

NO MORE LAME PROSEMS: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINARS IN SOCIOLOGY

Christopher Uggen and Heather Hlavka. 2008. Pages 191-216 in *Academic Street Smarts: Informal Professionalization of Graduate Students*, edited by Ira Silver and David Shulman.

Becoming a professor requires far more than passing qualifying examinations and completing dissertations, though these hurdles certainly loom large to students. Some will pass over these formal requirements like speed bumps, others crash but make it through eventually, and a fair number hit the wall, write themselves off as totaled, and leave academia for good. Under such conditions, it is easy for students to doubt themselves, especially when they might not be sure they belong in graduate school in the first place.

Part of this doubt likely stems from the great asymmetry in the positive and negative information disclosed by their faculty mentors. For example, a student's graduate advisor might proudly list the examination she "passed with distinction" twenty years ago in the honors and awards section of her curriculum vitae, though she would be far less likely to note having *failed* the same exam twenty-one years ago. Perhaps more professors should self-disclose such events. The knowledge that respected sociologists, advisors, and mentors have struggled to complete basic program requirements can help current students gain some perspective on their struggles to clear similar hurdles.

With limited negative self-disclosure in a "status-driven discipline" (Imbur 2005) graduate students must be resilient in navigating the early stages of their academic careers. Graduate school training involves intense emotional labor and identity management, and isolation works to reinforce uncertainty and disillusionment. Despite significant sociological research on identity and

emotions, however, the informal norms of sociological professionalization "have received little public dialogue and formal classroom attention among sociologists" (Shulman and Silver 2005:5). In this chapter, we argue that a successful graduate proseminar can help students deal appropriately with both career successes and disappointments.

How can sociology departments steer students away from a crash-and-burn mentality? Although much has been written on topics such as publishing in academic journals, the informal graduate school socialization process has rarely been examined (Pescosolido and Miller 1999). In this essay, we contend that a sense of shared experience and support may mitigate the effects of failing examinations, rejection letters, and general graduate school anomie. Graduate Professional Seminars ("proseminar") were initiated to provide just such an experience: classroom attention focused on first-year initiation, preparation, and socialization into the discipline and local departmental culture.

In Table 1, we report the extent of proseminar offerings and requirements for forty sociology departments in the United States (as ranked by the National Research Council in 1995). According to our 2007 canvas of course schedules and department websites, 58 percent of these departments offered a proseminar, but only 45 percent required participation. The most common format is a one-credit single-semester or year-long course covering departmental requirements, introductions to faculty, and workshops on ethics and financial opportunities (see Pescosolido and Hess 1996).

Although we have made a good faith effort to accurately categorize each program, readers should understand that practices vary widely across individual departments. For example, the University of California at San Diego does not offer a required proseminar, but graduate students can participate in a faculty research seminar.

Unfortunately, the coverage in most proseminars is rather thin, concentrating on formal requirements and resources rather than professional

identity development (Ferrales and Fine 2005). In particular, students are concerned with managing faculty expectations, developing mentoring relationships, building cohort cohesion, understanding the structural and emotional barriers before them, and finding meaning in the discipline.

Clearly, students need both the formal and informal aspects of professional development. Yet, for reasons explained in this essay, the standard proseminar often fails to demystify these processes.

Table 1: Graduate Professional Seminars in Top Sociology Departments (2007)

