

Kathleen S. Lowney, Ph.D.
Valdosta State University
Application for Regents' Teaching Excellence Award

I believe that teaching in general, and teaching sociology in particular, can best be seen as a particular kind of storytelling. Teaching involves multiple tellers; I believe students are not a passive audience, but should be engaged in the process of discovering the story of sociology for themselves. Students and I are co-creators of the story and how it gets told every day, by the questions asked, the readings chosen, and even the means of assessment. I know the final destination I am hoping to arrive at in each class (i.e., the learning goals and objectives for the course/core curriculum/major), but just how we get to that destination is a storytelling journey students and I take together. The story I co-tell with students, regardless of the course, is what it is like to be an applied sociologist, doing research in order to create social change.

ACTIVELY SHARING THE STORY OF APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

So for example, in my SOCI 4800 course on Issues in Sociological Practice – Domestic Violence, we examine the topic primarily from the perspective of a shelter worker (a job many of our students actually take right after graduation). The class constructs a virtual shelter, from the ground up. Either the whole class or groups of students decide what programs are best to offer victims and their children; and whether we want to include programs for perpetrators. All students analyze state and local data about domestic violence and interview local providers; one group will focus on how a non-profit survives in weak economic times and creates a fundraising campaign, while another group focuses on how to construct a publicity campaign for the shelter, all grounded in sociological theories such as constructionism. Another group creates a policy manual for shelter employees and shelter clients, with particular focus on creating rules for the residents and their families, shaped by the shelter philosophy the class created collectively. All these activities are buttressed by the latest in research – read and then discussed in class. Each week students write individual papers that ask them to apply the concepts we have been studying to real-world scenarios. For example, one week they may be told “they alone are working the 1-800 hotline and it is 2 AM. Several calls come in nearly simultaneously. The shelter, that evening, has one remaining adult bed available and no beds for children.” I go on to describe the circumstances of the callers – one has had an immediate first instance of domestic violence in the relationship, whereas the other is in a long-term abusive relationship where the violence is escalating. Given the readings and course materials, the student will write a paper which explains which caller (if any) will be invited in on an emergency basis and why (following the shelter rules which we have created) and explains what help would be offered to the other caller. There is no one “right” answer to this scenario – but students must take “book knowledge” and apply it to circumstances that applied sociologists frequently confront.

In my SOCI 1160 Intro. to Social Problems course, the class becomes the city of “Blazerville.” Each student chooses one job from among hundreds available and must participate in at least one community action group such as an environmental activism group or a committee to reduce teen pregnancy; we elect a Mayor, a City Council, and a School Board (students volunteer to run for these positions). Some students are reporters and in lieu of one assignment, they create *The Blazerville Daily Times* newspaper, which covers all city events. The class inherits Blazerville’s budget from the last time I taught the course (inevitably it is in the red) and elected officials must begin to cut programs. Community action groups respond, and off we go. The course teaches what sociologist Joel Best calls the social problems process – how one or a few individuals make claims about troubling conditions, which may or may not resonate with others and the media; how if they do resonate, they become constructed as social problems and often generate counter-claimsmakers – and social policy is born

out of this “messy soup” of competing claims. Periodically we have a city council or school board meeting and students “become” citizens. These sometimes raucous meetings teach about the social problems process in ways that go beyond what any textbook or lecture could. The activist groups attend and try to influence decision-making about the town’s growth, budget priorities, school decision-making, and so on. Students report becoming more active in causes both on and off campus during and after the course and I often get emails from past students saying they are using what they have learned in the course to help these social movements make claims about desired social change.

