

Teaching/Learning Matters

ASA's Newsletter for the



**Section On Teaching &
Learning In Sociology**

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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As I am sitting here looking out my office window watching the snow fall, I find myself thinking about the upcoming summer and our conference in Boston. There are numerous exciting sessions being planned and I hope everyone is making plans now to attend. Information is provided at the end of the newsletter about the conference. As most of us know, teaching is both challenging and rewarding. This issue features an interesting article about the CLEP Introductory Sociology exam tests and I find it raises many interesting questions. Please feel free to write a response to any article in this edition and I will include it in the next issue. Stephen Sweet has written an article on academic dishonesty. This issue continues to be discussed on the teaching sociology list serve and was featured in an article last year in this newsletter. I continue to enjoy serving as your newsletter editor and do ask that you please consider writing an article. We always need more articles and of course articles that include the scholarship of teaching and learning are always welcome. This is our first issue that will not be mailed to members. As someone who participated in the ASA Supported Teach-In on Global Climate Change

(www.linfield.edu/soan/et/teachin.html), I think moving in this direction makes sense for both our section and our environment. The due date for submissions for our summer edition is May 1, 2008. Please consider submitting an article.



THINKING ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

Guest Columnists
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Marc P. Singer, The College Board
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And
Stephen Sweet, Ithaca College, ssweet@ithaca.edu

Please note the editor is currently seeking articles on the scholarship of teaching and learning for the upcoming year.

How the CLEP Introductory Sociology Exam Can Help Your Department

Marissa A. Harrison, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY mharrison@bvmcc.cuny.edu and
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Does your institution have problems meeting the demand for Introductory Sociology courses? Are your sociology faculty members concerned with classroom over-enrollment each semester? The College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) offers a 100-question multiple-choice exam that allows qualified students to earn academic credit for Introductory Sociology without having to enroll in a college course covering content they already know. The CLEP Introductory Sociology exam tests students' mastery of material presented in most one-semester introductory sociology courses. Topics covered on the exam include institutions, social patterns, social processes, social stratification, and sociological perspective. By advising qualified students to earn credit through CLEP Introductory Sociology, you could free up valuable enrollment space in your introductory classes.

It might seem counterintuitive to advise a college student to take one less college course when your administration is counting your department's full-time enrollments. However, research indicates that a student's CLEP placement out of the Introductory Sociology course will not shorten his or her college enrollment, nor even reduce the number of courses the student will take in his or her major field.

Scammacca and Dodd (2005) showed that CLEP students are likely to be enrolled in college for as long as non-CLEP students, and students who pass CLEP are very likely to enroll in more advanced coursework in that subject rather than opt for out-of-area courses.

Who Takes CLEP? In the 2006-07 fiscal year, 7,072 candidates took the CLEP Sociology exam at test centers on college campuses, an increase of 9.4% from 2005-06. An additional 2,399 military personnel took this test at no cost through the military's DANTES program, a 12% increase from 2005-06. Demographic data from the candidate pool showed that 35% of test takers were over age 35, 34% were between the ages 23-35, and only 4% under age 19. Nontraditional students and veterans appear to be well-served by CLEP offerings; perhaps more traditional-age college students should be made aware of how CLEP can assist them in achieving their academic goals.

Because there is no official course associated with CLEP exams, CLEP test takers prepare for the exam on their own; thus, students who earn credit-granting scores on CLEP Introductory Sociology tend to be very disciplined and motivated. A recent study showed that CLEP students tend to outperform their classmates in subsequent courses and earn higher grade point averages (Moulder, Abdulla, & Moore, 2005). As a recruiting and admissions tool, a CLEP credit-granting policy can help attract high-level students to your school. Attracting CLEP candidates may also help address retention concerns, as CLEP students are more likely than their non-CLEP counterparts to graduate (Scammacca & Dodd, 2005).

Who Makes CLEP? CLEP Introductory Sociology exam questions are developed by sociology faculty from around the United States who teach the course. In conjunction with assessment specialists, this creation team also conducts curriculum surveys regularly to ensure alignment of exam content with trends and developments in college teaching of sociology. Psychometricians collect and analyze data from each test administration, and a panel of college sociology professors evaluates each question to determine test-item inclusion and scoring standards. The American Council on Education approves the standards for each CLEP exam. The entire process is designed to ensure that the exam is fair, rigorous, and valid.

