, I provide a brief reflection.

Courses evaluated: 2 semesters of Human Behavior (Social Psychology); 7 semesters of Principles of Sociology (Introduction to Sociology, most sections of which were taught in the First Year Inquiry Program with 20-22 students).

Enthusiastic Teaching Style

I have never had a teacher as enthusiastic as Ms. Rusche. I always look forward to coming to class because she makes the learning environment fun, interesting, and always different. Each activity we do relates to the topics we prepared for class and it allows us to retain the material in unforgettable ways. I thoroughly enjoyed this class because of Ms. Rusche.

She is my favorite instructor that I have ever had. She is totally awesome and an amazing teacher.

She made learning fun and memorable. I love how she teaches.

Professor Rusche was an excellent professor. She is very funny and entertaining while also teaching some difficult subject matter. The entire class is able to participate with each discussion and her encouragement is very helpful. I can’t think of any real weaknesses.

She was really excited about sociology, which made everyone else excited as well. One of my favorite professors.
**Reflection:** My students are right. I love sociology and it shows. I also believe that students learn more when they are given permission to have a little fun, and when they are actively involved in creating and maintaining the learning environment. My students are actively doing something every day. I think they appreciate that I value their contributions and that I genuinely want to see them learn and succeed.

**Values Student Engagement; Encourages Deep Learning**

[I] absolutely love Ms. Rusche and wish she taught more classes here at State. I could not wait to get to class and hear what she would be teaching us, and she gave us plenty of opportunities to jump right into the conversation and always answered a risen [sic] hand. She treated all students with respect which was important because we were working with very controversial subjects in the class. She was also very funny and hyper which made the lessons much more interesting! I like how she incorporated group work into the course and small skits that we would have to put together. She also knew everyone's name which definitely makes you appreciate the teacher more and makes you want to pay attention. Overall, the most effective teacher I have had here at State. She basically gave me a new outlook on society and on life!

Ms. Rusche was very receptive and kind to the students. She was available outside of class, and explained the material really well.

The instructor has a gift for making students understand the principles of sociology. She is very respectful and encourages students to think for themselves.

**Reflection:** When students are actively engaged in the course, encouraged to contribute to the learning community, and have those contributions valued, I believe that they are better equipped to take on greater intellectual challenges. My students work very hard in my courses and work through intellectual challenges regularly. What a good work-out at the gym does for the body, a good work-out in class does for the mind. Students twist their minds and wrestle with issues, and then they thank me for it. I treasure this gratitude.

**Intellectually Challenging, Yet Rewarding**

The instructor was simply amazing. She always challenged us. I learned so much more than I ever expected from her. Her knowledge on the subject itself was simply impressive as well.

Explained very complicated material in a way that everyone understood. Very reasonable with grading and wants everyone to succeed. Truly cares about her profession and students.

Course was very stimulating; a lot of the subjects we talked about were very interesting and all tied together making it much easier to understand. Also, not a lot of vocabulary to memorize, but instead concepts to understand, which I like a lot better.

Hard assignments. A lot of work, but made the material stick!!!

She gave us material that we could relate to and she influenced us too really push ourselves.
Reflection: I appreciate students’ acknowledgement of the intellectually challenging nature of my courses. Sometimes course evaluations can reflect the popularity or personality of a teacher rather than the teacher’s effectiveness or intellectual rigor. I consistently get good evaluations from students, but I always wondered, ‘are they really learning a lot or do they just like me?’ Of course, it’s nice to be well-liked, but not if this is the only basis for their enjoyment and praise for the course. Once I began to pay closer attention to this concern in my teaching and in my evaluations, I felt confident that my students were walking away with marked intellectual growth, not just memories of a good time in a fun class. Below are some examples of how students described their learning outcomes.

Self-reported Evidence of Sustained Learning

She never forced anyone to give their opinion, but welcomed them openly. I felt I learned a lot because she is so engaged in her teaching.

I love how she gave students the opportunity to record their own participation because it showed that she recognized that every individual learns in a different way.

Ms. Rusche is an excellent instructor! I learned so much from this course that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I feel like it was very eye-opening and I will be able to actually use the lessons I learned from Ms. Rusche in my everyday life. I actually think differently now! Thank you!

Hands down one of the best professors I have ever had at North Carolina State University. I have never felt like I wanted to participate in class until being in Professor Rusche’s class. She made it so interesting and borderline fun to be learning about Human Behavior. It gave me a great feeling about what I am setting out to do after college after being in that class and it is probably the most I have learned in a class in my college career.

Not the biggest fan of sociology and when signing up for a 300 level course I figured I was doomed, turns out I really enjoyed the class and learned more than I ever expected and I honestly believe it was because of the professor!