In Fall 2010, my 270-person supersection Intro. to Sociology students and I created a flash (dance) mob on campus. The Jazz III dance class on campus, taught by Dr. Eric Nielsen, choreographed the dance, taught it to my class, led 60 hours of out-of-class rehearsals, and joined us on the day of the event. The class and I created over 200 tentative hypotheses, which we narrowed to 10, about how people walking between classes on a November morning might react to all of us breaking out dancing, which we tested. Our plan was to have the dance filmed from the rooftops of several campus buildings, so that we would use content analysis to test hypotheses. While not everything worked quite as planned, the event brought the scientific method alive for students and made campus history! (Here is a video of the flash mob: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7wphBsuVVqE>). That is the kind of teaching as active storytelling that I aim for in all my classes.

SHAPING THE STORY THROUGH CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, INTERACTION, AND RESPECT

Good storytelling has a rhythm and creates natural pauses for the learner-teachers to process and to co-create what happens next. In my supersection Intro to Sociology courses (between 150 and 350 students), I have created several kinds of natural pauses. First, I have “class/teach” moments. I clap a pattern, students repeat it (that gets everyone’s attention) and then I tell them something I want them to go over with their partners (usually one or two people sitting near them). It might be the difference between “role conflict” and “role strain” or some other concept. I will pop in and out of about 10 conversations, listening and clarifying if asked. In about 5 minutes, I clap the pattern again and we pull together as a class, go back over the concepts, and then move on. This twist on “think-share” pairs has worked well in large classes. I also am using “clickers”/student response systems to engage students and provide some immediate feedback to me and to them about learning. I currently ask three clicker questions for points each day (one in the beginning about content from the day before and two spaced throughout the class about that day’s concepts); this semester, I have begun to ask “opinion” questions for no points. These opinion clicker questions set up the next concept or the example that I plan to use, so I ask a clicker question that measures where the class is. We will talk about their responses for a while and then I will discuss what the sociological data show and we will consider why there might be differences between their opinions and sociological studies. This allows me to discuss concepts like sampling, wording of questions, and so on in a way that keeps their attention because it involves their own opinions. Third, I use our learning management system’s discussion tool to create longer opportunities for students to pause, think, and reflect on their sociological learning. Each Monday and Wednesday, I post a “pre-write” assignment which gets students primed for the next day’s class. Usually these discussion prompts are scenarios that ask them to apply their knowledge to something we are discussing. Students have 18 hours to post their reply and I grade them before class the next day. I analyze their answers, looking for common errors and excellent responses and build them into the next day’s class. For instance, one Thursday, we were going to see a video about a 10-year old Navaho boy adopted by a white Mormon family – and how his birth mother wants him back. In the pre-write the day before, students had to debate the value of international/intercultural adoptions, by arguing either the side of a caseworker in an international adoption agency or an activist agitating against such adoptions. Either view had to apply

the sociological theories of G.H. Mead and C.H. Cooley. These kinds of tasks require students to consider the implications of what they are learning and to apply them in real-world situations. In storytelling terms, out-of-class assignments allow students time to process the plot, think about its complexities, and to show me that they are learning. And lastly, tests are pauses in the class, where students and I can assess their learning and if needed, diagnose how to help them. Every one of my tests, in every class, includes at least one essay question; for upper division and graduate courses, the tests are completely essay, and ask students to think about these kinds of real-world applications of knowledge.

Teaching and learning as storytelling involves a series of commitments to my students. First, I pledge to them that all their work will be graded within 72 hours of being turned in to me. Even in my supersections with hundreds of students, with one required essay, they receive their test grade that quickly. They have to be able to see what they know well and what is still shaky, before we further complicate the story with more course content. Second, all work receives comments from me. For example, the required twice-weekly writing assignments in my supersection class are graded using a rubric but I write every student comments as well. That takes me, on average 8 hours to do, twice a week. But they know that I have read their writing and thought about it. Comments are not just “good job” but often tell them that they made me think about the issue in a different way or that I was proud to see that a concept they had been struggling with, was better this week, etc. Third, I promise myself, my students, my colleagues, and my profession that students WILL write in all my classes. I believe it is part of my responsibility as a teacher to help them to improve as writers. Especially in courses for the major, I help them to see themselves as budding sociological writers, learning the style of the American Sociological Association, etc. Our profession has much to say to various audiences – but we need to be able to communicate it well, be that in a case file, a program evaluation written to a community agency, a written file that is used as evidence in court, or in a grant helping a civic organization to win money to make social change. I believe that writing is a key tool that applied sociologists need to develop and I work with all my students to improve their writing skills.

