



University of Idaho

College of Agricultural
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**Agricultural Economics and
Rural Sociology**

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Statement on Teaching

As a teacher of sociology and the social sciences, I have three primary objectives in my instruction: (1) to facilitate appreciation for the scientific study of society and core sociological concepts and perspectives; (2) to encourage students to question their perceptions of the social world and participate in broader conversations about society; and (3) to give students opportunities to do sociology and see its applicability outside of academia. These objectives direct my teaching.

The first of my objectives is to help students think about society scientifically. I aim to do this in all my teaching, but it is most present when I teach social research courses. At Michigan State University, I was the lab instructor for *Social Research Methods I and II* on multiple occasions. These cover research design, data collection, and data analysis. At Washington State University, I taught *Introduction to Social Research* course, which serves as an introduction to sociological research and design for non-majors. In all cases, I focused on identifying and mastering deductive and inductive logical reasoning. I emphasized the systematic nature of data collection and analysis and how crucial these steps are to accurate study. Students acquire a variety of proficiencies in these courses. Regardless of discipline, students see research in their daily lives. These courses provide the skills to think about social life scientifically. My use of real-life examples helps students recognize the importance of the scientific study of society. Through examples, exercises, and assignments, students question their perceptions and grasp the importance of logical reasoning.

To achieve my second goal, I use discussion-based learning. During discussions, students engage with the material and the viewpoints of others. Verbalizing and justifying their position urges students to grapple with their preconceived beliefs about the social world. I aim to accomplish this in all classes, including those taught online. As the instructor of an online *Youth & Society* course, I guided discussion forums centered around the debate of critical topics. Student reviews indicate that this was a valuable tool for transferring the crucial learning component of discussion to an online format while also shifting perceptions on social issues. I have accomplished similar goals in an online *Social Problems course*. Similarly, I value discussion for in-person classes. Even in large classes, I use brief peer discussions facilitated by interactive technology to break up lectures and apply course material.

My third objective directs my teaching of research methods courses, but I aim to encourage students to do sociology through assignments in other classes, as well. For instance, in my *Sociology of Sport* courses at Washington State University, I urge students to do sociology as they view popular media and current events. In one iteration of the course, I dedicated time weekly to exploring a current issue through a sociological lens. For other editions, students took a sociological approach to their viewing of popular sports films and documentaries. In both versions, students were pressed to see the relevance of sociology to everyday life. The exercises and assignments I use in methods courses allow students to conduct statistical tests to investigate real sociological issues with real data. Through these courses, students acquire the skills to perform every step of the research process and apply their understanding. Students leave these courses with the skills to do sociology.

To reach my teaching objectives and grow as an instructor, I am committed to continued learning and improvement. I was an Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Teaching Fellow at James Madison College at Michigan State University during the 2016-2017 academic year. The goal of the program is to broaden and enrich the professional development experience of a diverse group of graduate students. As a Fellow, I worked with faculty to engage in structured discussions on pedagogy, practice, course design, and

curriculum development. We investigated questions concerning the intellectual coherence and viability of interdisciplinary teaching and learning. During my year, the program concentrated on the possibilities and limitations of incorporating technology into the university classroom. As a Fellow, I completed a project investigating social knowledge construction in online debates, using content analysis of student work from my online courses.

The opportunity to train students in the study of society has been one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling aspects of my career. My teaching has been praised by faculty, such as this evaluation of my work: “*Sam Mindes ranks among the most outstanding TAs it has been my privilege to work with in over 20 years of teaching.*” These notes encourage me to strive for the best as I work to equip students with the skills to be well-rounded, discerning contributors to society. I have received very positive evaluations from students on many aspects of my teaching. From my most recent courses, students rate my effectiveness, the course quality, and the value of the course between 4.0 and 4.3 on a scale of 1 to 5. Evaluations show high ratings on all categories of my teaching, including my enthusiasm, my variety of teaching methods, and the alignment of material with course goals. On these criteria, I regularly rate between 4.5 and 4.7. I receive similarly high ratings on the usefulness of my feedback, my availability, and the respect I show for students and their ideas.

Written student feedback has been similarly encouraging. In these reviews, students have called my course material “purposeful” and “intentional” and noted that my enthusiasm made them “more intrigued and drawn to the material.” Their appreciation of my style is evident in comments like “[he is] great at using the lecture slides as a supplement in his lecture instead of just reading it word for word.” Furthermore, students recognize the value of my personality in the classroom. They note that I am a “super relatable guy,” a “very personable instructor,” and “very good at connecting with students.” They find value in my humor in the classroom, saying, “I love that he is funny and super nice and always super respectful to everyone.” In particular, comments like the following motivate me: “Samuel Mindes is an outstanding, creative, and entertaining professor who shows a very clear passion for his field of study. This makes it so much easier to engage with the class and take away something new at the end of each lecture! One of my favorite classes this semester.”

Despite these positive reviews, I always use student feedback to find ways to improve. I value student responses that critique my teaching, and I work to incorporate their suggestions to be a more effective teacher, even when teaching a course for the third time. To this point in my career, I have been the instructor for in-person courses: *Development of Social Theory*, *Introduction to Social Research*, *Youth & Society*, and *Sociology of Sport* on three occasions. I have also online taught *Social Problems* and three editions of *Youth & Society*. I was a co-instructor for *People and Environment*, *Social Research Methods I*, and *Social Research Methods II*. I would enjoy teaching these kinds of classes again, as well as develop new foundational courses on introductory topics, social theory, methods, and statistics. Furthermore, I am prepared to teach in my areas of specialization, such as global migration, development, globalization, population studies, and quantitative methods. I am passionate about teaching these topics to students of all disciplinary backgrounds and diverse life experiences. As a committed educator, I am set to succeed in teaching numerous other courses in and outside of my specializations.

I would be a valuable addition to a department that prizes high-quality instruction. I am a versatile, driven, and creative educator. I care deeply about every student and our society’s future. I look forward to any opportunities to teach students the skills of sociology and the value of the sociological approach. For more information on my teaching and teaching materials, please visit the teaching portion of my website (www.samuelcmindes.com/teaching). Please do not hesitate to contact me.

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