After taking this course I am thinking about minoring in Sociology. I love the concepts I have learned. This class has made me take on the world with a whole new perspective. I love learning about the way people are connected and why our society is constructed the way that it is and what made it that way. I can’t wait to take another Sociology class.

Prior to this course, I had not had any exposure to sociology. I entered the class with minimal knowledge and have left a sociologically sophisticated thinker. I believe the course provided a great environment for me to nurture my sociological curiosity and I hope to possibly further my sociological study in the future.

Reflection: I tell my students that we must maintain a balance between fun and learning. My courses are intellectually stimulating and challenging, and typically involve a lot of low-stakes writing. At first, students will complain about the “workload” but after some encouragement and feedback from me, they begin to see the great benefits of writing regularly as a part of their
intellectual and sociological practice. Although most students tend to enjoy my teaching style and course content, I am not perfect. However, I value the weaknesses that students point out because these help me see what needs improvement.

### Teaching Evaluations (Quantitative): Fall 2008-Spring 2011

Range: 1-5 (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree)

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Spring 2011</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Spring 2010</th>
<th>Fall 2009</th>
<th>Spring 2009</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
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<td>The instructor stated course objectives/outcomes</td>
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<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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<td>4.8</td>
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<td>The instructor was receptive to students outside the classroom</td>
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<td>The instructor explained difficult material well</td>
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<td>The instructor was enthusiastic about teaching the course</td>
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<td>The instructor was prepared for class</td>
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<td>The instructor gave prompt and useful feedback</td>
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<td>The instructor effectively used instructional technology</td>
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<td>The instructor consistently treated students with respect</td>
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<td>Overall, the instructor was an effective teacher</td>
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<td>The course readings were valuable aids to learning</td>
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<td>The course assignments were valuable aids to learning</td>
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<td>This course was intellectually challenging and stimulating</td>
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<td>This course improved my knowledge of the subject</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, this course was excellent</td>
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**Peer Evaluations of Teaching**

Professor Maxine Atkinson, Department Head and teaching mentor, mentored me as I developed into the teacher-scholar I am today. The brief statement she offered after an observation in my classroom reflects her high evaluation of my teaching abilities. She said:

Sarah challenges students in ways that are unique and profound. However, she does so in such a kind and gentle way that they embrace rather than resist the lessons she teaches. I am amazed at her skill and her compassion.

Emily Estrada, a graduate student colleague, also observed and evaluated my teaching. Her perspective is unique because in addition to observations made in my classroom at one point in time, I am also her peer teaching mentor:

Sarah is my peer teaching mentor. As a colleague once said, when Sarah teaches, “magic happens.” Through my observations of her classroom, I can see what she meant. Rather than providing the answers and solutions herself, one of Sarah’s main teaching practices involves asking her students to wrestle with questions. Some questions are meant to check comprehension of the material, while others challenge the students to discover knowledge on their own. When students are allowed to uncover pieces of the sociological puzzle for themselves, the knowledge they gain is much more profound. For example, during a classroom observation where she introduced the historical baggage of contemporary racism, a student shared her realization of the differences between a white person and black person using the N-word. Sarah then affirmed the student’s observation and used her example to illustrate the historical and contemporary power differences between whites and blacks. Sarah is an effective communicator. Her message is clear and delivered with a great deal of enthusiasm; her teaching-style is not only informative, it is performative. Sarah’s passion for sociology and teaching are exceptional and, lucky for me, contagious.

Sarah’s supportive teaching mentorship shows me why inquiry-guided learning techniques are effective and how I can incorporate them into my own teaching practice. Sarah excels at teaching students how to think critically and she has helped me develop these skills. When I chose to adopt a more challenging textbook, Sarah shared all of her materials for this new text: notes, discussion questions, activities, and advice for effectively and mindfully responding to students’ sometimes challenging questions, comments, or counterpoints. I am a more engaged and effective teacher because of Sarah; I know that her encouragement and guidance will stay with me throughout my teaching career.
Mentoring Minority Students

I am committed to teaching and mentoring African American and other minority students and will thrive in an environment where this is possible. I acknowledge the obstacles – both institutionally and interpersonally – that minority students may face on a college campus and seek to provide teaching and mentorship that is empowering and supportive. Although NC State is a predominately white institution, I have had numerous opportunities to teach and mentor minority students, particularly African Americans. I have formed strong mentoring relationships with several African American students over the years – in fact, nearly all of the students who keep in touch with me for letters of reference or to update me about their lives, are African American. They tell me there is something I do or offer them that they appreciate, value, and/or don’t get elsewhere on campus. In order to capture the valuable impact my mentorship has had on them, I decided to ask them to elaborate. Below are statements on mentorship from four African American students – all of whom I taught in the classroom and who have maintained relationships with me throughout college, and for some, beyond graduation.

