

J. Carlee Purdum, Ph.D.

Statement of Teaching and Service

Teaching and working with undergraduate and graduate students is an important part of my job as a postdoctoral scholar and one of the reasons I continue to pursue a career in academia. Since joining Texas A&M University, I have taught Environmental Sociology and mentored more than a dozen undergraduate and graduate students (at LSU and Texas A&M), across two separate NSF grants. Through the university's Debakey Leadership research program, I also advise and manage undergraduate researchers on a third ongoing "Aggie Research" project. Below, I discuss my teaching philosophy as well as my commitment to service.

Teaching Philosophy

In working with undergraduate and graduate students, my goal is to develop a collaborative environment that will not only foster strong scholars but also thoughtful citizens. With this goal in mind, I connect my teaching with my research, research of fellow department faculty members, community advocates, and other professional opportunities to show students that they can interweave what they are learning into their lives beyond the university. Thus, my teaching practice involves several main components directed towards developing student's critical thinking skills including: 1) the centrality of reading, writing, and discussion to learning, 2) the value of real-world application, and 3) the role of social inequality.

First, whether I were teaching a course on research methods or a subject matter course on corrections, incarceration and inequality, or environmental sociology, I will always direct students to spend time reading articles and books and writing about what they have read. In my Environmental Sociology course, students have commented that they enjoyed devoting time to reading several full-length books because they felt they were better able to understand the research and topic in ways that textbooks could not offer. Students select their own book and then share what they read with the class, allowing us to cover many more books than one class can do in a semester. Students often choose topics that are related to their own experiences with environmental policy and have commented that it helped them better understand their community and how certain policies have shaped their lives, families, and communities. This often inspires their final research project as well, allowing them another opportunity to better understand their relationship to the environment.

My writing assignments compliment the assigned reading for the course. I focus on helping students improve their writing skills, as this is one of the most basic and important skills that any student can take away from their college experience into any professional setting. Students write often in my class and receive notes on writing style along with content. I also assign draft versions of final papers so that they get feedback from me on their writing and can improve before receiving the final grade. I also grade progressively harder on writing style throughout each semester, so they have time to adjust to the writing requirements and are then rewarded for improvements in this area.

I believe discussion is also fundamental to learning, especially because it may be the first opportunity students have had to openly engage with theory and the challenging subject matter. They have the knowledge from the readings, but in discussion they exercise their thoughts in a space where they can be supported but also challenged to critically engage. I have seen in my class what it does for as student when they ask a good question that make the rest of the class think, or how empowered students feel when someone asks a question and they are able to give a

J. Carlee Purdum, Ph.D.

Statement of Teaching and Service

thoughtfully reasoned response. Students have told me that discussion in my class makes them feel competent and confident, like they can successfully engage with the topics of discussion that before intimidated them.

Second, I incorporate real world application into each of my classes and I ask students to assist in this process. In the beginning of each semester, I ask my students about one topic they want to learn about and also one environmental memory they have from their past. Nearly every student says they want to learn about climate change, and nearly every student has talked about having experienced exposure to a hazard or disaster in their past from wildfires and hurricanes to local waste facilities. I often spend that first week of classes teaching some fundamental concepts necessary for proceeding through the literature, but also getting a strong sense as to what concerns are on their mind to help guide examples to bring into course materials for engagement. Beyond giving examples in lecture, I also assign students to do a presentation on media articles that discuss an environmental issue of their interest such as climate change or environmental justice. Students identify how those issues are framed within the media and then connect the arguments within the article to topics of class discussion such as environmental racism, individualism, or the persistent belief in technological solutions.

