

**Sociology 570: Seminar on College Teaching
Spring 2023**

**Parkes Hall 222
F 9:00am-11:50am
(All times are in CST)**

Instructor: David Schieber

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Office Hours: I am happy to schedule meetings outside of class in person or on Zoom with advance notice. My in-person office is in the big red building (1810 Chicago Ave. Rm. 321, top of the turret).

Zoom Meeting Room: <https://northwestern.zoom.us/my/dwschieber>

Course Description

Teaching can be one of the very few consistently rewarding parts of graduate school. Between grant applications, R&Rs, fieldwork, and enormous amounts of reading, graduate school is full of stress and uncertainty intermixed with exciting and brief moments of success here and there. Teaching can be break from this stress and uncertainty. Teaching can be fun.

My goal with this course is to find ways for you to be an effective teacher while also moving forward with your own research agendas, coursework, and personal lives. This is something that took me years to figure out how to do well in graduate school, and I hope I can help you figure out your own balance sooner than I did. I structured this course with a focus on teaching you these important skills. If you already have experience teaching, then the focus will be on making you an even better and more effective teacher.

In addition, we will discuss practical aspects of teaching that are often treated as tacit knowledge. How do you write a syllabus? What role should you play as a TA in a class? How do you grade and how should you run discussion sections? In my experience, there is a great deal of tacit knowledge in teaching in academia, and my goal will be to demystify this as much as possible.

Course Objectives

1. Become more comfortable teaching by practicing in a fun and positive setting where we are all trying to make each other better teachers.
2. Learn new pedagogical techniques from each other, and discuss how we might apply these techniques in our own classrooms.

3. Demystify the tacit knowledge in TAing and teaching by talking about the practical skills needed to be an effective teacher.

Course Materials

There are no required textbooks for this course. Readings for this class will be available on Canvas through the course reserves or as PDF links.

Class Procedures

I am structuring this course in a somewhat unique way that I think will be helpful for all of you. Classes will generally be broken down into 3 parts, although later we will have classes with two presentations and less time on practical parts of TAing.

Part 1 (9:00am-9:50am): Practice Discussion Section

- The first thirty minutes of every class, we will collectively pretend we are all in an undergraduate discussion section. Once this quarter, each student will lead a 30 minute practice discussion section with the class based on that week's readings from Soc 110. The Monday before you lead discussion, you will also have to share an article about pedagogy, and you will use the strategies in that article to conduct the session. In my experience, the best way to get comfortable in front of a classroom and to learn how to create new discussion sections efficiently and quickly is to do it a lot. This assignment is meant to help you practice this skill.
- You are responsible for your practice discussion section time just like you would be for a regular section. If you come unprepared, it will be an awkward 30 minutes. If you do not show up, we will sit there emailing you worried about where you are. If you are sick or have an emergency, you should let us know what you are going to do about it (Get someone to switch with you? Reschedule? Have a sick kid on your Zoom screen behind you?). If you want to assign something for us to read or watch for your section, that is your prerogative. These are all decisions you will need to make at some point when you teach, and I believe it is better if the first time you make these decisions is in a friendly practice setting.
- Students not conducting the session will be responsible for having done the readings and coming prepared to actively participate. You will quickly learn that successful discussion sections are highly dependent on the preparedness of the students.
- One rule of mine is that anything used in class (strategies, examples, etc.) can be used by the other

students in their own future teaching. If you see something you like, take note and use it in the future. We are learning from each other.

Part 2 (10:00am-10:50am): Constructive Debrief

- After the section is over, I will ask the presenter to explain what their pedagogy paper was about and how they integrated the approach into the session. This does not need to be prepared beforehand, but can just be a conversation about how you approached the assignment. Did you run into problems? Did it go how you thought it would? Would you change anything?
- We will then collectively discuss what we liked about the presentation and different ways the strategy worked. This comment session is meant to be positive for the presenter, and an opportunity to reflect on making the discussion section and how it resonated with the group. We will approach class from the perspective that this is the worst any of us will ever be at teaching, and every subsequent class you ever teach will be better taught than the last.
- We will then talk about the pedagogy paper itself. Do we think it is an effective strategy? Would we change anything? Do we have any critiques of the reading? How might we integrate this strategy into our own discussion sections? This time is meant to be more critical, but the criticism should be directed towards the strategy and paper—not the presenter.

Part 3 (11:00am-11:50am): Practical Parts of TAing

- I will use this time to talk about more practical aspects of being a TA and how to approach them. This will be things like writing a syllabus, grading, appropriate behavior, etc.

Grading

This Course is graded on a Pass/Fail basis. In Order to pass, you need to:

- Conduct a practice 30 minute discussion section in class.
- Share a pedagogical paper the Monday before you present that relates to your mock session.
- Attend 8 out of 10 classes having done that weeks readings for 110, having read the shared pedagogy paper, and being ready to actively participate and help each other learn.

Emails

Email is the best way to get a hold of me, and I try to respond to emails as quickly as possible. If you have questions about course materials or readings, don't hesitate to email.

Students With Disabilities

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Additional Notes

It is the responsibility of every student enrolled at Northwestern University to support the principles of academic integrity and refrain from all forms of academic dishonesty: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/>. Always do your own work, and reference any words that did not originally come from you. I will report any suspected academic dishonesty cases to the dean.

Calendar of Presentations

Week 1

Friday, March 31st

- David Schieber

Week 2

Friday, April 7th

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Week 3

Friday April 14th

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Week 4

Friday, April 21st

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Week 5

Friday April 28th

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Week 6

Friday, May 5th

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Week 7

Friday, May 12th

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Week 8

Friday, May 19th

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Week 9

Friday, May 26th

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Week 10

Friday, June 2nd

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