-Kendra-

“I am honored to be able to speak on the behalf of my favorite professor, Professor Rusche. I am a recent graduate of N.C State and I had the pleasure of being in Professor Rusche’s sociology course. She was able to open my mind to a lot of ideas. I had plenty of "ah-ha" moments in her class. Even though I am African-American, I was sometimes blind to some of the struggles many people face. I actually used what I learned to help others. I felt like Professor Rusche actually understood when she talked about the minorities’ experience. That helped me connect to her. Also, as a freshman I felt very lost and she actually gave me confidence. Whether I was her student or not she took the time to help me. As an African American student in a predominantly white institution – that was comforting. She gave so much encouragement and guidance. At no point did I ever feel like she didn't understand or didn't want to understand. I never felt like race was topic that was off limits. She was open and willing to talk and was never on the defensive side. Professor Rusche is very strong woman and she can handle any task given to her. She wants the best for others and tries hard to help. I believe she is very capable of being a teacher or mentor to African-American students. I have never connected to any other professor like I have with Professor Rusche. I tried hard every year to try to fit one of her classes into my schedule and though it never happened if I could go back and take a course I would. I believe she has a lot to offer to other students and would have a positive impact on their lives.”

-Justin R.-

“Sarah’s passion for the field of sociology and women’s and gender studies has invoked in me a unique view of the world...I transitioned into the field of Sociology from a background in Biology and found that the world was not actually black and white as I had previously believed it to be. Sarah’s introductory course was the first Sociology course I took as I transitioned into a new field of study. Enthusiastically and unhampered by social mores, Sarah explored the gray areas and encouraged a level of sophistication and inquiry that was unrivaled in any of my other
classes up to this point. The breadth of topics covered in this class encouraged me to explore the depths on my own and reassured me that this field of study was exactly what I had a passion for.

As an African-American male, it is rare that I am able to bond with someone who is not of the same social group...Sarah [has a] unique ability to maintain a sense of flair and unbridled enthusiasm for...the plight of the underrepresented in a manner that is relevantly informed. The idea is that an instructor should give you the tools to make your own conclusions without clouding your personal inquiry with their own paradigms. This is at the heart of what our relationship is about. I know where Sarah stands on many important societal issues, however, her lens has never been forced upon me or anyone else. Sarah’s delivery is matter-of-fact but respectful; blatant yet subtle; and bold yet subdued.

I stepped into Sarah’s class on the first day along with about 35 other students of vastly different backgrounds and ethnic groups. It is certain that no two students received the same experience from that introductory course. What was consistent among each student, however, was that our instructor treated us as equals and made each of us check our misconceptions, stereotypes and invisible knapsacks of privilege at the door. Sarah is a rarity and a necessity in the field of Sociology and would be a valuable addition to any entity whose mission is to contribute to our global society.”

-DeLisa-

“Ms. Rusche has been there for me for both my educational career and personal life. She is the only former teacher that I’ve had with whom I am on a first name basis with, and that means a lot to me. She has assisted me with matters while I was in her class, as well as when I had trouble in other courses. I know that if I ever need anything, all I have to do is ask. She has been one of my #1 supporters while attending NC State. I only have two former college instructors that I always go to, and Ms. Rusche is one of them. I consider Ms. Rusche more than a mentor, but as a true friend! I know that any student, minority or not, would benefit to have Ms. Rusche as a mentor as she would provide genuine and beneficial guidance and support.”

-Justin T.-

“Sarah Rusche has been more than an amazing teacher and mentor to myself and others. She has become a really great friend and something like a mother to me. Taking her Human Behavior class was a great experience but what makes Sarah special is her willingness to help her students outside of the classroom. Whether it has been advising me on which classes to take, helping me plan my future, or just letting me in on some of the wisdom she has learned through her experiences, Sarah is always there when I need her. You should hire Sarah to teach and mentor African American students because with Sarah the skin color doesn’t matter; I could be African American, Chinese, White, or Indian and she would still treat me the same. Speaking from experience, as an African American, you can’t find relationships/friendships like that with just anyone. I would recommend Sarah to mentor anyone. She is a great friend, amazing teacher, and a wonderful person; she will be a great asset to your school and community.”
Teaching Awards and Honors

- Excellent Teaching Mentor Award, NC State 2008
- Thank a Teacher Award, NC State 2010-11
- First Year Inquiry (FYI)Teaching Fellow, NC State 2006-2009
- Summer START Teaching Fellow, NC State, Summer 2010, Summer 2011

The Teaching Innovations and Professional Development award contributed significantly to my ongoing development as a teacher-scholar. I not only created networks with other teachers both new and seasoned, but also acquired skills and ideas for classroom exercises, managing conflict, developing new courses, finding ways to balance teaching and research, and disrupting this false dichotomy, thus supporting the teacher-scholar I strive to be. This pre-conference workshop was my official entrance and membership in the Teaching Movement of ASA.

