

**Personal Statement: Tracey McKenzie, Ph.D.**

More than transmitting knowledge, teaching is about inspiring others to discover their purpose and potential. As a professor, I have the opportunity to impact the lives of students, and I take that role seriously. Each student enters the classroom with a unique and valuable set of life experiences, and my goal is to use the tools of sociology to help students better understand their lives and the larger social world in which they live. Teaching requires openness to change; therefore, I continually examine my teaching techniques and experiment with ways to become a more effective teacher by integrating technology (e.g. student response systems), adapting practices to address the needs an increasingly diverse student body, (e.g. student generated syllabi), understanding different learning styles, and incorporating various assessment strategies. I strive to create an active, collaborative learning environment filled with curiosity and inquiry in which all participants are both teachers and learners and where students can *discover* knowledge rather than be passive recipients.

I strongly believe that critical thinking and a global perspective are crucial to becoming a competent citizen in society. Rather than teaching sociology simply as a collection of facts, names, and theories, I strive to provide students with a set of principles to apply to their everyday experiences. By examining cultures other than their own, students learn to examine and analyze critically their own taken-for-granted realities; my role, then, is to help students learn to address the complexities of an issue, carefully form opinions, and develop and analyze solutions to social problems. Education can be liberating if students master *how to learn* and *how to think*. Making that small contribution clearly defines my professional goals as a teacher.

Collin College's Learning Communities -- interdisciplinary, team-taught courses designed around a theme-- have broadened my vision of teaching and learning. The goal of Learning Communities is to address what Ernest Boyer and other educational theorists have described as a "disconnect" existing in education -- a disconnect between disciplines, students, and faculty. Building a community of learners, making cross-disciplinary connections, and emphasizing active learning, are a few of the many benefits of Learning Communities. Utilizing this unique format, students in my Learning Community classes are involved in extensive group work and critical thinking exercises. For example, in *Let's Talk About Sex: The Politics of Sexuality and Gender* student groups conduct original research, prepare poster presentations, and present their findings at Collin's Cultivating Scholars Student Research Showcase. Research topics have included a content analysis of media coverage of male and female politicians and a survey of gender role attitudes of young adults. This is a unique, rewarding experience for first and second year college students, which enhances scholarly curiosity and interest in the research process. The benefits

of Learning Communities are spurring interest throughout higher education. Because of past conference presentations, I have had the pleasure to assist replicating this innovation at colleges in other states.

As a member of the Student Leadership Academy Planning Committee I took part in developing the curriculum for an Introduction to Leadership course. I especially enjoy teaching this class because it exposes students to community leaders, service opportunities, and practical leadership experience. The course is designed to help students discover their leadership potential and then practice their leadership skills. In addition to studying leadership theory, students are responsible for scheduling guest speakers, leading community service projects, and facilitating class discussions and activities. This is a very empowering experience for students as they develop confidence, purpose, and vision.

I recall the teachers who made a difference in my life, and I am grateful to them. In turn, it is essential for me to be available to students - and to fellow colleagues as well - to help them reach their goals. I have an open-door policy and strive to be approachable and welcoming to my entire college community, whether I am working with students, presenting professional-development workshops to faculty, or helping facilitate service-learning projects. I also encourage events outside the classroom to build a stronger faculty-student connection and deepen student learning. For example, trips to the Holocaust Museum, AIDS Resource Center, African American History Museum, Collin County Detention Center, and Women's Museum, bring the sociological concepts studied in class to life. Additionally, I sponsor campus events in which students are invited to view films and then participate in interdisciplinary, faculty- led panel discussions about the film's content.

I learn a great deal from my colleagues and I enjoy opportunities to collaborate. I offer professional development presentations on topics such as using film for curricular enhancement, using instructional technology, recognizing student diversity, teaching for inclusion, and developing student learning outcomes. My involvement with our college reaffirmation process and with the design and implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan gave the opportunity to further study pedagogy, critical thinking, learning environments, and the impact of all the aforementioned on student learning outcomes. Through numerous professional development workshops, I have shared and brainstormed with faculty on how to enhance student learning at Collin College.

Galileo Galilei is quoted as saying, "You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself." Through teaching I dedicate myself to inspiring, challenging, and nurturing the minds of my students as they discover the art of learning - and the art of life.