A good storyteller, if not a great one, has to provide the “good bones” of the story. That is not just sharing the narrative; I see it as providing a strong support system to students. I hold in person and online office hours every week and double the amount the two weeks before every test. I will go where my students are (e.g., Starbucks or the library) to have office hours. In my supersection classes, about every three weeks I plan either a lunch or dinner event where students and I can meet informally and relax together. Usually I will make it the week before a test – and I often get 30-40 students to come and talk. We’ll review sociology, but often the conversation morphs into how to develop better study habits, how to understand VSU’s bureaucracy, or how to deal with awkward roommate issues, etc. Students know that I will check our learning management system 10+ times a day – even on weekends. So they feel comfortable that they can write me and receive help quickly. I frequently receive positive comments on student opinions of instruction about how promptly I reply to their requests. I see that technology can – if used appropriately – be a useful storytelling tool. I try to use it to enhance student learning and frequently ask students if there are ways they feel it is detracting from their learning. For example, last semester many supersection students said on the SOIs that they were having trouble finding things in the learning management system. They felt the main page was “too busy.” This spring I reworked the home page, simplifying it and using a “module” style instead and they are very satisfied with the change.

Storytellers also need to realize that not everyone “gets” the story at the same speed. My graduate assistant and I, together, have over thirty hours per week where students can drop by to see us and to get help. My first assignment in supersections is for only five points, but requires each

student to stop by and meet me individually and come ready to discuss their study habits, what they want academically from our class and how they plan on achieving those goals, in terms of the amount of time they plan on devoting to the class, etc. I have found that getting them into my office that one time, makes it easier for them to come visit me when they are struggling with the class. My graduate assistant and I also e-mail every student who misses a class, encouraging them to re-engage and recommit to the class and to learning the story of sociology.

NO STORYTELLER IS ALONE: PARTICIPATING IN BROADER PEDAGOGICAL CONVERSATIONS

I also know that I constantly need to grow and develop my teaching skills. I have teaching mentors on and off our campus who I turn to when I am stuck about how to help students learn a particular sociological concept or the classroom management issues that come with scaling up to teaching supersections. I know that I don't know everything about teaching and am eager to learn from others. Once a month I take four hours and just sit in the Library Periodical Room and read about the scholarship of teaching and learning in other disciplines. What are their scholars finding? I am an avid reader of blogs about pedagogy, such as Agile Learning (Dr. Bruff's blog on best practices using technology, especially "clickers") and the Teaching Sociology Google group.

Part of the applied sociological perspective I share with students is that we should be servant-scholars. I take that call to service seriously, sharing what I know about best practices in teaching sociology with others. I present yearly at national and regional sociology conferences; I organize sessions and workshops at conferences, and I share my own pedagogical successes in print. In 2009, I was selected by the American Sociological Association to be the editor of its sole peer-reviewed journal which is focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning, *Teaching Sociology*. (It is the 2nd most read/subscribed to journal published by the American Sociological Association.) I was just asked to serve another term as editor, until 2014. Every week I get to read cutting-edge ideas about how to improve pedagogy in my discipline. I believe with a passion that sociology can make a difference – at the micro level in students' own interactions with family, friends, and roommates, at the organizational level, and at the macro/societal level -- and I want to share that passion with the readers of the journal.

This past January, a group of peers – many from the *Teaching Sociology's* Editorial Board – nominated me for the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award, the only pedagogical award the ASA gives. I will learn if I won later this year. One of the key things that they talked about in their nomination letters is how I see my editorial decision letters as teaching moments, where I can help authors to sharpen their pedagogical skills, the ways in which they are assessing student learning, etc. – all within a supportive context of my decision letter.