In March, 2008 I was awarded the first Excellent Mentor Award for my teaching mentorship, by the Sociology Graduate Student Association at NC State. This award was based on my informal mentoring to newer graduate student teachers. Since then, I have had the pleasure of being a formal teaching mentor in the Summer START program. I was honored to receive this award and flattered by the statement composite from those who nominated me:

Sarah Rusche loves teaching and is eager to help new graduate instructors become successful and effective too. Whether that means offering practical advice on a lesson plan, helping them keep a difficult day in perspective, or reminding them that it’s always harder when you care about being good at what you do, Sarah is available to offer support. A lot of us are better, saner instructors because Sarah has graced us with her talents and attention.

In January 2011, I was delighted to find a letter from The Office of Faculty Development congratulating me on receiving a “Thank a Teacher” award. This program is, as they put it, “a way to honor NC State faculty who have made a difference in students’ lives.” Since this is what I strive to do, I was honored. An excerpt of what the student wrote in the nomination follows:

...The way you talk about complicated concepts, I just get it....I have felt the comfort of being an equal having a conversation in this class...Because of you I have found a new excitement and focus on Sociology...Please don’t change anything about the course. I will always remember it as one of my favorites I have taken at NC State.

---

4 Please see “Teaching Appointments and Fellowships” for more details on the FYI and Summer START programs.

Sarah Nell Rusche
Evidence of Teaching Excellence
Publications on Teaching and Learning


Teaching Appointments and Fellowships

I have been an instructor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at NC State since 2003. I also taught as an adjunct at Elon University during their intensive winter terms (2008-2009). I have taught Principles of Sociology, Social Problems, Social Psychology, Sociology through Film, and Women and Men in Society in traditional classroom settings and/or online.

I was selected to be a teaching fellow in NC State’s First Year Inquiry (FYI) Program and taught in the program for four years. The FYI program’s pedagogical foundation is inquiry guided learning; teachers selected for the program are trained in this teaching and learning approach. With courses capped at an ideal size (22), this program provides a small-college environment for students. Through this fellowship I collaborated in a linked-course model with First Year College. This model links one disciplinary course (e.g., sociology) with a basic college skills course taught by students’ academic advisor. All 20 students are in both sections, thus fostering a learning community through the link. This interdisciplinary, learner-focused program had a significant impact on the teacher I am today. You can read about the program here: [http://www.ncsu.edu/firstyearinquiry/faculty_info/faculty_info.htm](http://www.ncsu.edu/firstyearinquiry/faculty_info/faculty_info.htm)

I was later selected to be a teaching fellow and teaching mentor in the pilot year of NC State’s Summer START program. In addition to teaching in the program, I also played a role in its development. This program is designed to help incoming first year students make the transition from high school to college during the summer session. The program has unique demographics compared to the general student population; most students are members of racial/ethnic minority groups and/or come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. You can read about the program here: [http://www.ncsu.edu/summer/start/index.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/summer/start/index.html)
**Reflections on Teaching:**

What does it mean to be an excellent teacher?

An excellent teacher is enthusiastic, resourceful, uses active learning, makes students think and do, off-loads the content, is a creative assessor, loves what she does, is generous with feedback, gives students a voice, is adaptable, and is a teacher-learner. An excellent teacher tunes in to her students to see where they are coming from and what they would like to leave with. An excellent teacher is sensitive to students’ needs yet comfortable pushing their boundaries of intellectual existence. An excellent teacher creates an environment where students truly want to be there and to learn. But an excellent teacher is not only these things; she is also effective.

An effective teacher has clear goals and learning outcomes and carefully prepares ways to achieve these. An effective teacher designs assessments that suit the teaching and learning practiced; assessments that assess learning, not memorization. An effective teacher is a scholar who uses insights of the discipline and applies them to the classroom. An effective teacher uses scholarship on teaching and learning to enhance her teaching practice and also contributes to this literature by publishing in journals and books about teaching. An effective teacher has learned how to create exercises and assessments to achieve the desired learning outcome. An effective teacher has a teaching philosophy, is reflective, admits and learns from mistakes and weaknesses, provides clear expectations for work, and is always improving, revising, or adjusting her pedagogical tricks of the trade.

