

“Many Students Really Do Not Yet Know How to Behave!”: The Syllabus as a Tool for Socialization

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Abstract

This study analyzes the content and discursive strategies within 39 introductory-level sociology course syllabi published in TRAILS, the Teaching Resources and Innovations Library of the American Sociological Association, from two different time periods (2004 and 2010) to explore the syllabus as a tool for socialization. We find that syllabi, commended for their attention to pedagogical practice, do more than communicate course objectives and the means for achieving them. Syllabi (re)socialize students for success in the college setting by establishing student-teacher roles and norms and setting the tone for classroom interactions. The integration of sociological concepts and perspectives into syllabi also immerses students into the discipline and practice of sociology.

Keywords

syllabus, course policies, socialization, role expectations, norms, sociological imagination

Sharing the syllabus in the first class session is a familiar ritual. On the surface it provides a course plan, establishes learning objectives, and answers frequently asked questions. By communicating instructors' expectations, the syllabus already serves as a vital socializing mechanism. This function is especially important in introductory-level courses that draw first-year students or nonmajors fulfilling general education requirements. These students may especially benefit from (re)socialization that challenges prior learning experiences. In addition to fostering communality and sociological thinking, instructors teach norms about accountability, impression management, and modes of social interaction useful within their new college environments.

Danielson (1995) illustrated how the syllabus transmits information about roles to reduce uncertainties, thereby playing an integral part in classroom socialization. Emerick (1994) observed that professors engage in prosocial normative socialization when they institute rules for classroom etiquette. He

argues that this is necessary because “At least at the beginning of their college careers, many students really do not yet know how to behave!” (Emerick 1944:344). Although there are guidebooks on syllabus development (e.g., O'Brien et al. 2008) and research using syllabi as sources of data (see Grauerholz and Gibson 2006), until now there have been no thorough sociological examinations of the syllabus as a pedagogical tool for socialization.

We analyzed 39 introductory-level sociology syllabi from two time periods, paying particular attention to the establishment of student and

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instructor roles, the construction of the classroom environment, and the integration of sociological concepts. Before discussing our findings, we review literature on syllabus construction and functionality to establish the unique importance of the syllabus in structuring the teaching and learning environment.

SYLLABUS CONSTRUCTION AND FUNCTIONALITY

Syllabus construction is one of the first challenges new college teachers face, and there are many resources to draw on when developing syllabi. Typical checklists recommend the basic inclusion of a course description, contact information, policies, readings, assignments, due dates, and schedule (Collins 1997; Matejka and Kurke 1994; O'Brien et al. 2008; Parkes and Harris 2002). Beyond this, guidelines vary in style and comprehensiveness. Some promote using a comprehensive syllabus that includes "more rather than less material" to clarify the course structure and help students to understand their roles (Davis 2009:22). Minimalists, however, suggest paring down to the essential "ground rules for course operation" needed to get students to "do what you want them to do" (Fink 2003:144). Alternatively, syllabi may be written as an invitation to students to take part in an "organized and meaningful journey" (Slattery and Carlson 2005:159).

Both students and faculty express a preference for more detailed syllabi that may be revised as needed (Garavalia et al. 1999). Students want to see day-to-day class activities, goals and objectives, requirements for assignments, and the withdrawal policy, and they deem due dates, material covered on examinations, and grading procedures as critical (Becker and Calhoun 1999). Students report that they consult syllabi fairly regularly (Calhoun and Becker 2008). To the chagrin of instructors, most students do not read syllabi carefully and have difficulty recalling relevant information (Raymark and Connor-Greene 2002; Smith and Razzouk 1993). Consequently, it may be necessary verbally to highlight and regularly revisit key points (Becker and Calhoun 1999). Despite these limitations, research has shown that the syllabus serves important functions, including (1) documenting pedagogical practices, (2) promoting student success, (3) shaping class climate, and (4) stipulating expectations and obligations.

First, the syllabus provides evidence of pedagogy and teaching effectiveness (Albers 2003).

Accreditation boards use syllabi to determine whether programs are meeting requirements (Bain 2004; Wasley 2008). Syllabi may demonstrate that course objectives and materials are in sync and showcase an instructor's ability to transmit knowledge, create learning conditions, practice culturally responsive pedagogy, and engage in excellent advisement (Boyer 1997; O'Meara and Rice 2005). Because syllabi serve as a permanent record of teaching competencies, rigor, and accomplishment, instructors regularly submit syllabi with applications for employment and tenure and promotion.