The CLEP Introductory Sociology exam would save your students and your department money and time. Admittedly, the exam cannot replicate valuable engagement with scholarly instructors and interesting classmates in a college classroom. However, for those students who already have some understanding of sociology, and don't need to start from scratch, this

\$65 test can provide an invaluable stepping stone into the exciting field of sociology. For departments with over-tally enrollment problems in introductory courses, this is a practical and viable solution. Over 2,900 colleges in the United States have established a CLEP policy. Thus, it would be worthwhile to make students and your school's academic advisors aware of CLEP.

The College Board has more information about using the CLEP Introductory Sociology exam in your department at their website: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/clep>. A detailed Test Information Guide is available via email at clep@collegeboard.org.

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Reframing The Problem of Academic Dishonesty

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Early in my career a suspect paper crossed my desk. It was a nicely composed essay presenting an ethnographic account of the student's job as a waitress in a New York State Thruway rest stop off exit 21. Although the paper was well written, a number of passages raised my suspicion that this was not original work. The more I considered this paper, the more incensed I became. How dare she attempt to deceive me! What an affront to the student-teacher social contract! What a way to return my generosity! Grrrrrr!

Guided more by emotion than reason, I concluded that the time had come to teach a student a lesson. I called the New York State Thruway Authority (this was before Google was invented) and asked what town was located off exit 21. After I had this information in hand, I arranged for us discuss "an issue with her

paper" and forced her to reiterate and elaborate. I feigned surprise when she could not recall where exit 21 was on the Thruway, and feeling more than a bit like Perry Mason (and almost wishing for an audience), I led the discussion to the point where the student collapsed and confessed. It was child's play. As she regained composure and expressed what I believed to be sincere regret, I made no effort to hide my disappointment.

Soon after she left my office, my self-satisfaction turned to self criticism. Like most everyone else, I do not like to make people feel bad, and yet I deliberately orchestrated a degradation ritual. How did I become such a mean person? Why did I spend so much time and energy on convicting this transgressing student? Were these efforts at the expense of my "honest" students? And why did this student cheat in the first place?

As Peter Berger (1963) observed, the sociological imagination tends to invade one's mindset, and push us to consider our own actions through its lens. As a result, I find myself thinking not only about how to teach content, but also how my teaching constitutes a social act and the ways a variety of structural and cultural contexts frame my experiences and decisions (Sweet 1998). In the case of academic dishonesty, I concluded that its primary cause is not moral failings of students. As I argue below, it will not be solved through the imposition dark threats on course syllabi, through the application of website searches like turnitin.com, or by fatalistically accepting that there will always be cheats. Instead, I suggest that if we want to take academic dishonesty seriously, we will have to consider teaching techniques and the types of political action needed to support students in the learning process. Sociology, perhaps more than any other discipline, offers guidance on how to do this. Without attempting to be comprehensive, I consider some observations about social relations that are so widely accepted that they could be considered axiomatic in their application to the problem of academic dishonesty.

To begin this discussion, it is worth reflecting on Robert Merton's (1968) theory that many acts of deviance result from the inability of individuals to fulfill culturally scripted goals through institutionalized means. If, for example, a time strapped community college student resubmits a paper composed by her husband, it may not indicate that her values were misaligned. Plagiarism in this instance may reflect her incapacity to fulfill culturally scripted goals through conventional pathways, as there is simply not enough time in a day to diligently fulfill the roles of student, spouse, parent, and worker. The same explanation

could be offered for student athletes whose training schedules or pre-existing skills prevent the completion of assigned work. Merton's concept of structural strain suggests the following recommendation:

Construct assignments that are suited to student capabilities.

Because students vary, assignments that may work well at one institution could actually promote academic dishonesty at another institution. Strains can also be differentially allocated within classes, depending on the resources available to individual students. This suggests a need to accommodate some students with alternate types of assignments. Such accommodations run counter to McDonaldization and assumptions that all students should be held to the same exacting standards. There is ample room for debate on how much variation should be tolerated between institutions and between students. That being said, Merton's theory leads to a self-evident conclusion that as we reduce the need for students to "innovate," we should also expect a reduction in the incidence of academic dishonesty.

Studies in the sociology of work offer further insight into the reasons for academic dishonesty. Although American culture defines students as being different than workers, it is important to remember that this is social construction, as schooling is work (Gratton and Moen 2007). Numerous studies show that extrinsic rewards (such as grades or paychecks) only go so far in motivating effort. As important (and arguably more-so) is identification with the products being created and the social definitions surrounding the acts of production (Kohn 1993). Alienated workers are sloppy, they cheat, and they sometimes sabotage (Montgomery 1979). Conversely, committed workers do good work and often go above and beyond what is required. The same is true of students. The problem of alienation is not solved with therapy, instruction, or punitive measures, but by repositioning ownership and control. The implications for teaching and learning are clear:

Construct assignments that are meaningful to student interests and that promote opportunities for creative expression.