Third, my classes also directly discuss issues of race, class, and gender as I teach about the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on low-income communities and the topics of environmental racism. We spend one third of the class focusing on the topics of environmental justice. I use Michigan professor Dorceta Taylor's book *Toxic Communities* in that class. Students love it, even though they feel it is a challenging book, and enjoy talking about environmental justice issues in their own backyard. I employ an intersectional lens in that different aspects of a person's social characteristics reflect differential ways in which institutions expose them or allow them to be exposed to environmental risks and harms. Additionally, in my courses when I discuss my research on incarcerated populations, I frame these discussions with knowledge about mass incarceration, by which the U.S. imprisons populations disproportionately drawn from the same vulnerable communities we discuss in class including racial and ethnic minorities, low-income, unhoused, lower-levels of educational attainment, and those with mental and physical illnesses.

Commitment to Service

I believe that a commitment to service not only benefits institutions, but also can make them more equitable. Three of the avenues in which I work to increase equity in my field include service to my research partners, mentorship with students, and service to department.

In service to my research partners, I work to make our relationship as equitable as possible. For example, in my work with the nonprofit organization Texas Prison Air Conditioning Advocates (TPCA), I have built stipends for their organizational staff into grant applications to account for their time and resources supporting my research. I applied for and won university grants to fund a recent in-person event related to our research partnership to host their organization, formerly incarcerated speakers, and their mock cell exhibit to Texas A&M's campus. The event was sponsored by the Race and Ethnic Studies Institute and was the first ever college or university to host TPCA. I make myself available to provide data analysis and I author public reports in addition to publishing in academic journals. I recently authored a public report

J. Carlee Purdum, Ph.D.

Statement of Teaching and Service

from an analysis of surveys from nearly 350 incarcerated persons about their experiences with heat and COVID-19 mitigation policies in the Texas prison system. I have also worked to provide opportunities for co-authorship with community partners including members of the Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons who I recently published an article with in the journal of *Environmental Justice* about how transformative justice policies and ending mass incarceration in the U.S. could increase resilience to disaster impacts for individuals and communities.

In service related to students, I spend a significant time investing in mentorship for undergraduate and graduate student researchers. I began my start in academia because a kind graduate student saw promise in me as an undergraduate. They took me under their wing to work in their lab. They invested in me personally by answering my questions about research, about unfamiliar theory, and helped me understand the confusing policies and processes of academia that are in no way intuitive. I have done the same with my students. This has been absolutely necessary in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic where students are facing enormous uncertainty. I have truly enjoyed being there for them and seeing them grow as researchers and as people with strong character.

I have also devoted time specifically to mentor and support students of color. I mentor two graduate students who are members of the Bill Anderson Fund, an organization that supports graduate students of color whose studies are hazards or disasters related. Several students of color that I mentor have confided that they have been alienated by the white students in the program who are unwilling to pass on institutional knowledge about issues such as comprehensive exams or forming your dissertation committee. In response, I devote extra time when I meet with students, undergraduate and graduate, to offer myself as a resource on navigating academic processes like applying for graduate school, writing letters of intent, applying for jobs, choosing a dissertation topic, meeting major milestones, choosing an advisor, etc. I also advocate for them to other faculty members in positions of power to address the covert and blatant racism that harms students and inhibits their progress. I believe that students should be able to trust that those they work for will also be willing to advocate for change so that they do not have to continue bearing the weight of that marginalization.

Finally, I work to build cross-sectional interdisciplinary relationships. The spaces in which I build those relationships tend to center on racial justice and equity, especially within the realm of environmental and climate justice. For example, by working with the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, I was able to facilitate a workshop visit from the director of the program Jacqui Patterson to visit with our students for a workshop with the Bill Anderson Fund (BAF). One of our students later obtained a position within the NAACP's Environmental and Climate Justice program. I have also partnered with alumni and current members of the BAF for ongoing projects including coauthoring papers and submitting proposals. My efforts have strengthened the relationship between the BAF and my current research center which has allowed for innovative collaborations and opportunities for further engagement. Several of the students in our department are current members of the BAF and several of our department's alumni are also BAF alumni. It is my belief that building strategic partnerships can be a tool for equity within academic institutions, in that strengthening our relationship to such organizations allows for us to better support students and faculty members within the university, within our respective fields, and even across the world.

J. Carlee Purdum, Ph.D.

Statement of Teaching and Service