Second, a well-crafted syllabus may be used to promote student learning. In contrast to the "one-sided" communiqué of an instructor's expectations, a learner-centered approach concentrates on how the tools and information provided will help students pursue and achieve ambitious goals (Habaneck 2005; O'Brien et al. 2008; Parkes and Harris 2002). Collins (1997:82) encourages instructors to "disclose as much insider knowledge as possible to promote the success of all students." This could include a discussion of course relevance, models of high-quality work, interesting websites, study or time management tips, or information about tutoring services or a writing center. Course policies may also be written in a learner-centered fashion, such as the need for minimal disruptions as a precondition for learning. Bain (2004) found that many of the best college teachers craft a "promising syllabus" that conveys a strong belief in students' learning potential and focuses on what students will gain from the course and how they will receive feedback about their progress. This approach may bolster students' expectations of themselves and their educational investment.

Third, the tone influences student sentiment, student-teacher interaction, and class climate (Collins 1997; Davidson and Ambrose 1994; O'Brien et al. 2008). Matejka and Kurke (1994:2) argue, "A technically detailed, unimaginative, 'cold' syllabus is usually a precursor to a boring class." Students who read less friendly syllabi (i.e., confrontational, condescending, mistrustful) may believe that "their professor does not expect them to be successful, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Slattery and Carlson 2005:160). Warm syllabi characterized by friendliness, enthusiasm, and the anticipation of success tend to be associated with positive results (Habaneck 2005; Slattery and Carlson 2005). Supportive statements encourage students to seek help (Perrine, Lisle, and Tucker 1995), whereas punitive ones may make students uncomfortable about approaching a professor

(Ishiyama and Hartlaub 2002). The syllabus alone may influence a student's decision about remaining in a class (Brookfield 1995; Smith and Razzouk 1993).

Fourth, the syllabus may be understood as an agreement between instructors and students. Unambiguous expectations and consistently applied policies may promote understanding and fair treatment, thereby reducing complaints and allegations (Smith and Razzouk 1993). The contractual approach may improve communication, save time, and protect instructors from charges of unfairness (Davidson and Ambrose 1994; Habanek 2005; Matejka and Kurke 1994; Slattery and Carlson 2005). The Associate Counsel for Iowa State University argues that syllabi are not legal contracts simply because they have requirements and expectations for involved parties (Overberg 2006). However, the syllabus has been used as evidence in legal cases. One case concluded that a student was expelled on solid grounds because an instructor followed the syllabus. A wrongful termination suit was dismissed because the instructor did not adhere to the syllabus, modified grading criteria, and added assignments (Parkes and Harris 2005). While some instructors try to close loopholes that might give rise to grievances, many use nonbinding terms such as "objectives" or "guidelines" to preclude people from relying on the syllabus as a contract or contesting modifications.

Literature on the syllabus confirms its importance in shaping conditions for teaching and learning. The analysis presented here furthers our understanding of the process by which some instructors use syllabi to establish norms, roles, and responsibilities that (re)socialize students for higher learning. By integrating sociological concepts, syllabi may also serve as a gateway to the discipline. In addition, syllabi illuminate some of the ways instructors navigate new challenges in higher education, such as the increased demand for technology and mass media in the classroom.

METHODS

This study is based on an analysis of 39 introductory-level sociology syllabi published in TRAILS, the Teaching Resources and Innovations Library of the American Sociological Association. This digital database replaced edited paper volumes of syllabi sets and teaching materials. Editors ensure quality sociological content and pedagogy. In 2012, TRAILS had more than 6,000 visits and 114,000 page views. Grauerholz and Gibson (2006:6)

suggest that syllabi of an exemplary nature are a valuable investigative focus, as they serve as "models for others—both new and experienced in the teaching of sociology—to follow." As such, we use this convenience sample to generate concepts for future research of syllabus functionality. While the themes may reflect general patterns, there is no larger data set to which the findings apply.