Sociology of education offers further insight into the problem of academic dishonesty. Consider one observation drawn from Bowles and Gintis (1976) classic treatise *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Most students enter college after a thorough immersion in a hidden curriculum designed to instill subservience and obedience. They come accustomed to small homework

assignments and intense supervision. But at the college level, a new hidden curriculum focuses on developing capacities to self-regulate. As a result, students are expected to take control and manage larger projects, but many have yet to develop the skills needed to perform this work. Not incidentally, students from middle and upper classes are more likely to possess the cultural capital needed for success in college, something that members of the lower classes will need to learn through more formalized means. To address these concerns, in addition to abandoning ritualistic assignments:

Design assessment strategies to help students develop the skills to perform increasingly complex tasks.

For some students, plagiarizing may indicate a lack of understanding of *how* to be self-regulating. How can these skills be taught? One means is to teach students techniques to chunk large projects into smaller blocks of work. Another approach is to provide assessments as projects are in their formative stages. I do this, for example, by structuring library research assignments early in the semester and by checking that students have selected appropriate articles for inclusion in their research papers. I also require that papers be submitted in sections throughout the semester, rather than as one final product in the last week of class. This enables me to provide feedback to students to facilitate revision work. It is very difficult to plagiarize when assessment occurs in a progressive fashion. And these types of assignments prevent students from painting themselves into a corner where academic dishonesty appears as the only solution.

Erving Goffman's (1961) analysis of institutional arrangements and their impact on social interactions offers another insight relevant to the academic dishonesty problem. Goffman observed that the staff-inmate caste division in total institutions dehumanizes social encounters, as inmates are classified as objects to be processed. The end result is that these organizational structures promote conditions in which inmates may be viewed in terms of narrow stereotypes and as unworthy of trust. They diminish the capacity to view those being served as people with unique needs and capacities. This suggests the following:

Treat students as individuals and provide the types of respect and support one would wish be extended to oneself.

To accomplish this goal, it is important for teachers to learn students' names early in the semester, as well as their career interests, hobbies, or other markers that define them as something other than an inmate in the

class. While it may not be possible to learn all students' names in a 250 person lecture class, it is certainly possible to provide a personal correspondence to all individual students who experience academic difficulty. It is the teacher's obligation to consider ways to improve the student's performance, as well as consider ways to motivate students irrespective of their performance. In the unfortunate circumstance of discovering an act of academic dishonesty, this suggestion should compel one to respond with compassion.

Although there is certainly disagreement on the following suggestion (see St.John-Jarvis 2007), I believe that extending respect to students implies *not* including a statement concerning academic honesty on a course syllabus. It should be clear in all communications that trust and respect are taken-for-granted. For those who disagree with me on this point, consider this scenario. Imagine interviewing for a job and (in the early moments of your interaction) receiving a document and lecture from the department chair on what constitutes professional integrity and the consequences of breaching those expectations. Some things are best left unsaid.

Finally, it is important to recognize that some of the causes of academic dishonesty are external to the classroom and beyond our immediate control. Certainly the above recommendations will not prevent all acts of dishonesty. Even among those students who have it all (resources, skills, guidance, and respect), some will cheat. It happens on Wall Street and it will happen in our classes. But as important is recognizing that succeeding in college is less of an option than it was for previous generations of students, as the credentials provided by a college education are essential for career success in the new economy (Sweet and Meiksins 2008). But owing to obscene disparities in the allocation of resources, which are evident at the family and community levels (and associated with race, gender, life stage), there is wide variation in students' capacities to perform academic work. Some students are set up to fail, and in such circumstances, academic dishonesty – while not acceptable – is understandable. Without lowering standards, sociology teachers can help address these concerns by teaching students about inequalities and shaping commitments to narrow existing opportunity chasms.

To conclude, I suggest that discussions of academic dishonesty that focus on students and/or the need for punitive response lead inquiry in a direction that is unlikely to bear fruit. Far more useful, and likely more productive, is to consider if academic dishonesty indicates something amiss in teaching practices or in

the contexts in which learning is expected to take place.

