

**Harvard University  
Department of Sociology**

**Teaching Undergraduate Sociology Courses: A Guide for Instructors**

**2018-19**

One of the true pleasures of teaching undergraduates at Harvard is having very bright and ambitious students. The Sociology Department is fortunate to have a set of concentrators who are truly engaged with sociology and eager to understand how the social world works. This memo will provide some basic information about workload, grading, Teaching Fellows (TFs), and course administration.

A detailed description of all teaching requirements and recommendations can be found online in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences faculty handbook, *Information for Faculty Offering Instruction in Arts and Sciences*, and we encourage you to reference this as needed throughout the academic year. And of course please do not hesitate to contact Hilary Holbrow (ADUS) or Jocelyn Viterna (DUS) with any questions or concerns that may arise throughout the semester. We are delighted to have you on our teaching team.

### **COURSE WORKLOAD**

The typical undergraduate takes four courses a semester. The Department recommends that average workload in our courses is 7-10 hours per week. The amount of reading and writing varies depending on the course and on the difficulty of reading material and assignments. A total of 40-100 pages of reading per week, and approximately 30-50 pages of writing per semester, are reasonable expectations.

Please keep in mind that, when it comes to reading load, less is often more. When course readings are focused and selective students are encouraged to read more closely. If it is appropriate for your class, you are welcome to vary the kinds of readings offered. For example, you might want to pair an article from a sociological journal with a case study, narrative, ethnographic account, or journalist's investigation that helps illustrate the sociological concept. We of course expect that all courses are built on a foundation of sociological theory and method, but we encourage you to be creative in how you engage those foundational sociological concepts.

### **GRADING**

The Sociology Department recommends that faculty follow the College's grading system:

- A, A- Earned by work whose excellent quality indicates a full mastery of the subject and, in the case of the grade of A, is of extraordinary distinction.
- B+, B, B- Earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities.
- C+, C, C- Earned by work that indicates an adequate and satisfactory comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and participating in class activities.
- D+, D, D- Earned by work that is unsatisfactory but that indicates some minimal command of the course materials and some minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
- E Earned by work which is unsatisfactory and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

You might consider attaching to your course syllabus the above grading scheme and letting students (and TFs) know on the first day of class that you will be following it.

Well-thought-out assignments and exams are crucial for student learning. They are also crucial for fair grading, and Harvard undergraduates can sometimes be persistent in asking for higher grades even, unfortunately, when it is not appropriate. To maximize learning and minimize these requests we recommend the following:

- The most important thing you can do to avoid grading disputes is to spend plenty of time developing well-worded, thoughtful paper assignments and examinations. With essays and problem sets alike it takes a lot of time and revision to develop a testing procedure that is clearly written with coherent goals; that offers a problem that is answerable given the material covered in class; and that will allow you to distinguish among extraordinary answers, good answers, acceptable answers, and poor or unacceptable answers. Student frustration arises when they feel that a poor grade is a consequence of unclear instructions or expectations. Writing and revising your assignment prompts well in advance can save a lot of frustration—for you and your students—later in the semester. The Harvard Writing Program offers support in developing clear and effective writing assignments (contact James Herron at [jherron@g.harvard.edu](mailto:jherron@g.harvard.edu)).
- Develop a clear grading rubric and apply it rigorously to each assignment. If TFs are assisting with grading make sure to instruct them in how to systematically and uniformly apply the rubric. For each assignment you should spend at least a couple of hours grading together with your TFs to ensure that everyone is following a uniform process.
- If a student expresses frustration with a grade you should review the assignment with them and 1) explain why, according to the rubric used, they earned the grade they received and 2) help them understand how to do better on the next assignment. We strongly encourage you to avoid changing grades after they have been assigned. On very rare occasions, and only if you feel a student's grade truly does not reflect what they earned, you may revise the grade up or down to ensure standardized grading across students. If students learn that you will increase the grade for anyone who expresses frustration then your office hours will be full of frustrated students. It is much better to ensure that grading is done carefully, thoughtfully, and consistently the first time. Additionally, before reviewing a grade you should let students know that their grade may go down or up.

## **TEACHING FELLOWS AND DISCUSSION SECTIONS**

Harvard provides faculty with Teaching Fellows (TFs) who are teaching assistants for lecture courses. TFs assist with grading, hold office hours, and lead sections (typically 50 minutes/week for each section).