I strive to be both excellent and effective; I use reflection as a tool for assessing my success at this. Reflecting on teaching helps me think of ways to update my course with fresh ideas, new activities, new readings, or new ways of organizing things. One reflection led me to see that my pedagogy did not align with my scholarly knowledge. Without my reflections, and my teacher-scholar approach, I may not have identified the need for a change. Here is what I discovered:

My students read an article by Patricia Hill Collins\(^5\) called “Toward a New Vision” to start the unit on inequality. Collins emphasizes her classic point that oppressions intersect and urges us to examine oppression at the individual, symbolic, and institutional levels instead of by category of oppression (race, class, gender). I always agree with her yet I habitually proceed to teach inequality by categories of oppression. I decided to transform the course altogether. I tried to fulfill Collins’ vision by examining each form of oppression across the levels at which it is experienced and reproduced. Instead of discussing each category of oppression, we examine how oppression is experienced and perpetuated at the symbolic, individual, and institutional levels. This revamping challenged me to think more critically about the readings I assigned.

I brought scholarship to bear on teaching and used reflection to link my teaching with my scholarship. As a teacher-scholar, the integration of these practices is essential. The syllabus for this revamped Principles of Sociology course is below. Whatever and whoever I am teaching, I consistently reflect upon my teaching. For me, reflection is central to the process of becoming an excellent and effective teacher.


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Sarah Nell Rusche  
Evidence of Teaching Excellence
Sample Syllabus (Abridged)

202Q Principles of Sociology
Fall 2009

Student Learning Outcomes:
By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Demonstrate active learning skills
- Ask deep probing questions
- Apply the sociological perspective and sociological knowledge to explain various aspects of social life
- Identify and explain several sociological concepts (i.e. society, power, inequality, etc.)
- Trace out the connections and patterns in social life
- Read, write, research, think, and work like a sociologist

Required Texts:

Course Assignments and Grading:

*Class Participation 15%*. Our class is discussion-based and will involve in-class exercises. Participation is required.

*Attendance and Preparation 5%*. Attend class each day, prepared to discuss the material. If you must miss class, please notify me before class via email and show documentation for excused absences upon your return.

*Three Stream Assessments 50%*. There are three streams, or sections of the course. Each stream aims to answer questions about the social world. Stream assessments assess your grasp and knowledge of this material, asking you to think like a sociologist. More specific instructions and grading rubrics will be provided.

- **Stream 1**: What is sociology? What does it mean to think and work like a sociologist? Due Sept. 15th – this is an individual writing assignment. 10% of final grade
- **Stream 2**: How is society organized and where do I fit? How do social arrangements enable and constrain social behavior? Due Oct. 6th – this is a group assessment that will require out of class work and a report to the class. 15% of final grade
- **Stream 3**: How is inequality built into society? How is inequality perpetuated? How does inequality shape individuals’ experiences? Due Dec. 1st – this is an individual writing assignment. 25% of final grade

*Critical Writing Journals 30%*. This is a semester long assignment that has several components and will require organizational abilities on your part. *Once a week*, on the day and reading of your choice, you must submit a one-page critical reflection paper. In a paper folder with clasps,
place the reflection papers in chronological order after I’ve graded and returned them. Keep these in a safe place; you will need them at the end of the semester to write a final analytic reflection paper\(^6\). The purpose of this assignment is to offer you a place to think deeply and critically about the reading and to provide an avenue for sociological engagement. This will help you understand the reading, remember what you read, and also prepare you to discuss the material critically. Good reflections offer a balance between (a) summary of argument; (b) reactions to the arguments, connections to other readings, or relation to personal experience; and (c) critical thinking or discussion questions.

**Stream Assessments: Sample Questions**

*Note*: These questions do not appear on the actual syllabus. This is for illustration purposes only. Taken together, these assess each student learning outcome stated on the syllabus.

*Stream 1*: In “Inventing the Social World,” Schwalbe argues that the powerful (dominant) groups in society tend to shape the culture, and in turn the ideas people accept as true. Give a concrete example from the movie “Pleasantville” that illustrates this concept. Be brief but complete (3-5 sentences).

*Stream 3*: Using a sociological lens, consider how the social problem “unequal access to health care” operates at each level of oppression. In other words, say how oppression and privilege with regard to this issue operates at the institutional, symbolic, and individual levels. You should incorporate race, class and gender in your discussion. Use 2-3 course readings and 2 legitimate news sources that cover the health care issue to frame your discussion.