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RESEARCH NOTES

GENEALOGY

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In 2004 in a Family and Society course another dimension was added to my pedagogy. Having studied genealogy, I prepared a unit on family genealogy. The students embraced the idea and the activities associated with family genealogy. Students actively engaged in their own learning, students took pleasure in the research. A professional genealogist presented genealogy charts while I instructed family structure and relationships. Students had a field trip to the Wisconsin Historical Society. They combed through

census data to locate family members. The project had latent ramifications—students located paternal and maternal great grandparents in the archives and available census data. They gained new knowledge for sources to research which benefited them personally. Students interviewed parents and elder family members. Several students went on to purchase genealogy soft ware (not required). The final project was a well documented history of their family lineage and a comprehensive record of their family genealogy.

Having attended the African American Historical and Genealogical Society annual conference in 2006 it was apparent colleagues in the academy through out the country had incorporated genealogy in the course curriculum. Genealogy has an appeal in popular culture, the interest was ignited in the African American culture with the release of author Alex Haley's classic novel, "Roots: The Saga of an American Family," in 1976. In 1997 a miniseries was presented by the *American Broadcast Corporation*. For the past two years during Black History Month there is a resurgence and interest in family genealogy, following Harvard scholar, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. special on Public Broadcasting Service, which featured an assortment of African American celebrities. Through *African Ancestry*, which traces African DNA, Gates presented the history and African origins to the celebrities.

Social Genealogy placement is a good fit under the rubric of Sociology. The term was coined in 2000 by Lynda L. Holmstrom sociology professor at Boston College. She defines the term as a "history of families in a social context."¹ Personally expanding on the description of *Social Genealogy* it is the study of familial relationships and social interaction among kinship groups using *genetic genealogy* presented historically.

While there is a historic and scientific perspective, according to genealogist Tony Burroughs, genealogy has not only a historical angle, but embodies biographical and sociological study.² Social Genealogy research includes primary research of public records, written and oral history and biographical and autobiographical information corroborated by genetic testing and research.

In writing this brief research note, I am hoping to start a dialogue on using social genealogy as a pedagogical method in the teaching and learning of sociology. Please feel free to email me or contact me with your thoughts and experiences.

References:

¹ Conversation with Professor Holmstrom on November 8, 2006.

² Burroughs, T. (2001). *Black Roots: A Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree*. New York: Fireside Books. p. 28

SECTION NEWS AND NOTES



Pre-Conference Workshop

"Teachers are Made, Not Born: A Workshop for New Sociology Instructors"

Time: Thursday, July 31, 8:30am to 5:30pm

Beginning instructors and graduate teaching assistants are encouraged to apply for the ASA Pre-conference which will combine presentations, panels and roundtable discussions on teaching and learning issues, all led by experts in the field. For information on specific sessions, see the ASA Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology website at <http://www2.asanet.org/sectionteach/>

Participants will be admitted on a rolling basis with consideration as applications are received. Applications are available on the website or from Kate Linnenberg (linnenbe@beloit.edu; 608.363.2306). A \$50 registration fee covers conference materials, snacks and Section membership. WE ENCOURAGE INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS TO APPLY SOON.

Section On Teaching and Learning Co-Sponsors Workshop for High School Sociology Teachers

The Section on Teaching and Learning will co-sponsor—for the third consecutive year—a workshop for high school teachers of sociology. Eighteen years ago, the North Central Sociological Association's Teaching Committee decided to sponsor a workshop for high school teachers living in the region where the annual meeting was to be held. Teachers could receive continuing education units for attending. There has now been a workshop for high school teachers every year, save two, since 1990. The STLS's Cooperative Initiatives Committee decided three years ago to be supportive and to participate in co-sponsorship of this event.

This year the workshop is in Cincinnati on Friday, March 28th, at the Hilton Netherland Hotel. The

organizers, Keith Roberts (Hanover College), Kathleen-Piker King (Mount Union College), and Diane Bryant (a high school teacher from Sandusky, Ohio), have recruited many workshop co-leaders. There are multiple break-out sessions so teachers can custom-design the workshop around their own needs. These sessions include:

- Linking H.S. Sociology to State Social Studies Standards
- Textbooks Appropriate for the High School Sociology Course
- Using the School and the Classroom to Develop a Sociological Perspective
- Teaching about Gender and Gender Stratification
- Teaching about Race, Ethnicity, and Class
- Videos in the Sociology Course
- Simulations and Games for Teaching Sociology
- Addressing Issues of Bullying in the High School
- Sharing Lesson Plans (each teacher brings a favorite lesson to share)

Attendees are also introduced to the services of the ASA Teaching Resources Center, are provided information about various publications and websites with active learning instructional strategies, are given opportunities to network with other high school sociology teachers, and usually leave the workshop with roughly 100 active-learning instructional strategies ("lesson plans"). The workshop ends with a poster session with every high school teacher—and many college instructors—sharing an innovative lesson plan or teaching strategy. In addition, each year the registrants are given a monograph on teaching. Last year they received a copy of *Sociology through Active Learning* (McKinney, Beck, and Heyl). This year they will each receive a copy of *The Creative Sociology Classroom* (Pratt, Riennerth, and Parks).