TFs are paid for 7 hours a week per section of a standard lecture course including time in class. Most TFs will be leading two sections and so you should anticipate that they will work 14 hours per week for your class. This includes time in lecture (2 hours/week), time leading section (2 hours/week), time doing the course readings (4 hours/week), time preparing their sections (2 hours/week), time in office hours (2 hours/week), time in weekly meetings with you (1 hour/week), and grading (variable). Please note that *even on weeks without grading TFs typically work thirteen of their fourteen hours*. It is important to ensure that their average hours do not exceed the 14 hours/week for which they are paid. Given that most TFs work significantly more than 14 hours during grading weeks, we recommend that you do not ask them to do additional tasks during non-grading weeks.

The College expects faculty to meet with TFs weekly to review the material that will be covered in lecture and to collectively develop section discussion plans and assignments. However, the ultimate responsibility for instruction and grading always rests with the faculty member. Faculty are encouraged to visit each section once a semester.

Sections of approximately 18 students are led by the TF and they are an opportunity for students to actively engage lecture material in a discussion-based setting. They work best when section participation is required and graded. Instructors have a great amount of flexibility in determining how to use their sections which can include: discussion of course readings, additional reading from the popular press, connecting course material to current events, working through cases that challenge or expand lecture content, preparation for assignments, group

projects, or student presentations. The ADUS is available to discuss the options and what would be most pedagogically beneficial for your class. The Head TF will complete sectioning through the my.harvard tool. Information on how to section may be found here: <https://registrar.fas.harvard.edu/sections>. Training is offered through the Registrar's Office.

## **COURSE ADMINISTRATION**

- **my.harvard.edu** – Harvard uses my.harvard.edu for course administration, and this is where you can access class rosters and course sites. The Knowledge Center has information for faculty on how to use this system (<http://about.my.harvard.edu/faculty>).
- **Academic Calendar** – Please see the Office of the Registrar's academic calendar as you plan your course schedule and syllabus. Take note of the first day of class and university holidays. Their five-year calendar can be found here: <http://www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/calendar/five-year-calendar>.
- **Academic Integrity** – For information and resources about Harvard's Honor Code and supporting academic integrity see <http://honor.fas.harvard.edu>. This site has teaching resources for designing syllabi and assignments along with sample collaboration policies. All course syllabi must include your policy on collaboration and it is expected that this appears on course websites as well.
- **Start Time/End Time** – Classes now start at their scheduled start time (there is no more "Harvard time"). Under the new faculty guidelines courses are officially scheduled for 75 minutes or 2 hours and 45 minutes. Some instructors may plan to teach for less than the officially scheduled time. Seminars that meet for 2 hours have a course note in the catalog letting students know. Please be in touch with Laura Thomas ([lthomas@wjh.harvard.edu](mailto:lthomas@wjh.harvard.edu)) if you would like a change made.
- **Classroom Assignments** – Since enrollment numbers are uncertain until the semester has begun, the department will not make any changes to classroom assignments until the day after the course registration deadline. At that point, classes with sections may request classrooms (see TF handbook).
- **Shopping Period** – The first week of classes is called "shopping period" and students are able to attend whatever classes they think they might wish to take. For that first week it is not unusual to have students arrive or leave at different points during your class. Note: the Advising Programs Office is calling this period "course selection" but it may be some time before this vernacular takes root with students. See the Registrar's academic calendar for the course registration deadline.
- **Limited Enrollment Courses** – If you have a limited enrollment course instructors must give approval online (via my.harvard.edu) in order for students to enroll. When there are more students wanting to enroll than slots available, instructors with a limited enrollment course must determine which students they will admit into the class. The Undergraduate Program recommends that instructors prioritize offering slots to two groups of students: 1) Sociology concentrators and 2) pre-concentrators. (Pre-concentrators are all freshman, and then sophomores during fall term only.) After prioritizing Sociology concentrators and pre-concentrators we encourage you to consider special circumstances such as students considering a concentration switch to Sociology or those from other concentrations who are writing a thesis on the course topic. After taking these factors into consideration other approaches to enrollment decisions include having students write a paragraph on why they'd like to be in the class, random selection via lottery, and going by first come/first serve. Please note that you will not be notified when a student adds your class and so it is a good idea to check your my.harvard page regularly for pending petitions.
- **Add/Drop** – Students may add a course (with the instructor's permission) until the fifth Monday of the semester and they may also drop a course (with no instructor approval) until then. It is up to the instructor whether or not they let a student add a class; sometimes too much material has been covered

and it is not possible. Students have until the seventh Monday to withdraw from a course (meaning a WD will appear on their transcript).