Our initial data set, the 2004 *Introductory Sociology Resource Manual*, which contains 21 syllabi, was digitized for TRAILS. For comparative purposes we analyzed 18 additional syllabi published in TRAILS in 2010 that resulted from selecting "Introduction to Sociology" in the subject area search field. The courses yielded from this search were Introductory Sociology (51 percent), Social Problems (31 percent), and other gateway courses such as Principles of Sociology, Sociological Perspectives, and Institutions and Inequalities (18 percent). We excluded course schedules, readings, and assignments in the analysis because these were not included with all syllabi. Although the syllabi are published, we exclude identifying information. Syllabi in the 2004 data set are designated by [A] and syllabi in the 2010 data set by [B]. So, for example, syllabus number 10 from the 2004 data set is labeled [A10].

The sample represents a range of institutional types (64 percent universities, 23 percent colleges, 5 percent community colleges, 3 percent military academies, 5 percent unknown). It is important to note that the use of policies, procedures, and rationales within the syllabi reflects cultural norms within institutional settings. Some institutions, for example, require standard policy statements on matters such as attendance, academic integrity, and disability accommodations.

Although syllabi contain many important components, we spotlight course policies to explore three research questions: (1) What roles and norms do the syllabi establish for students and instructors? (2) What kinds of learning environments do the syllabi cultivate? and (3) How do the syllabi use or integrate sociological concepts and ideas? To explore these questions, we use content and discourse analytic approaches to analyze manifest and latent meanings (Patton 2002; Tinsley and Weiss 2000). Using a quantitative approach, we counted the prevalence of manifest content stated explicitly in the text, such as whether the syllabus overtly tells students to attend class. We used a qualitative approach to uncover latent meanings, considering for example whether an instructor's expressions of enthusiasm may give an impression of "approachability."

First, we analyzed the initial set of syllabi ($N = 21$) using an open coding process in four areas: student roles and norms, instructor rules and norms, class climate, and integrating sociological concepts. We also used theoretically derived subcategories, such as anticipatory socialization and resocialization. We both coded the syllabi and searched for regularities (e.g., the use of personal anecdotes). We repeated the process for the second set of syllabi ($N = 18$) and determined that the categories previously identified were still relevant. We also became interested in recurring themes such as respect, critical thinking, collaboration, personal responsibility and accountability, and use of active or passive voice, necessitating a recoding of each data set.

We reorganized the data descriptively to extract meanings, make comparisons, and assess the degree to which categories were differentiated and the data within them internally homogeneous. We worked together to scrutinize the fit between the data and classification system to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of categories and the placement of data. Discussions of similarities and differences enabled us to fine-tune the classification scheme and increase intercoder reliability (Tinsley and Weiss 2000). For example, we fleshed out *building a learning community* to capture emerging dimensions of *respect*, *cooperation*, and *shared responsibility*. We struggled a bit in the final analysis to order the categories conceptually. *Personal responsibility*, for instance, was vital in the development of a collaborative learning environment, yet it was also normative within the student role. We determined that *accountability* better articulated an individual expectation, whereas *responsibility* (when shared) shaped class climate.

FINDINGS

Four themes emerged that expand earlier theoretical interests in the socializing capacity of the syllabus. First, introductory-level sociology syllabi may function as a pedagogical tool that helps to socialize students to their new role in college with prescriptive and proscriptive norms about accountability and self-presentation. Second, instructors use syllabi to establish authority and engage in impression management. Third, syllabi help instructors to cultivate a class climate that facilitates critical thinking, active learning, and self-awareness. Fourth, instructors incorporate sociological concepts and ideas into syllabi as they model the discipline and practice of sociology.

Shaping the Student Role: Accountability and Self-Presentation

While the roles associated with statuses of student and teacher are established a priori outside the classroom, syllabi may further specify behaviors, duties, and rights associated with these roles. Course policies about attendance, punctuality, and deadlines stressed accountability and self-presentation as keys to success. Just 73 percent of syllabi in 2004 addressed the issue of attendance, whereas 91 percent did so in 2010. We also noted that instructors elaborated more on their policies, yielding an increase in the average word count in the discussion of attendance from 69 words in 2004 to 152 words in 2010.