Top 40 Sociology Departments <i>National Research Council, 1995</i>	Graduate Professional Seminar	Departmental Requirement
University of Chicago	No	No
University of Wisconsin Madison	Yes	No
University of California Berkeley	No	No
University of Michigan	No	No
University of California Los Angeles	Yes	Yes
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill	Yes	Don't know
Harvard University	No	No
Stanford University	Yes	Yes
Northwestern University	Yes	Yes
University of Washington	Yes	Don't know
University of Pennsylvania	No	No
Indiana University	Yes	Yes
Princeton University	No	No
University of Arizona	Yes	Don't know
Columbia University	No	No
University of Texas Austin	Yes	Yes
Johns Hopkins University	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania State University	No	Don't know
Yale University	Yes	Yes
Duke University	Yes	Yes
New York University	No	No
University of California San Diego	No	No
University of California Santa Barbara	No	No
University of Minnesota	Yes	Yes
State University of New York Stony Brook	Yes	No
Ohio State University	Yes	Yes
Vanderbilt University	No	No
University of California Riverside	Yes	Yes
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Yes	Yes
State University of New York Albany	Yes	Yes
Rutgers University New Brunswick	No	No
Washington State University	Yes	Yes
University of Maryland College Park	No	No
State University of New York Binghamton	No	No
Cornell University	Yes	Yes
Florida State University	Yes	Yes
City University of New York	Yes	Yes
Brown University	No	No
University of Massachusetts Amherst	Yes	Yes
University of Southern California	No	No
	23 of 40 (58%)	18 of 36 (50%).

Because the discipline changes so rapidly, graduate students must develop both the skills to navigate the current field and the flexibility to adapt to inevitable changes. Moreover, each cohort of students brings a different set of skills, life experiences, and orientations to the discipline. Although sociology graduate students do not and cannot uniformly follow the same trajectory, with some emphasizing research and others emphasizing teaching or public service, they tend to compare themselves against a single unidimensional scale.

Yet students do not pass through similar stages at the same rate, in the same way, or with the same fervor. Despite tremendous variation across students, proseminars often present the stages of graduate school as linear and entirely predictable. Student comparisons can thus lead to misevaluation, disappointment, and disillusionment. Contrary to a simple model of professional socialization, the proseminar might also empower students to choose when to replicate past models, when to innovate new ones, and how to strike a balance between the two. Of course, creative sociologists can encounter difficulty when they are perceived as being "ahead of their time," so graduate students are rightly cautioned against re-imagining the discipline as they learn basic theory and methodology. But, after all, this is our aim: to give students the freedom to understand sociology as it is currently practiced and to empower them to actively create the sociology of the future.

In this essay we present a broad philosophy of the proseminar and aim to offer an alternative approach that takes seriously processes of emotional labor and management. We flesh out the model and share experiences that occur through the informal norms and subtle

practices in graduate school training. We write from the perspective of a professor who regularly teaches a proseminar and of an advanced graduate student who has both taken the course and mentored first-year teaching assistants and graduate instructors.

First, we suggest some general guidelines and ground rules for the proseminar. Next, a section on the "working sociologist" highlights research, teaching and service roles in a changing discipline and the need to orient to both local conditions and national markets. In this section, we include a discussion on finding meaning as a sociologist. We also highlight professional ethics with respect to research and teaching, as well as student, faculty, and community relationships. Finally, we raise questions about the formation of professional identity. This section discusses solidarity, mentoring relationships, managing professional "negatives" such as rejection and criticism, and professional "positives," such as awards, flexible work schedules, and the like. Finally, we summarize and conclude by highlighting the resources and opportunities that sociology departments can offer their graduate students.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Starting Up

Certainly the narrow scope of most proseminars can be attributed, at least in part, to their low priority in the graduate curriculum. In many programs, faculty members do not receive teaching credit for offering a proseminar. Busy with their core obligations, neither faculty nor students can afford to be fully invested in a one-credit course. Instructors therefore tend to overemphasize graduate school

requirements rather than graduate school experiences. Once the program requirements have been introduced, it is common practice for proseminar instructors to invite an aimless parade of available faculty visitors to talk about their research interests, current projects, and, quite literally, whatever else they would like to discuss. Surely, the principal advantage to this method is that students are exposed to a diversity of faculty perspectives, meeting face-to-face with professors in the department. The principal disadvantages of this approach involve repetition, conflicting information, and potential biases in the information presented. Junior faculty speakers, in particular, may be subject to social desirability biases, as they must be especially concerned about managing impressions within the department.