**Reading Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Th. Aug 20</td>
<td>Welcome and Introduction</td>
<td>How Sociologists Look at the World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STREAM ONE</strong></td>
<td>What is sociology? What does it mean to think and work like a sociologist?</td>
<td><em>(TSEL = The Sociologically Examined Life)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Aug 25</td>
<td>The Sociological Perspective</td>
<td>The Sociological Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Aug 27</td>
<td>The Sociological Perspective</td>
<td>The Forest and the Trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Sep 1</td>
<td>Sociological Research and Theory</td>
<td>TSEL Preface and Ch.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Sep 3</td>
<td>The Social Construction of Reality</td>
<td>TSEL p. 238-249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Sep 8</td>
<td>FILM: Pleasantville</td>
<td>TSEL Ch.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>STREAM ONE</strong></td>
<td>TSEL p. 124-126; 127-131; 135-136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TSEL Ch.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>STREAM ONE</strong></td>
<td>Social Construction of Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Construction of Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Th. Sep 10  FILM continued: Pleasantville  **DUE: Stream 1 Assessment**

**STREAM TWO**
How is society organized and where do I fit? How do social arrangements enable and constrain social behavior?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings/Additional Info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Th. Sep 17</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Sept. 11...Consumer Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Sep 22</td>
<td>The Self and Society</td>
<td>Men and Women: Mind and Body (US p.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Sep 24</td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>TSEL p. 56-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Sep 29</td>
<td>Contingency and Cause</td>
<td>TSEL Ch. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Oct  6</td>
<td>Power in Social Life</td>
<td>TSEL Ch. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Oct 8</td>
<td><strong>Fall Break- No class</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STREAM THREE**
How is inequality built into society? How is inequality perpetuated? How does inequality shape individuals’ experiences?

**Three Dimensions of Oppression: Institutional, Symbolic, Individual**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings/Additional Info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Oct 13</td>
<td>Social Inequality</td>
<td>TSEL Ch. 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Oct 15</td>
<td>Three Dimensions of Oppression</td>
<td>The Rest Room and Equal Opportunity (vista)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Oct 20</td>
<td>Institutional Dimension</td>
<td>Toward a New Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Oct 22</td>
<td>Institutional Dimension</td>
<td>Patriarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Oct 27</td>
<td>Institutional Dimension</td>
<td>Weaving Work and Motherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Oct 29</td>
<td>Institutional Dimension</td>
<td>Social Organization of Toy Stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Nov. 3</td>
<td>Symbolic Dimension</td>
<td>The Nanny Chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Nov. 5</td>
<td>Symbolic Dimension</td>
<td>American Apartheid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Nov 10</td>
<td>Individual Dimension</td>
<td>Dishonoring the Dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Nov 12</td>
<td>Individual Dimension</td>
<td>FILM: <em>Race: the Power of an Illusion</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Nov 17</td>
<td>Individual Dimension</td>
<td>Souls of Black Folk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Nov 19</td>
<td>Individual Dimension</td>
<td>Ain’t I a Beauty Queen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Nov 24</td>
<td>FILM: <em>Tough Guise or Dreamworlds 3</em></td>
<td>On Hidden Injuries of Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Nov 26</td>
<td><strong>Thanksgiving-no class</strong></td>
<td>Barbie Girls and Sea Monsters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu. Dec 1</td>
<td>FILM: <em>Mirrors of Privilege</em></td>
<td>Everyday Race Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Dec 3</td>
<td>End of Course Discussion</td>
<td>DUE: Stream 3 Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sarah Nell Rusche  
Evidence of Teaching Excellence
Race and Ethnic Relations
Sample Syllabus (Proposed)

Course Description:
This course examines the historical social construction of race in the U.S., the development of racist practices by individuals and institutions and the consequences of those practices, especially the persistence of racial inequality. We will examine U.S. racial/ethnic groups, including whites, as well as the intersections of race with other inequalities such as class and gender.

Learning Outcomes:
By the end of the term you should be able to:

- Identify and explain various sociological concepts and theories pertaining to race/ethnicity and racial oppression
- Apply sociological concepts and theories of race to everyday life
- Examine the experiences of racial/ethnic groups from the perspective of a researcher as well as members of those groups
- Describe how race is socially constructed institutionally as well as symbolically
- Use a historical perspective to understand and explain the persistence of racial inequality; Analyze the consequences of racist historical practices on individuals of all racial/ethnic groups and society as a whole
- Explain specific forms of racial inequality (e.g., education, employment, crime, immigration) with sociological sophistication
- Distinguish between racism as an attitude and racism as a system of advantage based on race

Required Texts:


Assessments:

Reflection Papers
The purpose of these weekly papers is to provide an opportunity for you to engage with the material for deeper learning. You will write one reflection paper per week on the reading(s) of your choice. By mid-semester, you should be trying to synthesize readings and discuss the topic
more broadly. Reflection papers should be at least one double spaced page, but not to exceed three pages. These reflections should demonstrate your understanding of the theories and/or findings described in the readings, a connection or relation to other course readings or units, your personal response to the issues raised, and critical thinking questions that can spur discussion. Note: You are still responsible for the other assigned readings you choose not to write about.