While many stated that attendance was “expected,” more restrictive policies used words like “required” or “mandatory.” Some syllabi outlined suggestions on how to handle absences or addressed college policies and required documentation. One explained that those who miss an “unusually high number” of meetings would be advised to drop the course “out of fairness to . . . classmates (who may . . . resent your asking them for notes) . . . and to you (who may or may not have valid reasons for missing class, but whose grade may still be affected) [B6].” Some positioned students as capable decision makers: “I assume you are responsible adults and will attend class unless there is some unusual circumstance [A19]” and “This class has no attendance requirement. . . . I will present material . . . that is not in the readings and . . . is subject to testing [A5].” A firm policy stated, “Attendance . . . is essential to increase your knowledge and lend depth. . . . Secondhand information is . . . not as precise or . . . coherent as firsthand information. . . . There are no excused absences [A4].” Another admonished, “If you do not intend to come to class, this is not the class for you [B12].”

Syllabi were usually specific about how and why students would be held accountable: “After [two absences] your grade is lowered one letter . . . this is a simulation of the working world, you have X number of vacation days . . . after you use them, it comes out of your check [A3].” This statement from a liberal arts college is an exemplar of anticipatory socialization. Unfortunately, we could not assess with our data whether community colleges that train students for jobs where absenteeism may factor heavily into performance reviews place a heightened emphasis on attendance.

Being “on time” was one of several work-related behaviors expected of students [B3], even

referred to as a “basic work ethic and matter of respect [B11].” Promptness was described as “a wise investment [B4]” tied to doing well in the class and, more generally, to future successes [A15]. While occasional lateness was understandable or preferable to missing class [A9, B4], habitual tardiness was not. As one instructor put it, “Common courtesy dictates that you notify your instructor in advance if you know you will be late or unable to attend class [A7].” The 2010 syllabi paid more attention to punctuality (44 percent) than the 2004 syllabi (19 percent). As with attendance, instructors offered both positive and negative reinforcements.

There were only two directives about personal appearance. The first advised that the best way to prepare for class was to “get a good night’s sleep [and] eat a well-balanced diet [A4].” The second stated that in this “seriously-taught class with high expectations . . . coats are to be removed at the start of class and left until the end . . . [and] hats are not to be worn [A9].” Three syllabi mentioned that students should demonstrate interest by bringing “creativity, imagination, and burning curiosity about the world [A7]” to the class. One framed interest as advantageous, since being “faceless and anonymous will not help you get the benefit of the doubt, if you need it [A5].”

Accountability *for learning* specifically appeared in 28 percent of syllabi. These syllabi advised students to raise questions, be involved, and embrace active learning: “Students who produce ‘A’ work . . . take responsibility for their education by claiming—not receiving—knowledge [A4].” Instructors impressed upon students that college work is different from high school in terms of rigor and independence. One instructor candidly stated, “Let me be upfront . . . this course demands a sense of responsibility . . . expected of college students who are very serious about the learning process [B4]!” Another promised to help students “wrestle with ideas” but stated that “In the end, your effort will make your grade, and your knowledge, more satisfying [A5].”

Students were also held accountable for deadlines, and instructors commonly underlined or bolded due dates. Two offered tips: “Technology is not always reliable . . . have a back-up plan! [B11]” and “Past successful students hint: Don’t get behind in your work [A12].” Eight instructors were willing to exercise discretionary leniency. One granted students an “indulgence” for the “one (and only one) occasion” when there was a problem [A4]. Ten policies included sanctions, sometimes

in all-caps, and point deductions were typically 5 to 10 percent. Zero tolerance rules were commonly written in passive voice: “No late . . . assignments will be accepted [A13],” perhaps suggesting unease about exercising power (Baecker 1998). In contrast, “I do not accept late assignments [A21]” made professorial authority more transparent. Eighty-one percent of syllabi in 2004 and 89 percent in 2010 had policies about late work.

Clarifying the Instructor Role: Authority and Impression Management

Instructors engaged in impression management when crafting their syllabi, particularly in terms of instructor authority and self-presentation. Learner-centered features and policies on academic integrity contributed to these aspects of the instructor role.

Given the centrality of expertise to the professoriate, it was surprising that the title of *Dr.* or *Professor* appeared in only five syllabi. Credentials are not the only way to establish seriousness or authority, however. Instructors asserted authorial rights to make modifications in 26 percent of syllabi. Yet some still presented themselves as deliberately nonhierarchical: “Any and all changes [to the schedule] will be done democratically with student input [A3]” and “The schedule . . . is a map. . . . On a trip you sometimes find some places more or less interesting, and the same applies to . . . a syllabus . . . don’t panic if we deviate [A17].” To tone down the possible heavy-handedness associated with “rules,” another reassured, “[these] may seem like a bit much . . . [but] it is important that this learning experience be multidirectional [A14].”