THE STORY OF APPLIED SOCIOLOGY CONTINUES

By telling the story of how sociology sees the world, of how sociologists do our work, I want to plant seeds. I know that most of my students, especially in my Introduction to Sociology university core curriculum supersection classes, will not become professional sociologists. But if I can get them to continue to think sociologically about public policy questions, about their personal values, about their work culture, and to use the sociological perspective to inform their lives – then I have shared the story of sociology, the discipline I love. That is what I strive to do as a teacher.

Kathleen S. Lowney, Ph.D.

Professor of Sociology

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Criminal Justice, with Marriage and Family Therapy
Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA 31698-0060

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy, May 1986, Religion and Society, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

Dissertation: Passport to Heaven: A Feminist Sociological Analysis of the Gender Roles in the Unification Church as Evidenced in Its Vows of Blessing

Master of Philosophy, with distinction, October 1984, Religion and Society, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

Bachelor of Arts, *magna cum laude*, June 1981, Double major in Sociology, with honors, and in Comparative Religion, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

PUBLICATIONS ON THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AND/OR PEDAGOGY

1. Atkinson, Maxine and Kathleen S. Lowney. Forthcoming 2013. *In the Trenches: Learning How To Teach Sociology*. New York: W.W. Norton. Book under contract. 25 chapters, including creating course goals and objectives, creating program goals and objectives, designing a syllabus, creating an accessible course, grading and how to still have a life, etc.
2. Lowney, Kathleen S. 2008. *Teaching Social Problems From a Constructionist Perspective: A Manual to Accompany Joel Best's Social Problems*. New York: W.W. Norton. (editor and major contributor)
3. Lowney, Kathleen S. 2008. "Thinking about Teaching A Social Problems Course: A Personal Journey." Pp. 3-12 in *Teaching About Social Problems from a Constructionist Perspective*, edited by Kathleen S. Lowney. New York: W.W. Norton.
4. Lowney, Kathleen S. 2008. "Transitioning to a Constructionist Course: Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater." Pp. 13-19 in *Teaching About Social Problems from a Constructionist Perspective*, edited by Kathleen S. Lowney. New York: W.W. Norton.
5. Macheski, Ginger E., Kathleen S. Lowney, Jan Buhrmann, and Melanie E. Bush. 2008. "Overcoming Student Disengagement and Anxiety in Theory, Methods, and Statistics Courses by Building a Community of Learners." *Teaching Sociology* 36:42-47.
6. Lowney, Kathleen S. "Puzzling over Theoretical Perspectives." 2008. Pp. 1-8 in *Sociology Through Active Learning*, 2nd edition, edited by Kathleen McKinney and Barbara Heyl. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
7. Macheski, Ginger E., Kathleen S. Lowney, Michael Capece, Kate Warner, and Martha J. Laughlin. 2007. "Voices from the Classroom: An Examination of Family Sociology Syllabi." *Journal of Teaching in Marriage and the Family* 6:206-26.
8. Macheski, Ginger E., Kathleen S. Lowney, Michael Capece, Kate Warner, and Martha Laughlin, editors. 2004. *Teaching About Families: A Collection of Syllabi and Other Materials*. Washington D.C.: American Sociological Association's Teaching Resources Center.
9. Macheski, Ginger E. and Kathleen S. Lowney. 2002. "A Long and Winding Road: Curricular Development as Social-Context Based Assessment." *Teaching Sociology* 30:454-66.
10. Lowney, Kathleen S. "Puzzling Over Theoretical Perspectives." Pp. 1-3 in *Sociology Through Active Learning*, edited by Kathleen McKinney, Frank D. Beck, and Barbara S. Heyl. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
11. Lowney, Kathleen S. 2001. "Puzzling Over Theoretical Perspectives." Pp. 1-4 in *Sociology Through Active Learning, Instructor's Manual*, edited by Kathleen McKinney, Frank D. Beck, and Barbara S. Heyl. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

