# Sociology Thesis Statement of Intent - Example

## *Description of Topic*

For my thesis, I plan to explore the question, "What is the nature of teachers' out of school labor in relation to their schools' socioeconomic status?" A common expectation in the teaching profession is that teachers will do anything that is necessary to provide their students with a positive learning environment and to set their students up for success. I am interested in how this expectation (and reality) may differ particularly in relation to the average SES of the schools that teachers work at. Do teachers in high-poverty schools work more outside of school than teachers in wealthier schools, or vice versa? Is working outside of school simply a universal experience regardless of school SES? Are there other factors that are perhaps more salient in dictating this extra work? Does the nature of what teachers are doing after school differ depending on school SES, even if the total time spent is the same? These are just some of the questions that I hope to begin to answer through my proposed research question and through the research design outlined below.

## *Research Design*

The majority of the data for this research will be sourced from interviews that I will be conducting with public high school teachers in New York City. I chose to focus on New York City because of its socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity, and therefore the potential diversity of teacher experiences that I could find due to this. I chose to focus solely on high schools because that is a time where the most intensive curriculum is taught, where extracurriculars are more likely to be a part of students and teachers' lives, and where additional stressors or factors to consider (like applying to college, dealing with increased social and romantic challenges, dealing with other struggles of becoming an adult) become more salient in students (and their teachers') school experiences. I chose to only focus on public schools so as to streamline things like the potential resources available to schools/ teachers, what regulations and

testing requirements may impact teachers' experiences, and what types of funding teachers and schools are able to utilize.

My interview questions center around what teachers' workload is like outside of school and what factors may impact that and what teachers' relationships with students are like, in addition to asking certain demographic questions and asking about teachers' perceptions of their professional futures. My goal is to eventually conduct 40 interviews*, and I am planning on providing each interviewee with a $20 Amazon Gift Card through the HCRP Spring Funding that I was awarded. I was granted an extension on that funding so that I only had to submit a progress report by the May 1st spring funding report deadline prior to receiving the remainder of the funding. This funding will also cover a few months of an Otter.ai subscription for me to transcribe my interview data. Interviews will all be conducted on Zoom and recorded, with these audio files then being transferred into Otter.ai for transcription. I will then qualitatively code these transcriptions to organize my interview findings. I do not foresee needing any funding for this project other than that funding that I have already been granted through HCRP.

In choosing my interview respondents, I eventually settled on reaching out to any schools in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx that had a percentage of students in poverty that was either above 90% (for my low-SES bracket) or below 60% (for my high-SES bracket). I chose these cutoffs because of the manageable number of schools that this yielded while still giving me a roughly even number of potential teachers between the two brackets. Once I went through the list of eligible schools and saw which ones had specific teachers' emails listed on their websites, I ended up with 53 schools to reach out to in the low-SES bracket and 30 schools in the high-SES bracket. I was okay with this imbalance due to a presumed lower response rate among teachers at low-SES schools. I chose not to include schools from Queens or Staten Island (at least, for now) due to these boroughs not including both low-SES *and* high-SES schools based on my previously stated cutoff points. For each school that I included on my list, I then went through the list of teachers on the school's online directories and tried to include a diversity of

teachers in terms of subjects taught (I mostly focused on core subjects except in cases of more specialized schools), gender, race, ethnicity, and age. (The latter few categories were able to be determined more so by things like names and teacher pictures that were provided, but did involve a fair amount of discretion. When in doubt, I just aimed to at least include a diversity of teachers based on their subjects in order to curb my own assumptions about identity markers.) I included 6 teachers per low-SES school, and between 7-9 teachers per high-SES school (due to the lower number of schools available). I staggered my outreach emails by starting with Manhattan, then the Bronx, then Brooklyn (and will re-ping those emails after a week of the original send date).

In addition to interviews, I also plan to analyze quantitative data through existing datasets on relevant topics. While I have not formally decided on what those may be, I have been looking through platforms like ICPSR for relevant datasets on teacher labor, labor force satisfaction, gendered labor, teacher demographics, emotional labor, etc. I hope to use this data to get a better sense of the relevant data that is already out there, to be used in conjunction with more formal papers that have already been written to form my full literature review. I also plan to partially build my thesis literature review on the literature review that I created for my Sociology Junior Tutorial paper, as this thesis project is an extension of a similar question that I had explored through that project ("What extra work beyond teachers' regular job descriptions do teachers do in high-needs schools, and how necessary do teachers believe this work to be for ensuring functioning classroom learning environments?").

*At this point, I have conducted 3 interviews with 6 others currently scheduled, and I am in the process of reaching out to the Brooklyn schools and re-pinging the previous emails that I have sent to teachers in the Bronx and Manhattan. If I am still struggling to get respondents after sending these emails a few times, I plan to either choose new teachers at each school, or to start going through channels like teacher Facebook groups or UFT representatives based on the list I have compiled of such resources.*

*Projected Work Schedule*

As of right now, I plan for my upcoming thesis work schedule to look like the following:

- <u>May 1st:</u> Submit HCRP spring funding update report

- <u>April - July:</u> Conduct interviews and start searching for potential existing datasets to reference in literature review

- <u>July - September:</u> Research existing relevant literature/ quantitatively analyze datasets and write literature review

- <u>September - November:</u> Qualitative analysis of interview data; finish any quantitative data analysis/ literature review work; meet with adviser

  - (Submit Prospectus and Approval form by 5th Monday of Fall semester)

- <u>November - February:</u> Write discussion/ remaining parts of paper, meet with adviser

  - (Chapter and Progress Report submitted by end of Fall semester)

- <u>February - March:</u> Receive and make final revisions; final proofreading

*Agreement to Process and Deadline*

I agree to the process and deadlines as detailed in the Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Sociology document.