Word choice and tone may also reveal tension between formal and informal interactions (Thompson 2007). Perhaps to demystify the professorial role, 28 percent of syllabi “invited” students to office hours and encouraged them to ask for help. One instructor warmly expressed personal interest in students: “I look forward to getting to know each of you during the course of the semester [A21].” Another teased, “Talk to the instructor. He doesn’t bite [A5].” In contrast, two instructors placed guarded parameters: “Please do not email me and expect me to respond within a few hours [B8]” and “Respect my privacy and contact me only in the ways I have provided you. . . . [D]o not contact me at home . . . it will . . . result in negative consequences [B15].”

Stimulating language, song lyrics, and smiley faces in syllabi may signify instructors’ acknowledgement of, or attentiveness to, a wider social

milieu that has become mediated, entertainment-oriented, and individually focused (De Zengotita 2005). Using an upbeat tone, one syllabus opened with “Welcome!” and closed with the upper case phrase, “LET’S HAVE A GREAT CLASS [A1]!” Another listed a course objective that was literally “To Have Fun!!!” The three exclamation points may express the instructor’s enthusiastic personality, or they may be intended to compete with all that is vying for students’ attention. Statements such as “face your fears [A5]” and “we will explore the exciting topic of sociology . . . [and] reap the greatest benefits . . . by . . . sharing . . . how sociology applies to our experiences” support a model of customization.

Instructors frequently positioned themselves as facilitators of student success. The quantity was usually minimal, sometimes a basic statement such as “We want you to be a success in this course [A7].” Yet, 48 percent of syllabi in the 2004 data set used learner-centered language or content that encourages agency and empowers student learning, up from 39 percent in 2010. Some syllabi incorporated features such as reading tips, lists of the best news outlets, and resources for time management. Several syllabi directed students to campus writing and tutorial services. One instructor presented the syllabus as a way to “help provide an enjoyable and prosperous . . . experience in the field of Sociology [A9].” Others endeavored to create a learner-centered environment by promoting more student involvement, moving away from lecture-only classes, and making allowances for different learning styles. These instructors were transparent in the syllabus about how to be successful in their classes. One claimed that if students followed the suggestions, they would be able to excel not only in “this class” but in “all of their classes [A5].”

Instructors situated impressions of themselves and their classes within the context of varied institutional policies, most notably those on academic integrity. Although it was clear that students should responsibly refrain from academic dishonesty, instructors took up the charge of preventing, discovering, and imposing sanctions for violations. “Cheating will not be tolerated in this course . . . you will receive a failing grade in the course for even one incident of cheating or plagiarism [B8].” An “aggressive stance toward the detection and punishment of academic dishonesty” was also framed as way to safeguard students’ “character development [A8].” One instructor personalized academic integrity, saying it is “extremely important to me . . . as a teacher and scholar [B10].”

Another emphasized that the “entire educational process rests upon an atmosphere of academic honesty and trust [B9].” In the 2010 data set, 78 percent of syllabi included detailed statements on academic integrity or references to the institution’s honor code, an increase from 57 percent in 2004.

Instructors used the syllabus to balance impressions of authority with those of friendliness and care. Instructors engaged in further impression management in the first class session, throughout a semester, and in their approaches to grading, makeup examinations, and extra credit. These aspects were beyond the scope of the present analysis.

Cultivating a Class Climate: Civility and Community

The syllabus may also be used to establish norms for social interaction, both in terms of helping to destabilize attitudes and redirect behaviors that may inhibit learning and in terms of cultivating skills that help to build a sense of community and mutual support.

While just 14 percent of syllabi in 2004 addressed classroom etiquette, 33 percent did so in 2010. Here again, anticipatory socialization was apparent: “I expect you to bring the same good manners and concern for others to this class as you would to a work or professional encounter [B10].” Some prescribed behaviors such as “going to the bathroom . . . before class” and “scheduling . . . appointments outside of class [A19],” while others proscribed behaviors like “sleeping, talking, eating . . . [doing] Sudoku puzzles [B15].” One instructor insisted on “decent normal human behavioral expectations,” explaining that “shuffling papers and preparing to leave before the end of class will be considered culturally rude and unacceptable [A9]!”

