Teaching and mentoring have been the most rewarding aspects of my graduate career. Each interaction with students is an opportunity to inspire learning and empower them to be agents of change in their personal and professional communities. To prepare for classroom instruction, I intentionally sought pedagogical training through Duke University’s Certificate in College Teaching program. I also served as the Instructor of Record for the undergraduate Introduction to Public Policy Analysis course at Duke Kunshan University. Further, I also served as the lead teaching assistant for the Introduction to Public Policy Analysis courses at Duke University, Additionally, I served as a teaching assistant for the undergraduate courses Politics and Policy Analysis and The Invention and Consequences of Race and a masters courses in Social policy. In April 2023, the Department of Sociology recognized my contributions to post-secondary education with the Graduate Student Teaching Award.

Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching is grounded in the belief that learning is contextual and knowledge is personal. I recognize each student brings their lived experience to the classroom and strive to facilitate learning by encouraging students to draw connections between new information and the topics with which they are already familiar. This makes learning both personal and exciting for students. As an educator and sociologist, my pedagogy is motivated by a desire to bring the power of diverse perspectives and interdisciplinary research to bear on the most pressing inequalities observed in the social world. To accomplish my goal, I equip students from diverse backgrounds with the skills to think critically about social problems, apply knowledge to real-world challenges, and transform knowledge into action. Below, I describe how I employ these strategies in the classroom.

Teaching Critical Thinking

I strive to teach students **how to think rather than what to think**. In my Introduction to Public Policy course, I introduce foundational material for students to grapple with. For example, ahead of my lecture on structural inequality, I assign a variety of academic and popular press readings to orient students to our current understanding of the topic. In class, I begin my lecture with an open forum where students are encouraged to respond to the following prompts, “What did you find surprising about today’s readings?”, “What are you questioning about the readings?”, and “What do you need to know more about to feel confident in this material?” This exercise challenges students to draw upon their own personal experiences and knowledge banks to determine if the social world operates as our course readings suggest. I pair the open forum with a writing activity. In small groups, I task students to develop a collective definition of the word “structure” based upon their understanding of the assigned readings. I then challenge each group to rework their definition based upon their critiques of the material. Each semester, students thoroughly enjoy both activities. As one student stated, “I loved that we were able to participate and discuss the topics. I feel like I really benefitted both from your lecture style and having the opportunity to hear more about my classmates' experiences and perspectives.”

Learning by Doing

Once students learn how to critically engage with course material, I help them develop skills to apply that knowledge to addressing social problems. For example, during the second half of my lecture on structural inequality, student groups complete an application activity on debt-based driver’s license suspension policies. First, I ask students to identify features of these policies that could produce disparate outcomes for subsets of the population. With these features in mind, I then ask groups to describe how they would advise policy makers to restructure debt-based driver’s license suspension polices to ensure equality of outcomes for all motorists. This exercise challenges students to get creative, work collaboratively, and think analytically about the connection between policy design and outcomes. Students appreciate the opportunity to learn how they can apply course concepts outside the academic environment. One student remarked, “I found the incorporation of your research as an applicable and engaging way to think about systemic inequity as related to public policy and was glad to see these topics covered in 155 [Introduction to Public Policy].”

Mentoring

In addition to classroom instruction, I co-lead a Bass Connections research team. Bass Connections is a Duke program for interdisciplinary teams of graduate and undergraduate students to collaborate with faculty in conducting cutting edge research. As a member of the Justice Reform leadership team, I co-lead weekly learning sessions and mentor students through the development and implementation of original research projects. Between January and March of 2023, I led my student group through a data collection initiative to better understand the barriers motorists who have had their driver’s license suspended face as they attempt to restore their driver’s licenses. I supported students as they developed a set of guiding research questions and interview protocol. I also trained the students to conduct participant outreach and recruitment. The Bass Connections program has recognized my students’ work and my contributions to the research team. In spring 2023, Bass Connections awarded my small group first place in the poster competition at the end of year showcase. Further, in 2022, I was recognized as a runner-up for the Bass Connections Graduate Student Mentoring Award. As stated by undergraduate members of my team, “Adrienne Jones is one the most impactful, caring, and visionary mentors I have ever had in my professional and academic career. She has reaffirmed for me and for the team that researching is supposed to be a continuously transformative process, and the overall goal is learning, whether or not it falls directly in line with how you would expect it to look or feel throughout.”

Outside the classroom, I also mentor undergraduate students through my work as an Assistant Residence Coordinator with the Department of Housing and Residence Life at Duke University. Over the past five years, I have worked to facilitate the academic and socio-emotional growth of hundreds of first year students and undergraduate residential staff. In April 2023, the Department of Housing and Residence Life recognized my efforts by awarding me Assistant Residence Coordinator of the Year.

Teaching Interests

I would be excited to teach undergraduate or graduate courses that I have already taught, including Introduction to Public Policy Analysis, Race in the United States, Social policy. I am also able to teach courses on qualitative methods, and research design. Finally, I would be happy to develop new courses on inequality and the state, Sociology of Work.