

Teaching Statement

Cassie Mead

I was a first-generation college student myself. That experience has shaped how I approach teaching and how I organize my classroom. Along with course specific goals, a top priority in every class I teach is building a course that will be accessible to students no matter their background. Additionally, while my graduate education and much of my teaching experience has been at a large state university, my undergraduate education was at a smaller liberal arts college. This has given me a wide range of classroom experiences to draw from in my own instruction. These experiences have shaped my goal to create rigorous yet approachable courses that are designed to encourage students' growth as academics and people.

In my course on the sociology of families, my students come in with a wide variety of majors and academic interests, and for many, this may be the only class in which they approach families from a sociological perspective. A central goal in the course is for students to think about how families both influence society and are influenced by society. Because of this goal, I've designed several assignments that encourage students to connect course concepts to outside experiences, including assigning several weekly response papers. Students can choose which three weeks to complete these papers, allowing them to focus on topics that interest them while also providing flexibility in their schedules. Students also choose which material they respond to, with options including a reading and a piece of audio-visual media, such as a podcast or video. In addition to response papers, students are assigned a more formal application paper in which they apply course concepts to either their own life or a TV show or movie. The goal of this paper is for students to see how sociological trends can be applied to something outside of the classroom, and students have expressed how this assignment has made them really reflect on their own family life or the media they consume. Together, these assignments help students develop a clearer understanding of the relationship between families and society.

Another central goal in my courses is to encourage data and research literacy. In an undergraduate statistics class, a student once asked me a familiar question: When will I ever use this again? While students may not regularly calculate statistical tests after the class, they will interact with statistical claims throughout their life, including on the news, social media, and in the workplace. Because of this, I emphasize these skills not only in my statistics course, but also in classes such as Sociology of Families. In this course, I guide students in interpreting charts, graphs, and other figures, as well as working towards understanding research design through discussions and activities. One activity I have integrated into the classroom involves students analyzing qualitative data pulled from sociological studies (i.e., *Cohabitation Nation* by Sharon Sassler and Amanda Miller). Students pull out major themes, as well as working to understand how sociological research is conducted. Additionally, I have worked to translate my own research into classroom activities, such as an activity where students interpret figures and use sociological frameworks to explain patterns in family and gender. Overall, by incorporating these activities, I aim for students to leave my classroom with a great understanding of data, no matter where they encounter it.

Mentorship is also a central component of my identity as an educator. As a first generation-student myself, I would not be where I am today without mentors who helped guide me through the process, and because of this, I strive to provide the same support to my students. I share my first-generation experience with students to help create an environment where they can feel comfortable coming to me for academic guidance and any other questions they may have about navigating higher education. In addition to my classroom teaching, I have had the privilege to work with both undergraduate and graduate students in mentorship positions. This includes working with several undergraduate research assistants, as well as informally mentoring senior thesis students. I have also supported graduate students as a co-instructor for “Teaching Undergraduate Sociology”, where I provided support and feedback for graduate students teaching their own course for the first time. Through these experiences, I have developed a mentorship approach emphasizing educational accessibility and building academic confidence.

While my teaching experience has focused on families, statistics, and pedagogy, I plan to apply this approach to a range of courses including intro, methods, and substantive courses, such as gender and work. Across these settings, I aim to balance accessibility and rigor, creating classrooms where students feel supported as they engage with new topics. Given my own experience as a first-generation student, I am especially attentive to the challenges students may face navigating the academic system. In my courses, I work to create an environment where all students can build both sociological knowledge and develop skills that extend beyond the classroom.