**Exploring Race in Everyday Life** (2 parts: observation and analysis)

The goal of this assignment is to see your everyday life through a racial lens, and to eventually connect these observations to sociological understandings of racism. That is, focus your attention on the variety of ways race is present in daily life and create an observation log; I will collect these logs for review twice during the semester. The more you learn about race this term, the more you will begin to see the sociological context and complexity of your observations. Use these observations to supplement class discussions, raise questions, or silently deepen your understanding of race in the U.S. At the end of the term, you will write an analytic report describing and explaining the observations made. I will provide strategies for making observations and conducting an analysis.

**Exams**

A midterm and a final exam will be a combination of multiple choice and essay and will emphasize application, analysis, and evaluation over recall and memorization (see the handout *Bloom’s Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking* for study tips).

**Peer Teaching Project**

Five groups will be created and assigned one form of racial inequality outlined in Unit 5. First, your group will read and discuss the corresponding articles at least 2 weeks prior to the assigned reading day. Then identify the specific features of this form of racial inequality and describe the institutional, symbolic, and individual ways this is perpetuated. Using a historical perspective, describe how those racial/ethnic realities came to be. After this point, groups will meet with me to discuss how to facilitate a discussion on these topics. Combine knowledge gained from your discussions with what you have learned throughout the term to provide a sophisticated sociological discussion. One day for each topic in this unit will be a peer teaching day.

**ALTERNATE Peer Teaching Project** (to be used when emphasizing race/ethnicity specifically)

Six groups will be created and assigned one race/ethnicity to research. First, your group will read and discuss the corresponding chapter in *American Ethnicity*. Then identify the specific forms of racial inequality (or advantage) that affect this group. Using a historical perspective, describe how those racial/ethnic realities came to be. Combine knowledge gained from your discussions with facts and theories learned throughout the term to provide a sophisticated sociological discussion of what it means to Latino, Native American, White, (etc.) in the United States today. Perspective-taking of the group you are studying is highly encouraged, as is use of original examples and applications. Additionally, describe a current racial issue your ethnic
group faces. Together, collectively write a brief report. Then each group will teach the class about what it’s like to be a member of that racial/ethnic group, what unique or common problems they face, and what they do, if anything, to subvert or maintain the racial status quo.

**Grading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race in Everyday Life</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Log (10%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Paper (15%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Teaching Project</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COURSE READINGS AND FILMS**

*Note: RCL = Gallagher’s reader *Rethinking the Color Line*; EFW = Bush’s *Everyday forms of Whiteness*; Supplemental readings available on reserve are noted as such.*

1. **Historical Perspective: The U.S. as a Racialized Society (week 1)**

   **Supplemental Readings on Reserve**
   - Structural Racism: A Short History, Manning Marable (from *The Great Wells of Democracy: The Meaning of Race in American Life*)
   - “Gone with the Wind:” The Invisibility of Racism in American History Textbooks, James Loewen (from *Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything your American History Textbook Got Wrong*)
   - Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations (*American Ethnicity ch. 1*)
   - The Here and Now, Bush (*EFW* Chapter 1)

2. **The Social Construction of Race: Why We Attach Meaning to Race (weeks 2-4)**

   - How Our Skins Got Their Color, Marvin Harris (*RCL*)
   - Drawing the Color Line, Howard Zinn (*RCL*)
   - Racial Formations, Michael Omi and Howard Winant (*RCL*)
   - Theoretical Perspectives in Race and Ethnic Relations, Joe R. Feagin and Clairece Booher Feagin (*RCL*)
   - Racialized Social System Approach to Racism, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (*RCL*)
   - White, Black, and Places in Between, Bush (*EFW* Chapter 2)
   - **Film:** *Understanding Race*
   - **Film:** *Race: the Power an Illusion. Episode 1: The Difference Between Us*

***COLLECT OBSERVATION LOGS***
3. **How the Idea of Race Changes over Time and Place (weeks 5-6)**
   - American Identity, Democracy, the Flag, and the Foreign-Born Experience, Bush (*EFW* Chapter 3)
   - Making Sense, Nonsense, and No Sense of Race and Rules, Bush (*EFW* Chapter 4)
   - Placing Race in Context, Clara E. Rodriguez and Hector Cordero-Guzman (*RCL*)
   - A Tour of Indian People and Indian Lands, David E. Wilkins (*RCL*)
   - Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities, Yen Le Espiritu (*RCL*)

   **Supplemental Readings on Reserve**
   - Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?, Mary C. Waters

4. **Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism (weeks 7-8)**
   - Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position, Herbert Blumer (*RCL*)
   - Race and Civil Rights Pre-September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims, Susan M. Akram and Kevin R. Johnson (*RCL*)
   - The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy, George Lipsitz (*RCL*)
   - The Continuing Significance of Race: Anti-Black Discrimination in Public Places, Joe R. Feagin (*RCL*)
   - Poverty, Wealth, Discrimination, and Privilege, Bush (*EFW* Chapter 5)