We do not argue that the proseminar should be more intensive or worth more credit, but instead contend that departments might do a better job prioritizing the information that is shared. Given program constraints and the limited incentives for proseminar instructors, it is important to recognize that many sociology departments offer teaching courses and professional development workshops that examine pedagogy and practice in greater depth. Nevertheless, any proseminar requires some preparation, and should be current and topical. Ideally, the course should be taught by a faculty member with some authority in the department, such as the department chair or director of graduate studies, or by other instructors with some degree of legitimacy and credibility. In our view, such instructors should strive to adopt a flexible rather than a dogmatic approach, but they must have the capacity to speak with real authority on

issues such as publishing, mentoring, and emerging trends in the discipline.

To highlight our main points, we list fifteen basic ground rules or suggestions for implementing a proseminar in Table 2. We begin with a critical statement: that *the standard prosem is really lame* and in need of change (thesis #1 in Table 2). Contrary to routinely inviting all faculty members to give an unstructured talk, we suggest that time be left at the end of the semester for students to invite particular faculty members of their choosing to participate in the proseminar. In this way, graduate students are active and thoughtful about their choice, and engage in a more reflective and democratic process.

Ground Rules

Needless to say, a successful proseminar will consider the perspectives of students as well as faculty. In introducing the seminar to students, instructors should address common sources of misinformation and confusion among first- and second-year students. From the first day forward, a recurring theme in such seminars involves demystifying formal and informal training processes so that students are actively and emotionally engaged in their discipline. Yet the top priority for sociology graduate students should be to obtain a solid foundation of courses in theory, methodology, and their substantive areas. We therefore suggest that *assigned reading should be forbidden* in a student-focused, one-credit proseminar (thesis #2 in Table 2). Instead, handouts and online links can provide students with concrete materials for later reference, without bombarding them with new journal articles about the discipline.

Table 2. Fifteen Theses for Proseminars

1. **The standard proseminar is really lame**
An aimless parade of faculty visitors does little to advance the needs of graduate students.
 2. **Reading is forbidden**
Do not bomb busy students with new reading materials. Instead, maintain a website and good handouts and resource lists, presenting the information during the proseminar sessions.
 3. **Everybody talks**
Establish a norm of participation and interaction, so each student speaks at least once in each session.
 4. **Provide fresh data and social facts about the discipline**
Share information about salaries and trends in the discipline, including hiring by area and funding sources. Rankings of departments and journals can be reported with comment or critique. Describe various career trajectories, asking what kinds of jobs students want and how they might obtain them.
 5. **It is difficult to enjoy being a professor until one becomes comfortable in the classroom**
Messages to underinvest in teaching can do harm, so emphasize ways to balance faculty roles.
 6. **Encourage both safe and risky research agendas, showing students the premium placed on creativity**
Foster both productivity and creativity in research and teaching.
 7. **Help students find personally meaningful roles in research, teaching, and service**
 8. **Doing the right thing**
Discuss both formal rules and policies as well as development of personal commitment to ethical research.
 9. **Loving your neighbors**
Discuss issues of solidarity in the cohort, department, and discipline. Learn to appreciate faculty as potential allies and stewards of department culture. Offer frank discussions and advise on relationships with other graduate students, undergraduate students, faculty, administrators, and others.
 10. **Orient students to both internal and external audiences**
While some sociological work may garner attention from national and international audiences, sociologists must also make positive contributions to their immediate work environment.
 11. **Share and celebrate failures**
When instructors share their own failures, rejections, and horror stories, students can better contextualize the difficulties they will inevitably experience.
 12. **Attend to emotional content**
Emphasize how sociologists learn to manage the emotions of the job. Do not shy away from issues such as rejections, competitiveness, problematic relationships, and other stressors.
 13. **Workshop it**
Share information about constructing curriculum vitas, job application materials, conference presentations, and other materials.
 14. **Individualize it**
Individual meetings between the instructor and each student are often especially productive, as are group meetings with panels of graduate students.
 15. **Having a life**
Many students are wrestling with issues of work/family balance, welcoming discussions of time management, role overload, and mental and physical health.
-

A good proseminar should remain interactive, open, and flexible to student's needs. As such, we suggest that a norm be established in which *everybody talks at least once during each class meeting* (thesis #3 in Table 2). In our experience, this ground rule helps establish cohesion among cohort members from the beginning. Even in small seminars, a few students will tend to dominate the discussions unless an inclusive norm is established and

reinforced. Structuring small amounts of participation in early meetings encourages students to share with one another, building the trust that will be needed when sensitive topics (e.g., personal relationships with students or faculty) are discussed later in the semester.