12. Lowney, Kathleen S. 2001. *Teaching About Families: A Collection of Syllabi and Other Materials*. Washington D.C.: American Sociological Association's Teaching Resources Center. (G. Macheski, K. Lowney, C. Knudson-Martin, and M. Capece, eds.)
13. Macheski, Ginger E., Kathleen S. Lowney, Carmon Knudson-Martin, and Michael Capece, editors. 2000. *Teaching About Families: A Collection of Syllabi and Other Materials*. Washington D.C.: American Sociological Association's Teaching Resources Center.
14. Lowney, Kathleen S. 1998. "Reducing 'Theory Anxiety' Through Puzzles." *Teaching Sociology* 26:69-73.
15. Lowney, Kathleen S. 1997. Sociology 275--Social Problems. Pp. 86-99 and "Handouts for the Class." Pp. 194-206 in *Instructor's Resource Manual on Social Problems, 2nd edition*, edited by J. Michael Brooks and Kendal L. Broad. Washington, DC: ASA's Teaching Resources Center.
16. Macheski, Ginger E. Kathleen S. Lowney, and Tracy Meyers, editors. 1996. *Teaching About Families: A Collection of Syllabi and Other Materials*. Washington D.C.: ASA's Teaching Resources Center.
17. Lowney, Kathleen S. 1993. "Society Through Film: Sociological Theory." Pp. 129-132 in *Visual Sociology and Using Film/Video in Sociology Courses, 4th edition*, edited by Diana Papademas. Washington, DC: ASA's Teaching Resources Center.
18. Lowney, Kathleen S. 1988. "Victimization of Women: Trying to Link Community with Coursework [Course Syllabi and Elaboration (Sociology of Gender SOC 490/690)]." *Feminist Teacher* 4:33-38.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS FOCUSED ON TEACHING AND PEDAGOGY

1. "Getting Your Paper Published in *Teaching Sociology* and Other Journals on Pedagogy." Presented at the 2011 American Sociological Association. Las Vegas, NV. August 2011.
2. "ShiFTing from Accommodations for Some to Access for All." Presented to the 2011 Gulf South Adult and Career Education Professional Development Conference Program. With Dr. Kimberly Tanner. Valdosta, GA. March 4, 2011.
3. "ShiFTing from Accommodations for Some to Accessibility for All." Presented to the VSU Online Lifeline Conference. With Dr. Kimberly Tanner. February 17, 2011. Valdosta, GA.
4. "Is Sociological Knowledge 'Clicking' with Students?" Presented at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Atlanta, GA. August 2010.
5. "Gaining a Perspective on VSU Perspectives (Core Curriculum's Area B) Courses." Presented at the Core Matters Conference at Valdosta State University. Valdosta, GA. April 2010.
6. "Super-Size It: Assessing Learning in Large Core Classes." Moderator & member of panel for presentation at the Core Matters Conference at VSU. Valdosta, GA. April 2010.
7. "Teaching and Learning Moments: Studying Accessibility in City Services with Undergraduate and Graduate Students." With Dr. Ginger Macheski. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. San Francisco, CA. August 2009.
8. "Social Problems Theory, Teaching Social Policy, and Student Empowerment." With Dr. Cynthia Bograd. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Boston, MA. August 2008.
9. "Who's Online?: Using Technology for Informal Assessment of Student Learning." Accepted for presentation at the Interdisciplinary Conference for Teachers of Undergraduates. Macon, GA. March 2007. Unable to present due to duties as Sociology Faculty Search Committee Chair.
10. "Who's Online?: Using Technology for Informal Assessment of Student Learning." Presented at the VSU Online Lifeline Technology Conference. Valdosta, GA. February 16, 2007.
11. "Aligning Dreams and Reality: Comprehensive Program Review of the General Education Curriculum at Valdosta State University." Presented at the 46th Annual Conference of the Association for General and Liberal Studies. Indianapolis, IN. October 2006. With Drs. Sheri Gravett and Marsha Krotseng.

