

STATEMENT ON TEACHING

Gene L. Theodori
Department of Sociology
Sam Houston State University

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My teaching philosophy is rooted in the assertion that teaching and research are vitally and inseparably linked. In *The Academic Ethic* (1984) Edward Shils avowed

Research...is the methodical acquisition of knowledge, hitherto unknown. Knowledge languishes and fades if it is not cultivated by research. Teaching too languishes if it is not sustained by research.

With that said, it is important to note that not all teachers have a passion for engaging in research. I have a passion for both teaching and research. The enthusiasm I hold for scholarly research activities is mirrored in my teaching endeavors, and my teaching endeavors are enhanced by my scholarly research. Regardless if I am fulfilling my teaching responsibilities as a classroom instructor or as an outreach educator, I treat both students and the subject matter respectfully and seriously. As a university teacher I strive to heighten students' awareness of the substantive topic at hand and advance their understanding of relevant theoretical perspectives, methodological strategies, and statistical procedures. And at all times I encourage the use of sociological imagination.

To me, learning is a journey; it is the ongoing acquisition of knowledge, behaviors, and/or skills that were previously deficient. I am devoted to facilitating learning by developing students' capacity to observe, think, reason, scrutinize, and even criticize. Therefore, I demand a great deal academically from both my undergraduate and graduate students. I train students in the techniques of critical assessment and perpetually challenge them to extend themselves intellectually. I press students to attain the highest level of comprehension which their capacities will allow, and then I push them to achieve some more. Moreover, I encourage my students to make comparative judgments about competing interpretations in the subject-matter which they are studying, in turn, preparing them to be ready and willing to revise their views when more robust evidence and reasons are available.

With striving to maintain high academic expectations, I infuse my classroom with teaching methods that address the multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles of my students. I prefer student-centered teaching that encompasses a variety of readings, lectures, small group discussions, presentations, research projects and creative activities rather than teaching that depends entirely on straight lectures and rote testing. I prefer not to be the "talking head" at the front of a classroom; instead, I desire dialogue with and among students, and an environment that stimulates student engagement and participation.

In evaluating students' work, I am most interested in the quality of their engagement with the course materials and their participation in written and oral dialogue. I pay particular attention to critical thinking and writing skills, imagination and creativity, as well as contextual knowledge. Students are given a variety of evaluated assignments in each course, ranging from formal papers to creative presentations.

Even more integral than the evaluation of student work is my ongoing assessment of student learning and, in turn, the effectiveness of my teaching. I strive to assess and respond to my students' successes and difficulties with the course materials, and adjust my lessons to meet their collective needs. To accomplish this, I make frequent use of proven classroom assessment techniques ranging from simple exercises such as "muddiest point cards" and one minute papers to more in-depth techniques such as concept maps and student-generated test questions. In addition, these exercises afford yet one more opportunity for students to confidently communicate their needs and keep the dialogue between students and instructor open.

I am of the opinion that students learn most effectively when they can see the application of theories, methods, and statistics to the real world. It is my role as a teacher to make clear the connection between science and practice. In each course that I teach I find ways to incorporate my own basic and applied research into the classroom. I have found that such a procedure grounds abstract concepts and complex subject-matter information in reality, thereby deepening students' understanding and appreciation for theory. I have also discovered that students thoroughly enjoy learning while working with actual survey data.

In addition to my teaching/research role at the University, I fulfill numerous teaching and service-oriented responsibilities as an outreach educator. While serving in this role I present information on community and economic development topics at public workshops, meetings, and other educational events, both independently and in conjunction with collaborators. I also provide technical assistance, coordination, and leadership for applied educational programs in community and economic development. Furthermore, I plan, implement, and evaluate applied community and economic development research and educational programs, and I assist county Extension agents, community leaders, and local elected officials in resource identification and acquisition. My outreach abilities include the capability to communicate efficiently and effectively with a broad range of academic and non-academic audiences.

In summary, I believe my role as an educator to be more than the dispenser of knowledge. My goal is to facilitate, to motivate, to serve as a resource, to adapt to my students' and clientele's needs, and to challenge. If, as Paolo Friere argues, popular education is for, of, and by the people and that instructors are experts who work "for" the people, then it is through the persistent pursuit of these goals that I can truly serve my students and community clientele.