   **Supplemental Readings on Reserve**
   - “Because they Tip for Shit!”: The Social Psychology of Everyday Racism in Restaurants, Sarah Rusche and Zach Brewster

   ***MIDTERM EXAM***

5. **Racial Inequalities: Origins and Manifestations**
   - Toward a New Vision: Institutional, Symbolic, and Individual Levels of Oppression, Patricia Hill Collins [on reserve]

   **How Race Shapes Where and How we Live (week 9)**
   - Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Conditions in U.S. Metropolitan Areas, Douglas S. Massey (*RCL*)
   - Environmental Justice in the 21st Century: Race Still Matters, Robert D. Bullard (*RCL*)
   - Why Are There No Supermarkets in My Neighborhood?: The Long Search for Fresh Fruit, Produce and Healthy Food, Shannon N. Zenk (et.al) (*RCL*)

   **Film: Race: the Power an Illusion. Episode 3: The House We Live In**

   **How Race Shapes the Workplace (week 10)**
• Kristin v. Aisha; Brad v. Rasheed: What’s in a Name and How It Affects Getting a Job, Amy Braverman (RCL)
• When the Melting Pot Boils Over: The Irish, Jews, Blacks, and Koreans of New York, Roger Waldinger (RCL)
• “There’s No Shame in My Game”: Status and Stigma Among Harlem’s Working Poor, Katherine S. Newman and Catherine Ellis (RCL)
• Sweatshops in Sunset Park: A Variation of Late Twentieth-Century Chinese Garment Shops in New York City, Xiaolan Bao (RCL)
• Hispanics in the American South and the Transformation of the Poultry Industry, William Kandel and Emilio A. Parrado (RCL)

**Race and Education (week 11)**

• Savage Inequalities, Jonathan Kozol (RCL)

**Supplemental Readings on Reserve**

• DREAMers fighting to pass the DREAM Act (Immigration, education, and social mobility) (reading TBD)
• Dishonoring the Dead, Jonathan Kozol (trends in school resegregation)

***COLLECT OBSERVATION LOGS***

**Race and Criminal Justice (week 12)**

• No Equal Justice: The Color of Punishment, David Cole (RCL)
• Race and Criminalization: Black Americans and the Punishment Industry, Angela Y. Davis (RCL)
• ….and the Poor Get Prison, Jeffrey Reiman (RCL)
• The Mark of a Criminal Record, Devah Pager (RCL)

**Supplemental Readings on Reserve**

• Understanding, and Fighting the School-to-Prison Pipeline (reading TBD)
• Criminalizing undocumented immigrants (“Illegals”) (reading TBD)

**Race, Representations, and the Media (week 13)**

• Film: Race: the Power an Illusion. Episode 2: The Story We Tell

• Television and the Politics of Representation, Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally (RCL)

**Supplemental Readings on Reserve**

• We’re Honoring You, Dude: Myths, Mascots, and American Indians, Stephanie Fryberg and Alisha Watts
• Cinethetic racism: White redemption and black stereotypes in ‘Magical Negro’ films, Hughey
- Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images, Patricia Hill Collins (from Black Feminist Thought)

6. **Privilege and Intersectional Oppressions (week 14)**  
- Colorblind Privilege, Gallagher (*RCL*)

**Supplemental Readings on Reserve**  
- White and Male Privilege, Peggy McIntosh  
- Puerto Rican Wannabes: Sexual Spectacle and the Marking of Race, Class, and Gender Boundaries, Amy Wilkins  
- Cracks in the Wall of Whiteness: Desperately Seeking Agency and Optimism, Bush (*EFW* Chapter 6)

***RACE IN EVERYDAY LIFE PAPERS DUE***

7. **The More Things Change the More they Stay the Same? (week 15)**  

**Visions of Racial Progress**

**Supplemental Readings on Reserve**  
- Barack Obama as a contested symbol of racial equality (*Contexts*)  
- The Future of Ethnicity in America (*American Ethnicity* Ch. 10)

**From the Whiteness Text**  
- Afterword and Epilogue, Bush (*Everyday Forms of Whiteness*)

**Race-Based Social Movements and Course Wrap-Up (week 16)**

* Movements to explore (readings TBD)  
- Slave revolts  
- American Indian Movement (AIM)  
- Civil Rights Movement; Black Liberation Movement  
- KKK and Neo-Nazis  
- Local Racial Politics: Fighting for racial justice at home  
- **Film:** *Freedom Riders*

***FINAL EXAM***