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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I was inspired to become a sociologist when a college sociology professor commented during a lecture, “People who study sociology recognize there’s something wrong with the world and they want to change it.” His words, in addition to my personal experiences as a black female have cultivated my passion to study the social structures which have resulted in various types of social inequality. While my professor’s words had a profound impact on my academic trajectory, his ability to effectively teach sociological concepts and connect with college students also motivated me to pursue a teaching career. As an instructor I aim to share a theoretical and real-world applicable knowledge of sociology that will: (1) allow students to develop a comprehensive understanding of sociological theories and the social world, (2) become aware of existing social structures and inequalities, and (3) hopefully encourage them to be agents of positive social change in our global society.

In order to meet the aforementioned goals, I intend to use a variety of pedagogical practices to help students effectively comprehend sociology. While I will rely primarily on lectures to teach about relevant sociological theories and concepts, I will also incorporate in-class discussions, guest speakers, and student presentations. Related documentaries, movie/TV segments, and current events will also be shown and discussed to help students make the connection between theory and real-world implications. The use of a documentary as a teaching tool worked really well in a course I taught on “Intergroup Relations: Doing Dialogues Across Difference” in which I trained students to facilitate peer dialogues on various social identities. To help students effectively make the connection between contemporary racial inequalities and past government-sanctioned racist legislation, I showed a PBS Documentary which demonstrated how the suburbanization of America was directly tied to federal housing policies that resulted in the racial residential segregation still prevalent in US society. The student discussions spurred from this activity were very insightful and helped students connect their personal lives and family histories to those specific events, providing a personal and real-world connection to the course material. As a result, students develop a more in-depth and complex understanding of race, class, and gender. This critical understanding of social identities proved to be fundamentally valuable to their success as facilitators of these topics.

Due to my academic interests in the social construction of race and racism in the US and Latin America, the impact of immigration on race in the US, and racial/ethnic identity formation among black and Latino immigrants, I realize that courses I will teach in these areas may elicit controversial discussions in the classroom. I plan to address the sensitive nature of my courses on the first day and throughout the semester to ensure a safe and inclusive environment by establishing ground rules for class discussions and having students keep reflection journals regarding their engagement with course materials, discussions, and class dynamics. I will also

facilitate and participate in class exercises and activities that encourage students to think more deeply about their own and others' social identities and their relation to the course and individuals' social positions in the larger society. An example of such an activity that I also used in the "Doing Dialogues Across Difference" course was the Power Shuffle, an activity in which students are asked to begin the activity by standing in a straight line next to each other. After I read a statement regarding students' social positions (e.g. there were books in my home when I was growing up), I asked students to take a step forward or backward if the statement applied to them. By the end of the activity students were in different positions with some closer to the front of the room and others closer to the back, reflecting on their social positions in society with regard to their separate and intersecting social identities of race, gender, class, etc. This was a powerful activity because it allowed students to reflect on the various ways in which social categories result in social stratification and how societal power is differentially distributed among social groups.

I will ask students to write in reflection journals so they can debrief their perceptions of in-class activities such as the power shuffle and I can assess students' understanding of relevant theories and course material. Additional assessment measures such as papers, in-class quizzes, class participation and group activities will be used to evaluate students' engagement with the sociological concepts taught in the course. In a course I plan to teach on the Socio-historical Construction of Race in the US, I will assign a final paper in which I ask students to make connections between relevant US historical events and contemporary racial issues relying on course material. For example, one such paper topic would be examining the relationship between the Immigration Act of 1964 and the contemporary debate on immigration reform.

Incorporating various assessment measures and pedagogical approaches will provide an additional way to accommodate the diverse learning styles and skills students might have. From my own educational experiences as a student and teacher, I have recognized that some students are more visual learners while others are more conceptual. Including guest speakers, documentaries, and current newspaper articles in the class can bridge the gap between these students while helping them understand the relevance of course material to their personal lives. Additionally, some students may be more comfortable vocally participating in class discussions while others prefer more written forms of self-expression to share their thoughts, which is why journals, class participation, and discussions will also be forms of assessment. In order to create an inclusive and effective learning environment for all students, I feel it is important to meet students at their level wherever that may be. Only then can a true process of learning occur.

Ultimately, I hope students will develop a critical lens with which to view the world and recognize their positionality within it after taking my sociology courses. I intend to utilize my teaching skills and resources to empower students to facilitate social change at various levels by informing themselves about various social issues, getting involved in local and global communities, and actively participating in the political process among other things. Through critically engaging students in the classroom, I am dedicated to making my former professor's words a reality. I hope to use sociology as a tool to educate one mind at a time and to change the social inequality I see in the world.