Democracy and Diversity: Skills, Knowledge, and Outcomes in an Introductory Sociology Course

Patrick J. Ashton
Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne
Democracy and Diversity

Designed to produce students who:

• are informed and thoughtful
• demonstrate democratic values and civic virtue
• participate in community and act politically
Democracy and Diversity

Students

• are informed and thoughtful
  – Know the history and processes of American governance
  – Possess skills of critical and thoughtful analysis

• demonstrate democratic values and civic virtue
  – Mutually respect differences
  – Possess the skills of civil discourse

• participate in community and act politically
  – Understand and appreciate the efficacy of community and political action
  – Possess skills of civic engagement
Democracy and Diversity

Focus on

• Excellence and equity
  – Inclusive
  – Accessible
  – Engaging

• Intercultural competence
  – Knowledge
    • of the history of injustice, inequality
    • of the history of struggle, success, contribution
    • of similarities and differences
      – “e pluribus unum”
  – Skills
    • Perspective-taking, cultural relativism
General goal of S161: to assist students in becoming effective educated citizens in a democratic society

Effective educated citizens are:

- Knowledgeable
- Self-aware
- Self-actualizing
- Empowered
- Socially responsible
- Capable of living in community with diverse others
Operationalizing the goals

A look at Sociology S161
“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.”

- T.S. Eliot
Where Do You Want to Go?
Having Goals
Where Do You Want to Go?

Having Goals

Goals are rooted in perspectives, of which there are a variety.

- Understand where they come from and how and why they differ.
- Begin with view of human nature, work to values, view of society and social change.
- Understand your own perspective and how it relates to those of others.
How Will You Get There?

Building a workable vehicle

- Develop a sociological vocabulary
  - Fosters empowerment, analysis, dialogue

- Analyze social processes
  - Social structure, groups, institutions
How Will You Know Where You Are and Where You’re Headed?

Orienting ourselves and planning a route

You are Here

X
How Will You Know Where You Are and Where You’re Headed?

Orienting ourselves and planning a route

- Understand the structure of opportunities / distribution of resources

- How this distribution is affected by class, gender, race and ethnicity, position in the global system, etc.
How Will You Know Where You Are and Where You’re Headed?

Orienting ourselves and planning a route (continued)

- **Current trajectories of change:**
  - correspond to the 4 perspectives

- Learn how to make social change.
  - Recipe for personal and institutional change
How Can Sociology Help You Get There?

Knowing how to observe, analyze, and interpret social life

- Use your Sociological Imagination.
  - Basic Insight: Human behavior is largely shaped by the groups to which we belong.

- Develop a powerful “crap detector” for the information highway.
  - reliability, validity, sampling
1. Introduction
   How Can Sociology Help You?

2. Understanding Goals
   Where Do You Want to Go?

3. Understanding Social Dynamics
   How Will You Get There?

4. Examining the Pattern of Social Change
   How Will You Know Where You Are and Where You’re Headed?
Sociology provides “dangerous information” about the state of society.

Stages of response:
- Denial
- Despair
- Anger
- Acceptance of responsibility
The Current Crisis
Transforming the Intro Course

Classroom format

- Students sit in a horseshoe-shaped arrangement
  - More intimate, conversational
    - No student more than 2 rows away
    - “teacher immediacy” behavior impacts motivation and learning
- Students are able to see each other’s faces
  - Honors and reinforces their own participation in a community of learners
- Attendance is required
- Interactive activities
  - Games, group discussions, demonstrations
Transforming the Intro Course

Student assignments

- **No standardized exams**
- **Workbooks**
  - For each assigned reading
  - Standardized format
  - Higher-order cognitive skills: evaluation, comparison, application
- **Electronic bulletin board**
  - Participation is mandatory
  - Substantive responses to instructor or student generated issues
  - Volume, not content is graded
- **Final paper**
  - In the form of a letter to a friend
  - Explain the sociological imagination and its advantages
  - Explain 3 things learned in this course
Does it work?

Changes in minority enrollment

Table 1. Enrollment in S161 by majority/minority status across two time periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term span</th>
<th># of terms</th>
<th>N</th>
<th># of majority students</th>
<th>% Majority</th>
<th># of minority students</th>
<th>% Minority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 92 – Fall 94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 98 – Summer 01</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1324</td>
<td>1090</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-14.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>+436%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X2 = 143.4, df = 1, p<.01
Does it work?

Changes in grade performance

Table 2. Grades received in S161 by majority/minority status over two time periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Majority students</th>
<th>Minority students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># of D/F grades</td>
<td>% D/F grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 92 – Fall 94</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 98 – Summer 01</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>+61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X² = 26.777, df = 3, p<.01
Does it work?

Qualitative responses

From a Caucasian returning adult student:

“I just want to thank each of you, especially the Bridge students, for the experience I had in Dr. Ashton's Soc. class. I was the minority. I am a white, older than you all, female. And you know, I never felt like the minority or even white. I just felt like a part of a group. I felt like we were all equal. Although it was only for 2 hours and 20 minutes, for 3 days a week...it is an experience I will cherish for a lifetime. I experienced equality, unity, bright, smart, intuitive people, who taught me what it means to be accepted. I will admit I was afraid to start school again, with most of my fellow students being 10 years younger. You treated me the same as if I were black, hispanic, male or female and we just meshed. Thank you for sharing a part of yourselves with me and everyone else in this class. You are a gift to society and I believe many of you will do great things with your lives and impact society in a positive way.”
Does it work?

Qualitative responses

From an 18 year old Caucasian upper middle class suburban student:

“By understanding the concepts that we learned in sociology, you can better understand the world and the people around you. I used to be almost prejudiced against people who were different from me. I was just kind of raised that way, and I didn’t even notice it before I took sociology. I had an idea that I was just better than a lot of people who weren't in the same social class as me. However, from taking sociology, I see everyone as equals now. It’s valuable to look at the world this way because if you put yourself at the same level as others, you will be kind and compassionate to them…. Not only do I have a compassion for others around the world, but also those in the United States that may be different from me whether it be racially, economically, etc.. From this class, I feel that I have basically just opened up to people different than myself. This class has turned me into a person that wants to be involved with diversity. Not only do I want to belong to a diverse population, but watch it thrive and grow together…. I want to be among those different from me, and I want to allow diversity to change and mold me into a new person that is much more well-rounded, accepting, and cultured…. I really feel that my beliefs, feelings, and values have changed for the better since discovering the sociological perspective.”
Is it generalizable?

Where else can/should this material be taught?

Knowledge

Skills

Is the pedagogy transferable?