THE WORKING SOCIOLOGIST

Data and resources

The proseminar setting provides a rare opportunity for students to learn about non-intellectual concerns involving money, time, and the nuts and bolts of academic life. It is therefore important to present graduate students with *fresh data and social facts about the discipline* (thesis #4 in Table 2). This includes a clear picture of basic salaries for both private and public spheres, which the American Sociological Association makes easily available at *asanet.org*. In a rapidly changing field, a variety of career paths are available to sociology doctoral students, including positions in colleges and universities, applied settings, and academic administration. Most proseminar students are oriented to academic positions emphasizing research and teaching, though some may opt for careers in statistical analysis, program evaluation, and advocacy work.

During this section of the proseminar, it is appropriate to discuss the rapidly rising number of women entering sociology (and the not-so-rapidly rising number of persons of color entering sociology) as well as trends in local and national markets. Funding is always important to students, and a proseminar can help introduce students to sources of dissertation support, grants, and fellowships. Thinking about such questions often helps proseminar students assess career trajectories and the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of their work. We ask students: what kind of job do you want? What types of work do you find most rewarding? What kind of career path can you carve out? These are critical beginning questions as we move to exploring the varied work and service opportunities in sociology.

Research and Teaching

Departments and students vary greatly in their strengths and emphases, so a proseminar can help students understand the relative strengths of

their home department as well as some alternative career paths available outside of it. During the proseminar, it is reasonable to address both academic and non-academic research settings. As elsewhere, concrete lists, resources, and personal contacts are most helpful to students. Bringing in guest speakers and introducing students to research in non-academic fields is especially helpful when there is limited in-house representation.

New students often receive mixed messages about teaching. These mixed messages can produce a cycle of underinvestment, poor classroom performance, negative classroom experiences, and anxiety. It can therefore be useful to present a basic overview of sociology teaching, including the workloads and tenure expectations in different university and college settings. Although the relative emphasis of research and teaching varies across academic departments, we communicate to students that they are *unlikely to enjoy being a professor until they become comfortable in the classroom* (thesis #5 in Table 2). This information is presented to students so that they can make informed career decisions while addressing the various sources of rewarding work in sociology. Again, such information can serve as a jumping off point: at the University of Minnesota we offer a 3-credit teaching course in the sociology of higher education and hold workshops throughout the year to provide graduate students with practical information regarding job market portfolios, grant applications and the like.

While the proseminar is a good place to present strategic career moves to get ahead in the discipline, a valuable course will also foster the creativity necessary to connect personal motivations to career decisions. We encourage students to develop both a long-term research plan in an area of

interest and expertise, but to also *make room for creative opportunities and projects that fall outside the plan* (thesis #6 in Table 2). It is important for academics to be cognizant of the market, of course, but students who let the market dictate their decisions will quickly become alienated. The main question addressed in this section of the proseminar is one of meaning: Why do we do what we do?

Many sociology students apply to graduate school with a passion to find *personally meaningful research, teaching and service roles* that helps them 'make a difference' in their area of study (thesis #7 in Table 2). The tendency is for this passion to gradually dissipate, especially during the first few years of graduate school. The proseminar can offer a setting to explore students' reasons for finding sociology meaningful or rewarding. Finding one's passion is another recurring theme in the proseminar. We ask students: What is meaningful work for you? How does this work fit into the discipline? How does the work fit your career trajectory? In what ways is this type of work rewarded?

Such conversations can lead students to the conclusion that the work they find most satisfying may not be highly valued or rewarded. We therefore explore strategies for balancing different types of work and personal investments as a sociologist. For example, some students may love teaching, but find it is variably regarded and rewarded depending on the topic, the department, or the institution. Other students may not find their passion in teaching, but instead in research. There are a variety of ways to nurture such passions and interests, including developing courses, bringing community service into the classroom, and doing research and publishing on classroom teaching. The proseminar can help structure discussions about how

students can identify successful models for themselves and carve out their own place in the discipline.