The syllabus can reveal assumptions (real or imagined) that instructors have about students and may in some cases outline formalized responses to prior incivility problems. One instructor not only stated that “distractive non-learning activities will not be tolerated” but added, “I really take offense to students reading . . . during class . . . [J]ust leave the classroom—be sure to gather up all your things since you won’t be coming back [B4].” Even when instructors used passive voice, sanctions were clear: “Students disrupting the educational process will not be tolerated. Loud students will be warned and then asked to leave the room and will be marked absent [A2].” The concepts of power, social control, sanctions, and unintended consequences become personally relevant to students early on. Yet the purpose of

such ground rules was to promote a safe and productive learning community.

Reminiscent of Schwalbe's (2008) concept of *sociological mindfulness*, syllabi may help to sensitize students to their interconnectedness and help them understand that words and actions have the potential to cause harm. In this spirit, syllabi included language about respect (66 percent) as foundational for learning, personal growth, and the making of a good society.

[I]n our class: 1) everyone is allowed to feel they can work and learn in a safe and caring environment; 2) everyone learns about, understands, appreciates, and respects varied races, classes, genders, physical and mental abilities, and sexualities; 3) everyone matters; 4) all individuals are to be respected and treated with dignity and civility; and 5) everyone contributes in sharing in the responsibility in making our class, and the Academy, a positive and better place to live, work, and learn [A10].

Sixty-nine percent of syllabi promoted personal investment in the class, in peers, and in the broader community as a way to promote these kinds of positive outcomes. In the 2010 syllabi set, 22 percent of courses also incorporated service learning components, an increase from 10 percent in 2004.

Twenty-five percent of syllabi addressed shared student-teacher responsibility, and more than half integrated cooperative learning strategies. These approaches were also intended to inspire interdependence, solidarity, and a leveling of power relationships. Informally, cooperative learning may entail "the sharing, exchanging and appreciation of each other's ideas and experiences" as "part of the process that builds critical thinking skills [A16]." Formally, the instructor structures the interaction and groups students based on clear rationale (Cuseo 1997; Johnson and Johnson 2009). Syllabi described dynamic learning environments with discussion teams, group-led activities, and collaborative learning groups. One syllabus outlined a group-facilitated process in which the class was granted the authority to assess completed assignments with instructor-developed rubrics that would be averaged to compute the grade [B12].

To promote a specific type of class climate, instructors increasingly used and/or addressed technology in the course content, processes, and activities described in their syllabi. In the 2004 data

set, only 14 percent of syllabi incorporated web interfaces and 33 percent addressed technology in course policies. In the 2010 data set, 44 percent of syllabi included web-based materials (e.g., companion websites, online videos and tutorials, posted readings and lectures, discussion boards, e-portfolios, and Internet searches), and 56 percent addressed the uses and abuses of technology in the classroom with statements such as "turn off your cell phones, close your laptops, and refrain from texting." Technology and mass media clearly gained a foothold in the educational arena.

Modeling the Discipline and Practice of Sociology

Many introductory-level sociology instructors incorporated sociological concepts and ideas into their syllabi in ways that model the discipline and practice of sociology. Treating the classroom as a microcosm of society, this approach gave students ways to negotiate differences of opinion and the positive and negative consequences of social interactions. They also had opportunities to learn about the social factors that shape interactions and their outcomes. Personal accountability and interdependence served as platforms for teaching about tolerance and functioning in a pluralistic society.

The following excerpt, for example, incorporates key sociological concepts and theory about the role of socialization in creating social differences, inequality, and the hidden assumptions that allow them to flourish. Students may not know until the end of the course that this instructor was actually *speaking sociology*:

Each of us brings . . . a collection of socialization experiences gathered over our lifetimes. We have been taught the appropriate behavior for ourselves according to our place in society. This has had an effect on our lives . . . we often don't examine closely enough. . . . We have been taught to respond, often unconsciously, to one another with a pattern of attitudes and behaviors. . . . We have acquired the power to be sexist, homophobic, heterosexist, racist, classist, ageist, ableist, etc., even though we are often unaware that we hold these beliefs. It is important that we understand how these processes create inequality, their effects on different people, and how this inequality can be addressed [A14].