In 2007, the meeting was held in Chicago and had no less than 52 high school teachers in attendance. This year the workshop organizers had help with publicity from the Councils for the Social Studies from adjacent states, but they also sent letters to 270 high schools within a 70 mile radius of Cincinnati.

One of the co-organizers of the workshop has also organized a nation-wide listserve for high school sociology teachers. Perhaps because of that, and perhaps because this is virtually the only on-going program of its kind in the nation, the workshop is getting inquiries and registrations from around the U.S.. One of last year's attendees flew in from Maryland; another arrived from North Dakota. There were also inquiries from interested teachers in Nevada, California, and Arizona. There is clearly a need for similar programs across the country. For more

information, contact Keith Roberts at Hanover College: robertsk@hanover.edu.

Invitation to Participate in Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Conference

The Innovative Partnerships for Student Learning Conference is designed to bring together faculty, administrators and students from all types of higher education institutions as well as business and community members to share innovative practices and research on partnerships to promote learning. These partnerships are many and varied and can include valued connections between the curriculum and co-curriculum or between on-campus and off-campus experiences. Partnerships may also form between two-year and four-year institutions both public and private.

Conference Goals

- Feature exemplars of current practices in partnerships for student learning from participating campuses.
- Identify barriers to the development and implementation of joint programs and share resolution strategies.
- Illustrate the benefits that partnerships promote, not only for the students, but for faculty, staff, and the community.
- Provide a scholarly forum for recent research on partnerships.
- Foster new partnerships among and within participating institutions.
- Disseminate electronically a collection of papers, web sites, and other resources to share what is learned with institutions nationally.

The conference, hosted by Illinois State University, Illinois Wesleyan University and Heartland Community College, will be held on **September 25, 26 & 27, 2008** in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois. For more information view the following web site <http://www.partnershipsconference.ilstu.edu/>

Renew Your Membership!

We encourage all section members to join us in recruiting new people to join the section. As Chairperson Diane Pike is known for saying, EVERY sociologist who teaches should belong to the section. Help us in "spreading the word" about the section and its many benefits. We are the leaders in the scholarship of teaching and learning work as well as some of the most talented teachers. Additionally, the section newsletter provides compelling and interesting items to section members that you cannot get anywhere else.

Finally, the journal of *Teaching Sociology* represents our interests through its editors (who have all been section members) as well as through its content.

Automatic Enrollment in Section E-Mail

When STLS section members pay their annual dues, including Section membership dues, their email address is automatically added to the email list. This list is used by Section officers to send messages to the entire membership. However, this is not a listserv and therefore membership is not able to send messages to other members. While Section officers value this opportunity to communicate more readily with our membership, we recognize that some of you may prefer to be removed from the list.

To remove yourself from the STLS membership list for mailings, send a message to: infoservice@asanet.org with the following statement in the **body** of your message – ***“Please remove my name and email address from the Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology announcement list.”*** Then add your name and email address to the message.

CALLS FOR.....

Submissions Sought

Please submit suggestions for the summer newsletter to Kathy Rowell. Please submit articles by May 1, 2008. Suggestions for articles, regular features, news items to share with other members, and any other ideas are encouraged and welcome! Help me make this the best Section newsletter of the ASA.

Join the TEACHSOC Listserv

Established in 1995 by Jeff Chin and Kathleen McKinney, the Teaching Sociology E-mail List – teachsoc – provides a place to discuss and distribute news on teaching sociology. Teachsoc is open to all individuals interested in pedagogy, curriculum, and any other issues related to the teaching of sociology at any level. To join us, please send the command:

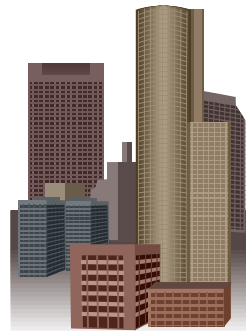
Subscribe teachsoc *Alfred Weber*

In the body of an email message addressed to – teachsoc@googlegroups.com substituting your name for Max's little brother, of course.

For the most up to date information about the Teaching and Learning Section in Sociology, please check the following websites:

American Sociological Association Meeting website:

<http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/leftnav/meetings/2008>



**August 1 – 4, 2008
Boston, MA**

ASA Teaching and Learning in Sociology website:

<http://www2.asanet.org/sectionteach/>