Service

Apart from their research and teaching, most sociologists are expected to make some contribution to service - to their department, discipline, university, and community. Nevertheless, the diverse service opportunities for sociologists are rarely addressed in graduate training. A proseminar discussion of service roles can thus help students make thoughtful choices about these contributions. The links between service activities and primary research and teaching roles have become especially important in an era of renewed attention to public sociology and engaged scholarship.

The proseminar offers a setting to explore these links and to build mutually reinforcing scholarly and service interests. It also serves to remind participants about the energy and idealism that drove many to study sociology in the first place. As we endeavor to conduct research that "matters," in terms of advancing knowledge and/or making a difference in a particular area of social life, our service activities can reinforce this pursuit, while also fostering harmonious departmental, university, and community relationships.

Many sociologists argue that service contributions are critical to understanding social life, and in particular, addressing social problems. In a sense, these sociologists view their research as service, and their service work as intimately intertwined with their scholarship. Proseminar discussions exploring the connections between research, teaching, and civic engagement can address the tension between public advocacy and the research enterprise, which provides a natural link to discussions of professional ethics.

Professional Ethics

The treatment of professional ethics in proseminars often seems perfunctory. Most proseminar instructors photocopy the ASA guidelines for students to read, describe the local Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, and send them on their way. But sociological ethics reach far beyond conflicts of interest, sexual harassment, or discriminatory language to encompass all manner of appropriate and inappropriate conduct as professional sociologists. A good proseminar can open a broader discussion of what it means to *do the right thing in the right situation* (thesis #8 in Table 2). We advise discussing the purposes of research, the ideological distinctions between 'subject' and 'participant', as well as the subjective nature of the enterprise. Can everyone give informed consent? How can students tell whether their interview participants are fatigued or distressed? What are our professional obligations in such a situation? Productive conversations go further than the basic discussion on research risks and benefits.

We advocate a policy of *loving one's neighbors* in which sociologists make service contributions that build solidarity or improve conditions for all members of the sociological community (thesis #9 in Table 2). In this regard, it can be useful to distinguish between local or internal audiences (such as one's home department) and external audiences (such as professional associations and national job markets). Particularly in the area of service work, sociologists must often strike a *balance between work done on behalf of internal and external audiences* (thesis #10 in Table 2). While some of their work may garner attention from national and international audiences, sociologists must also make positive

local service contributions to their immediate work environment.

The proseminar is perhaps the most appropriate place to discuss relationship ethics. The boundaries of personal relationships may be discussed, along with university and ASA policies regarding harassment, nepotism, consensual relationships, and conflicts of interest. Proseminar instructors can ask students how they would handle different scenarios, such as flirty emails from students, disputes with advisors or collaborators, or suspected plagiarism.

It is especially important to focus such discussion on issues of disclosure and disparities in power, as new graduate students are often only dimly aware of their own power over undergraduate students. When would they talk to their advisor or department chair? How can they avoid conflicts of interest or perceptions of favoritism toward their students? Who are some good models for managing relationships in a professional and responsible manner? What happens when a personal relationship ends but the professional relationship continues? With regard to the role of research and teaching assistantships, it is important for students to understand the norms surrounding these relationships. When should research assistants get credit for their work? When are teaching assistants doing too much? Because such questions are the source of much anxiety and stress among graduate students, a frank proseminar discussion can be especially productive.

EMOTIONAL LABOR AND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

Graduate school requires intense emotional labor and identity management, often in the face of isolation, anxiety and stress. While emotions are recognized throughout the proseminar, they are worthy of focused attention in a stand-alone session. The

informal and implicit norms and subtle cues of graduate socialization are similarly unexamined practices. Thus, the proseminar may be the first (and only) formal acknowledgement of emotional labor and management in graduate school. Socialization to graduate school tends to overemphasize independence, self-sufficiency and objectivity. For many reasons, this makes sense: graduate school typically allows for a great deal of individual time and lack of supervision. While such freedoms are great perquisites of the profession, they also impose new responsibilities to manage one's time efficiently and to seek out support when needed. Where students feel uncertain and isolated, they are more subject to anxiety and stress, particularly when they experience personal or professional setbacks. A sense of shared experience and support may mitigate the effects of failing examinations, rejection, disillusionment and the like.