Using sociological concepts within the syllabus gave students a chance to see sociology in action. As one instructor explained, "Social groups are a foundational element of study for sociologists"; therefore, students will "learn by doing" together [A8].

In addition to modeling sociological thinking and using key concepts in the syllabus, instructors presented themselves as sociological thinkers. "I have found that when I am thinking about sociological concepts, ideas and theories, I am better able to understand the discipline if I translate these elements into events . . . in my own life or situations that I have observed or have been told to me [A4]." This reflection opened a section titled "Personalizing Your Work through Critical Thinking." The title illustrates the spirit of the sociological imagination, the skill of thinking critically, and the practice of situating oneself within social structure to consider the interplay of individual and society. Such strategies were common across syllabi, and 80 percent had statements on critical thinking. By *personalizing* sociology, instructors may be more likely to pique students' interests, increase understanding and motivation to learn, help students retain knowledge, and seed appreciation of the subject (Felder and Brent 1996).

Many sociological learning environments trained students to situate their experiences in relation to a community of learners and the society at large. A course with service learning asked students to keep a journal of their experiences in a community program and demonstrate how they related to class topics, research, and theoretical perspectives [B5]. In a similar vein, syllabi *personalized the instructor* with first-person pronouns, personal explanations, and statements of teaching and learning philosophies. In the following excerpt, the instructor is explicit about the sociological and pedagogical rationale for an activity and takes ownership with first-person pronouns.

I have chosen to include the service learning option for this course because my overall purpose . . . other than introducing you to sociology is for you to become aware of social problems and to be able to develop tools to critically evaluate [them]. By being able to connect the research and theoretical perspectives . . . with hands on experience . . . your educational experience is not only enhanced, but hopefully your insight and desire to affect positive change is increased [B5].

Such strategies created transparency and promoted shared responsibility between teachers and students for meeting course objectives and developing a class climate that personalized learning while also mitigating an overly individualized orientation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Analyzing the content and discursive strategies within 39 published introductory-level sociology course syllabi, we found that syllabi function as a resocializing mechanism in their own right, teaching students much more than just how to pass a class. Course syllabi constructed the student-teacher relationship at the college level. The student role included obligations to exhibit respectful and ethical behavior. The teacher role came with responsibilities to create conditions for learning, clearly communicate expectations, and establish processes for fair treatment. The syllabus outlined norms for social interaction in the classroom and helped to create a climate conducive to mutuality, respect, and learning. The syllabus also presented an opportunity to socialize students into the discipline by incorporating sociological concepts and perspectives.

Our analysis also suggested that syllabi might help instructors to address elements of the broader cultural environment, particularly mass media as a social force that orients toward individualism by prioritizing personal achievement, self-esteem, peer acceptance, and personal networks. In facilitating shared responsibility and cooperative learning, the pedagogical practices we observed in syllabi worked in conjunction with socializing strategies that prepared students for sociological thinking while helping to address the pressures and consequences of living in a mediated society.

We encourage future research into the socializing capacity of the syllabus and the kinds of syllabi that contribute to student success and the promotion of diverse and inclusive institutional climates. Since the present study is focused on generating ideas for future research and training surrounding the pedagogy in introductory sociology, it will be useful to explore which patterns and themes hold across different courses, time periods, and institutional types. A national survey of instructors could shed light on how teachers think about syllabus construction and the extent to which they use it explicitly or implicitly for socialization purposes.

In-depth interviews with instructors could illuminate further how syllabi may help to cultivate classroom and institutional climates as well as model concepts and practices. Surveys and interviews with students could explore how they use syllabi and identify which practices are most useful for helping them to gain skills and abilities that empower their learning.

We hope that in addition to stimulating research, our findings will generate discussion about how introductory-level sociology courses in particular may be used to influence students' professional development. We propose workshops on syllabus construction for faculty to address its socializing capacity. For instructors committed to transparency in syllabi, we urge them to incorporate class activities that engage students in the reflexive practices involved in developing a productive learning community (Hudd 2003; Isserles and Dalmage 2000). Our own data set, while useful for generating ideas for future research, is too narrow to offer a comprehensive set of "best practices" for syllabi. Therefore, we urge TRAILS editors to develop a "best practices" model for soliciting course syllabi that will take into account the socializing potential of this vital course document.

NOTE

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