- **Pass/Fail** – It is up to the instructor whether or not they want to allow students to take their course on a pass/fail basis. Instructors must sign off on any course a student wishes to take pass/fail. Students have until the fifth Monday to change a letter graded course to pass/fail.
- **Midterm Exams** – If you choose to hold a midterm exam it should be scheduled during regular class meeting times. The Registrar's Office has no role in the administration of midterm exams.
- **Reading Period** – Please review the *Information for Faculty* handbook section “New Legislation on Reading and Exams Period.” Most importantly please note from the handbook:
  - 1) *Final papers, take-home exams, projects, presentations, and other culminating course assignments due after the end of regular classes must be due on or before the day of each course's assigned Examination Group, but no earlier than the fourth day of Reading Period. Final projects that include individual or group presentations may be scheduled beginning on the fourth day of Reading Period and may extend through the Final Examination and Project Period.*
  - 2) *Short, regular assignments that address material covered in the last two weeks of classes (such as problem sets or response papers) may be due during the first three days of Reading Period.*
- **Final Exams** – The Registrar's Office will assign a date for each regularly scheduled class and this will be the day final examinations will be held. The final assignment/exam dates will be visible in the Courses of Instruction, my.harvard, and in the Faculty and Student Handbooks. The Registrar's Office will ask faculty to complete the 3-hour final examination information (FAINFO) through the online portal. Students who need to reschedule their 3-hour exam will need to go through their Resident Dean and the Administrative Board.
- **Take Home Exams** – Take home examinations are discouraged. If you would like to assign students a take home examination please discuss your plans with the Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies.
- **Incompletes** – Undergraduates may not receive incompletes. The faculty handbook states: “*instructors may offer undergraduates an extension of time to complete course work until the end of the Examination Period; however, only with the express permission of the Administrative Board of Harvard College may instructors accept undergraduate work after the end of the Examination Period.*”
- **Returning Student Work** – The Sociology Undergraduate Office will hold any unclaimed final papers or exams for one year in accordance with Harvard College policy. Please be sure the papers/exams are in alphabetical order when turned in at the main office on the 6th floor.
- **Concerns About Students** – Please feel free to reach out to the Undergraduate Office if you have concerns about a particular student. We can put you in touch with the student's Resident Dean (or the appropriate office or person) or you may contact the RD directly. Instructors teaching undergraduate courses will be asked to report students making unsatisfactory progress using the online grading tool. A link will be sent to you by the Registrar's Office once courses begin and you can send a report at any time when you are concerned about a student. You may submit this information from approximately the third week of the semester until final grading opens. This report is sent to the Resident Dean for advising purposes. (Deans are assigned to the freshmen dorms and to each of the 12 upper-class Houses). You should also reach out to students directly to let them know of your concerns (the report does not notify students).
- **Departmental Writing Fellow (DWF)** – The DWF is a graduate student in the department who is available to help students with all aspects of writing. The DWF can help anyone taking a sociology course and we ask that you advertise this to your students. You may wish to put the DWF link on your syllabus:

<http://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/pages/writing-papers-sociology>. You may also direct students to the Harvard College Writing Center.

- **Undergraduate Research on Human Subjects** – We strongly encourage the inclusion of research training and instruction in courses. When course projects are for educational purposes only it is not necessary to submit an IRB application. However, Harvard's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects notes that: *"when the primary focus and initial intent of the class activities are designed to collect data to be used by students beyond the classroom, for example for scholarly publication or use for future research, it is the responsibility of the faculty advisor to assist students in determining whether obtaining IRB approval or exemption is required and if so, that this is done prior to the initiation of a human subjects research project."*
- **Electronic Devices in the Classroom** – We encourage instructors to think carefully about course policies regarding electronic devices in the classroom. Some instructors require devices because they are used to facilitate in-class participation and instruction, but many are now banning all electronic devices. Be aware that when devices are allowed many students are distracted and not focused on course material.
- **Course Evaluations** – Do not return grades on final assignments and exams until after the Q evaluations have closed for students. If students are able to calculate their final grade this can impact course evaluations. The ADUS is available to discuss course evaluations with instructors.