Self-disclosure

The proseminar is best designed as both present and preemptive. The alienation and anomie experienced by many graduate students (Adler and Adler 2005) can be tackled collectively rather than individually in an atmosphere that encourages interdependence as well as personal growth. First year graduate students may find themselves in a minor identity crisis, as they get the first serious criticism of their writing and, in some cases, fail examinations for the first time. Learning to respond appropriately in such circumstances is a major task of graduate school, playing an important role in the development of professional identity.

While proseminar students may embark on diverse trajectories, they will all be subject to rejection and professional disappointment at some point in their careers. When instructors and other faculty and students *share*

and celebrate their difficulties and failures, participants gain perspective on their own challenges (thesis #11 in Table 2). Solidarity is thus shaped, in part, through self-disclosure, as students share their concerns and their motivation for pursuing sociology. Such discussions offer another setting to work through the various sources of success and meaning in sociology. We suggest that gaining perspective on rejection and critique is a learning process, refocusing anxiety and disappointment toward acceptance and growth.

Emotional labor and identity management is also anticipatory. It is not necessary that students collectively identify with particular experiences, especially during their early years in the profession. Nevertheless, they should be introduced to a range of challenges that professional sociologists are likely to encounter. Illustrations also come from self-disclosure, particularly from the proseminar instructor and invited faculty members willing to share their experiences, both positive and negative. On the few occasions when negative experiences are shared outside a proseminar, they tend to be stripped of their emotional content. Hearing an instructor explain how it took several years to resubmit a manuscript after a difficult journal rejection, for example, can offer some reassurance to students receiving their first rejection letter. We therefore advise that proseminars *attend to the emotional content of professional sociology* (thesis #12 in Table 2).

Self-disclosure requires that the proseminar be designed as a safe environment for students to ask important and potentially embarrassing questions. Just as negative experiences, it is important for proseminar instructors and visitors to share positive experiences resulting in personal happiness. While curriculum vitas provide lists of publications,

presentations, awards and grants, the personal payoffs are just as important to the working sociologist. In our proseminar, for example, we review such personally fulfilling experiences as teaching specialized courses, mentoring undergraduate students, building a great department and university, and seeing the impact of one's work in a community.

Beyond the proseminar

A single proseminar can scarcely introduce all of the topics discussed in this chapter, much less offer a thorough treatment. Graduate departments are therefore encouraged to *offer follow-up workshops* for more advanced students, including preparation for the job market (thesis #13 in Table 2). Such workshops will include multiple cohorts of graduate students, often with a panel of graduate student presenters who can speak with some authority on a particular issue.

Depending on the length of the proseminar and the number of students

in attendance, we also advise setting time aside for *individual meetings* between the proseminar instructor and each student (thesis #14 in Table 2). In our experience, students sometimes wish to discuss certain proseminar topics individually, though they may be uncomfortable having these discussions with advisors they have only recently met. The stakes are often lower in a discussion with a proseminar instructor than in a discussion with a student's peers or advisor.

This is particularly the case when students have questions or concerns about finding balance in their work and personal lives. While a proseminar can offer time management and stress-reduction strategies, students will inevitably raise questions about how they can become a sociologist while also *having a life* (thesis #15 in Table 2). A good proseminar should offer a realistic portrayal of the demands of the profession, but also share with students the joy and fulfillment of the sociological enterprise.