12. "A Long and Winding Road: Curriculum Development as Assessment." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. Milwaukee, WI. April 2002. With Ginger Macheski.
13. "Teaching Applied Sociology." Workshop given at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. St. Louis, MO. April 2001. With Dr. Tracy Ore.
14. "The City Project as a Useful Technique in Social Problems Classes." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Washington DC. August 2000.
15. "Lessons Learned from the Curriculum Revision Process." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. Chicago, IL. April 2000.
16. "Reducing 'Theory Anxiety' Through Puzzles." With Megan Keller and Laura A. Cobb. Presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations. Irvine, CA. [Wrote paper with co-authors, but did not present it, they did]
17. "A Long and Winding Road: Revising the Undergraduate Curriculum." Presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. Minneapolis, MN.
18. "Celluloid Aids: Using Film to Teach Sociological Theory." Presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. Des Moines, IA.
19. "The City Project." Presented at the 1996 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association - Teaching Sociology Section. August 1996. New York City.
20. "Making the Classroom More Hospitable to Women and Minorities." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Sociological Association. October 1990. Chatsworth, GA.
21. "Teaching Social Theory Through Feature Films." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Sociological Association. October 1990. Chatsworth, Georgia.
22. *Packaged to Perfection*, an original videotape. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Humanist Sociology's Visual Sociology Section. October 1989. Lexington, KY. With Dr. Chet Ballard and Laurie Swift.

EDITOR OF *TEACHING SOCIOLOGY*. 2010-2014. Screen manuscripts, process those accepted for review, write decision letters, line edit accepted manuscripts, work with Sage production staff and authors, work with other American Sociological Association (ASA) editors and the ASA Publications Committee. Time to first decision under my editorship: 29days.

RECENT INVOLVEMENT ON VSU COMMITTEES WITH PEDAGOGICAL FOCUS

1. Chair, Faculty Excellence Initiative. 2011-2013. Tasked with assessing faculty and administrators' development needs, analyzing that data, and then will be proposing changes to the campus community. Initiative will likely be suggesting the creation of a Center for Excellence in Teaching in Fall 2012.
2. Member, Core Matters Conference Steering Committee. 2012. 3rd annual conference at VSU about the Core Curriculum.
3. Leader, Supersection Faculty Group. I call the group together several times a semester and control the learning management system's "class" we have created for easy communication with each other. Have also done informal training with faculty new to teaching supersections on issues such as classroom management, communication with students, etc.
4. Chair, Area B of the Core Curriculum Program Review Committee. 2005-2007. Conducted analysis of all Area B classes, how departments and colleges were participating in this part of the core curriculum, student opinions of these courses, and wrote assessment report for program review.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS: Books (2); Articles and Chapters (16)

Promoted to Full Professor (1998); Tenured (1994); Promoted to Associate Professor (1993); all at VSU

Student Opinions of Instruction Statistics Kathleen S. Lowney 2008-2011

Semester	Name of Course	Instructor Average	Departmental Average	N = # of students enrolled
Fall 2010	SOCI 1101B: Intro to Soc	4.41	4.40	109
	B1***	4.11		22
	B2***	4.44		22
	B3***	4.26		22
	B4***	4.68		22
	B5***	4.92		22
	B6***	4.68		22
Summer 2010	SOCI 4990: Senior Capstone	4.59	4.67	12
Spring 2010	SOCI 1101E: Intro to Soc	4.39	4.42	150
	SOCI 3500: Soc. Theory	4.98		25
Fall 2009	SOCI 1101B: Intro to Soc	4.37	4.37	150
	SOCI 1101E: Intro to Soc	4.63		45
Spring 2009	SOCI 1101B: Intro to Soc	4.59	4.43	25
	SOCI 1101E: Intro to Soc	4.39		35
	SOCI 4810: Soc of Disabilities	4.78		20
	SOCI 4990: Senior Capstone	4.91		9
Summer 2009	SOCI 4990	Lost	Lost	Lost
Fall 2008	SOCI 1101B: Intro to Soc	4.48/4.34	4.45/4.35	40
	SOCI 1101N: Intro to Soc	4.60/4.39		40
	SOCI 7011: Soc in Applied Settings	4.75/4.44		5
	SOCI 3500: Soc. Theory	4.70/4.45		13

