

Teaching Reflections Spring 2018

Spring 2018 has been the best, and hardest, semester of my career. This is largely the result of me offering SOCI 438 for the first time.

SOCI 100B: Understanding Contemporary Society

Some of the things that went particularly well with SOCI 100 this term included:

- The decision to change the tutorial assignments went really well. Instead of 2 assignments, each worth 15%, we changed them into a 5% proposal and a 25% literature review. Students produced much better work because we forced them to start earlier, provided them with feedback on their research ideas/choice of research articles, and students devoted more time on the second review because it was now worth their effort (25% instead of 15%);
- Students did very well on their exams this semester and the class averages were up a few % from last semester (which makes sense given they had more experience writing exams in 100A); and,
- The TAs were a very dedicated group this semester and completed all their grading, etc., responsibilities both professionally and with good humour.

Some of the things I continue to struggle with in SOCI 100, include:

- I am not sure what more I can do to help TAs and students better understand what I am looking for when I challenge students to “go beyond the content”. While I appreciate this is difficult for new sociology students to do, I continue to see students exceed my very high expectations every semester. I believe that by setting high standards students are motivated to exceed them. And, every semester students do. Further, in numerous conversations with 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students they continue to emphasize that the exams for 100 were a challenge but did help them understand the sociological perspective.

SOCI 438: Issues in Contemporary Sociology

My first delivery of this seminar course was delivered using a Community Engaged Learning model. This required students to work with a local non-profit agency I had contacted in Spring 2017. Once students were enrolled in the course (July 2017) I contacted them to choose their top 3 community partners they would like to work with. Of the 24 students all students (but 1) were placed with their number 1 choice (the 1 student who did not, was placed with their second choice). I then met with students in October and discussed the course and answered any questions they had.

The course was a wonderful experience. From the first class to the last, students appreciated that since this was my first time teaching the course that we all needed to be flexible and “learn as we go”. Every student was a pleasure to work with. They were all committed, passionate and incredibly professional in all their interactions with me and their community partners.

Some of the things that I need to work on in future deliveries of SOCI 438 include:

- I need to provide more specific research questions/project definitions, before the course starts. I felt we spent too much time at the beginning of the course trying to figure out what exactly the community partner needed/wanted;
- Revise timelines/assignments for the course given experience this year;
- Invite more guest speakers to speak to the specific topics of interest for each week;
- Implement a grading strategy requiring students to develop their own rubrics for their projects (i.e., I will still set the value of different deliverables (i.e., 40% of course grade) but have each student define how they want this allocated - this would allow both flexibility of the project, i.e., video production, literature reviews, etc.) but also improve greater student buy-in into the assessment process and better represent the reality of what they needed to do for/with the community partner;
- I want to implement some form of student presentations on their projects. They did so much work and I want them to be able to “celebrate” their achievements; and,
- I am considering implementing a mid-point review sheet (1-pager) to make sure students are on-track/document concerns that need to be addressed.

All in all, a great semester and a great year. My thanks to all my students and my best wishes for a relaxing and enjoyable summer

/Bruce