REFERENCES

- Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. 2005. "The Identity Career of the Graduate Student: Professional Socialization to Academic Sociology." *The American Sociologist*, 36: 11-27.
- Ferrales, Gabrielle and Gary Allan Fine. 2005. "Sociology as a Vocation." *The American Sociologist*, 36: 57-75.
- Imber, Jonathan B. 2005. "Ambition, Vocation, and Sociology." *The American Sociologist*, 36: 76-85.
- National Research Council. 1995. *National Academy of Sciences*. Washington, D.C.
- Pescosolido, Bernice and Donna Hess. 1996. "Models for the Professional Socialization of Graduate Students." *Report of the Ad Hoc Graduate Education Committee*, American Sociological Association.
- Pescosolido, Bernice and Eleanor Miller. 1999. "Of Nerds, Ardent Suitors, and Lecherous Professors" pp. 404-417 in *The Social Worlds of Higher Education*, Bernice Pescosolido and Ronald Aminzade, Eds. Pine Forge Press.
- Shulman, David and Ira Silver. 2005. "Demystifying the Hidden Magic of Producing Sociologists." *The American Sociologist*, 36: 5-10.

Appendix 1. Sample Proseminar Syllabus

SOCIOLOGY 8001 - SOCIOLOGY AS A PROFESSION

Thursday 2:45-4:00 Room 1109 Social Sciences

course page: www.soc.umn.edu/~uggen/8001.htm

Professor Christopher Uggen

1160 Social Sciences: 624-4016

Office: Wednesday 11:30-1 or appointment.

uggen001@umn.edu / chrisuggen.com

DESCRIPTION

Welcome to Sociology as a Profession and to Minnesota sociology! This 1-credit two-semester seminar is designed for first-year sociology graduate students. My goal is to help you understand the professional worlds of sociology. The first semester is dedicated to many of the practical matters of professional life. In the spring we will explore more detailed discussion of topics of particular interest (marked by a "part I" on this syllabus) and be joined by a cavalcade of faculty visitors that *you* request.

OBJECTIVES

1. Provide *practical information* about sociology and academic life.
2. *Introduce resources* or refamiliarize you with resources likely to be useful to you.
3. *Discuss presentations* by student and faculty in department seminars.
4. Provide a safe place to *ask questions* and make comments.
5. Foster an environment promoting creativity and the free and good-humored *exchange of ideas*.

READING IS FORBIDDEN!

By design, there are *no scheduled readings* assigned for this course. For some topics, you will visit websites, see a list of publications on a topic, or examine some "ambient" materials that cross our paths this year. For example, we will all examine the American Sociological Association [Code of Ethics](#) as part of our discussion of professional conduct.

REQUIREMENTS

1. *Be there*. Show up for each departmental seminar (4-5:15 Tuesdays) and each of our class meetings. Unless otherwise noted, the only preparation I expect is that you ask yourself what you would like to know about each topic before and during course meetings.
2. *Be interactive*. Participate in our discussions and in the departmental seminars. Make it a goal to speak at least once in each meeting.
3. *Be yourself*. I do not want you to just "learn about" the professional world of sociology. Instead, you need to start taking the role of a professional sociologist. To do so, you will need to make some accommodation to the professional world but at the same time keep your heart -- capitalizing on your own assets and ideas.

POLICIES

1. The course is **graded** on an "S" or "N" basis, indicating satisfactory or "not satisfactory" performance. Your course grade will be determined solely by your participation. If you attend and participate regularly you will pass the course.
2. It is best to *avoid incompletes* in this and other classes. If something pulls you out of class for several weeks, you may be able to make up particular sessions next year. If at all possible, avoid delaying your progress by taking an incomplete.

3. Other basics:
 - a. If you have a *disability*, we can make the appropriate accommodations.
 - b. If you experience *harassment* of any sort, including sexual or racial harassment, please alert Uggen or the Chair or Director of Graduate Studies.
 - c. If you have questions about *academic honesty*, plagiarism, or other issues, please bring them to my attention.
4. Teaching Philosophy (attached)
5. Department Policies (attached)