***Supersection divided into six Nursing major learning communities (B1-B6)& then rest of class (B)

Fall 2008: First number is Instructor Mean; second number is Course Mean

Since Fall 2009, I have had a one course load reduction every Fall and Spring semester for editing the journal *Teaching Sociology*



Valdosta State University

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May 7, 2012

I am pleased to nominate Dr. Kathleen S. Lowney, Professor of Sociology, as Valdosta State University's representative for the University System of Georgia's FY 2013 Regents' Teaching Excellence Award. While this brief packet cannot do justice to the depth and breadth of her commitment to teaching and learning, it does illustrate her thoughtful and innovative approach to teaching, not only in her own classroom but across her discipline.

Her packet contains the following required documentation:

- (1) Letters of support from myself and from Dr. Darrell Ross, the Head of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Criminal Justice, and Marriage and Family Therapy attest to her commitment and creativity as a classroom instructor, one whose classes are marked by their insistence that students become active participants in utilizing their sociological knowledge in applied contexts, whether in a core curriculum course or a major's course, whether in a course of 25 or a course of 150.
- (2) Her condensed curriculum vitae illustrates that her commitment to teaching and learning extends far beyond her own classroom. Her list of publications and presentations devoted to teaching and learning demonstrates her dedication to teaching in her discipline, and her continuing efforts to create more inclusive, more engaged, and more successful students. Her CV also shows that she serves as the Editor of *Teaching Sociology*, the sole peer-reviewed journal of the American Sociological Association. She is also currently under contract for a new book, *How to Teach Sociology*.
- (3) Her own reflective statement thoughtfully describes the time and energy she devotes to "actively sharing the story of applied sociology" in her classes, whether through her use of clicker technology to assist in her very large classes or through a variety of creative exercises, such as the creation of a flash mob to hypothesize about audience behavior or by an exercise in which students must construct and conduct a "virtual" domestic violence shelter.
- (4) Two supporting letters from former students (including one who is now a professional colleague) reflect the extra time and attention Dr. Lowney provides to all her students, no matter the class size or level, including providing quick and individualized feedback and striving to meet students, not only in her office but in the dining halls, the student union, or other places where she reach beyond the confines of the classroom.

- (5) Her teaching materials document the creative ways that she strives to make sure that students not only know the subject matter but can put that subject matter into action, including creating the town of "Blazerville" and setting up situations where students will confront a variety of social problems.

On my own behalf, I would also like to commend Dr. Lowney for her leadership in a couple of activities vital to Academic Affairs. Since she herself teaches a "supersection" class, she has assisted all faculty teaching these large classes by creating a "course" in our Learning Management System to which all supersection faculty are subscribed. This course provides links to useful research materials and a discussion board where faculty can share their questions and concerns. She also sets up informal lunches once or twice a semester so faculty (and the staff that support them) can meet and share ideas. She is also currently chairing our Faculty Excellence Initiative, a university-wide task force charged with examining ways to continue to enhance the faculty development opportunities on the VSU campus. This spring, this task-force conducted three separate surveys—for faculty, for administrators, and for graduate students—as well as interviewed Center for Teaching and Learning Directors at a variety of institutions. This task force's work is currently available at <http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/documents/initiative.shtml>. Her leadership continues to aid not only her students and department but the university as a whole.

As this brief overview illustrates, Dr. Kathleen Lowney superlatively fulfills the listed requirements for this award. As her students and colleagues can attest, Dr. Lowney's commitment to teaching and learning actively engages students in the practice of sociology as well as provides inspiration and leadership her colleagues both at Valdosta State University and beyond.