TENTATIVE OUTLINE

1. **September 8: research, teaching and service**
 - a. "who I am and how you can be too" (I'm kidding!)☺
 - i. fostering creativity
 - ii. secret advantage
 - b. power and purity
 - i. your advisors and committees
 - ii. ranks and positions in department and university
 - c. pulse check on resource use and interests
 - i. literature: sociological abstracts, social science citation index
 - ii. data: ICPSR, GSS, NES...
 - iii. professional associations: ASA, SWS, ASC...
2. **September 15: the academic sociologist**
 - a. types of institutions
 - b. social and political environments
 - i. public sociology and public discourse
 - c. social networks
 - d. developing your own professional identity
3. **September 22: continue academic and begin the nonacademic sociologist**
 - a. government
 - b. NGOs
 - c. private
4. **September 29: professional associations**
 - a. online resources
 - b. general and specialty
 - c. national, plus local, regional, and international
 - d. student membership
5. **October 6: funding and paying for your research**
 - a. "you lucky ****s!" -- internal support for Minnesota students
 - b. external research support
6. **October 13: developing collaborative relationships as a graduate student**
 - a. student/student
 - b. student/faculty
 - c. faculty/faculty
 - d. interdisciplinary
 - e. interplanetary
7. **October 20: preparing your CV**
 - a. local and national audiences
 - b. when can I put something on my CV?

- c. things best left unsaid...
8. **October 27: presenting your work, part I**
 - a. local and national sociology meetings
 - b. local and national specialty meetings
 - c. underinvestment in oral presentations
 9. **November 3: panel and evaluations**
 - a. midterm evaluations for fall course
 - b. ballots for student choice in spring course
 10. **November 10: journal publication, part I**
 - a. publishability and "sloppiness"
 - b. peer review - blind and public
 - i. offering constructive feedback to colleagues
 - c. generalist journal hierarchies
 - d. specialist journal hierarchies
 11. **November 11: questions and concerns for the DGS**
 - a. DGS Elizabeth Boyle visits
 12. **November 24: thanksgiving (no class)**
 13. **December 1: book publication**
 - a. edited volumes
 - b. preparing a book prospectus
- Spring Seminar: professional ethics and responsibilities, part I**
- a. research and teaching ethics
 - b. the ASA ethics code
 - c. why other professional associations may not *have* an ethics code.
- Spring Seminar: the job market**
- a. job talks
 - b. teaching portfolios and talks
 - c. letters and references
 - d. role transition and life of a new faculty member

Teaching Goals and Philosophy

1. Respect for Students.

The other points are really a subset of this one. Education is a service industry, but you cannot simply purchase a unit of education the way you would buy other commodities. Instead, you must devote time and energy to learning. I respect those students who must make work, family, or other commitments their top priority. Nevertheless, to benefit from the class and to be rewarded with a high grade, you must find time to do the work.

2. Procedural Justice or Fairness.

In my non-statistics classes, I typically grade exams and papers anonymously (by identification numbers rather than names) to avoid favoritism or other biases. Universal standards and strict deadlines are the best way I know to provide equal opportunities for all students.

3. High Standards for Excellence.

I reserve grades of A for outstanding work that engages course materials with original thought and creativity or a mastery of technical skills. You can receive a B by doing all of the work well and a C by meeting *all* course requirements.

4. Opportunities for Independent Work.

All must meet the basic requirements. For those wishing to engage the material at the highest level, I allow flexibility for more ambitious projects.

5. Responsiveness and Accountability.

You will have the opportunity to evaluate me and to critique the course in time for me to make changes that will benefit *you*. If you think I have failed to live up to the principles or philosophies here listed, please let me know about it.

6. Accessibility.

I will be available to you during office hours and flexible in scheduling appointments outside these hours (*including* nights and weekends if necessary).

7. Openness to Diverse Perspectives.

Sharing your experiences and understandings (publicly or privately) enriches the course for your fellow students, especially when you disagree with me.

8. Enthusiasm for the Subjects I Teach and for Teaching as a Vocation.

I cannot expect you to really engage the course materials if I am bored with them. Therefore, I will make every effort to make the texts, lectures, and assignments current, relevant, and intellectually engaging.

9. Skills, Knowledge, and Attitudes.

I teach: (1) technical and life skills that will benefit you inside and outside of the classroom; (2) abstract and concrete knowledge about the social world; and, (3) attitudes promoting the free and good-humored exchange of ideas.