I proudly present Dr. Lowney's packet for this award.

Sincerely,



Philip Gunter

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs



January 10, 2012

It is with a high degree of respect that I submit this letter of recommendation for Kathleen Lowney, Ph.D. for consideration for the Georgia University System Teaching Award. Based on Dr. Lowney's exceptional teaching record she clearly exceeds the criteria for consideration.

Professor Lowney has taught courses in Sociology at Valdosta State University since 1987. She embodies all of the qualities of a superior teacher. First, she is a highly organized and an effective communicator. I have observed Professor Lowney's teaching in the classroom (Introduction to Sociology). This course is a Super Section and is a service course for many majors across campus. I arrived ten minutes prior to the course commencing and observed Professor Lowney walking around the auditorium conversing with students, welcoming them to class, and participating in casual conversation with them. This practice was more than just an educational strategy. It demonstrated to me that she is highly concerned about her students not just as her students in her class, but as unique individuals who bring varying dynamics and experiences to the course. Throughout her presentation she used various types of technology in class and systematically presented the day's principles and concepts by linking them to past readings, assignments, and presentations. During her presentation she "worked the room" by moving across the stage back and forth and walking up and down the aisle making the students attend to her. She used proper voice pitch and inflection to drive home important points, also emphasizing critical learning components. Using the power point to illustrate points in an organized fashion facilitated the ease of note taking for students.

Secondly, Professor Lowney's teaching style is also buttressed by high energy and dynamic enthusiasm demonstrating her passion for conveying topical information for students. Dr. Lowney's pedagogical approach to this large class is to actively engage all students through what she has termed "Teachable Moments." This method utilizes lecture and then at an appropriate moment, she suddenly stops the class, has students discuss important principles in small groups, and the class then comes back together to discuss thoughts from the small group. This cycle is repeated several more times throughout the class period. Students comment that this approach is valuable to course content and their learning of important course concepts. Her approaches to teaching support the student-based outcomes that the course is intended to address. Dr. Lowney's commitment and passion for teaching are unmatched and her student instructional evaluations underscore her pursuit of excellence with her students by their superior evaluation ratings.

Third, I was most impressed with the teaching quality as an innovator in using technology in the classroom. Professor Lowney continually strives to improve her teaching skills and engages in lifelong learning. She is not apprehensive in experimenting with new ideas or technology. For over a year Dr. Lowney has voluntarily taught the introductory course in a Super Section and uses "Clicker" technology. Dr. Lowney was one of the first professors on campus to use this technology and bases some of her approaches from the work of Dr. Bruff. She continues to experiment with this technology using two or three questions per class and is finding that it enhances students' comprehension. Professor Lowney provides additional forums for student learning and for discussing course materials. Based on their suggestions she has designed a Sociology blog.

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College of Arts & Sciences

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Fourth, Dr. Lowney's superior teaching qualities serve as a sentinel in providing an environment which fosters intellectual safety for students to feel free to express their views in class without retribution. Dr. Lowney's teaching style crafts the course so that students actively engage in a three-way dialogue which provides for active learners and an atmosphere of open exchange. Students are not only learning but actually enjoying her courses. Further, she engaged students in the Fall Semester of 2010 in a "Flash Mob" activity on campus which received wide recognition across campus and the community.

Fifth, professor Lowney's teaching approach not only influences students inside the classroom but outside as well. On a regular basis there is a steady stream of curious students standing outside her office waiting to visit with her about course topics and other dimensions about the Sociology profession. Her accessibility to students is truly providing strong mentoring.

Sixth, Dr. Lowney seeks opportunity for collaboration and is well respected as a professor across campus. For several years she has conducted numerous workshops for campus and department faculty in developing their teaching strategies. Recently, Professor Lowney received University financial support to attend an E-Learning conference regarding the use of Clickers in the classroom at Harvard University in October 2010 to enhance her skills and strategies. She is using her new knowledge gleaned from the conference in her course but is also developing a workshop which will be offered to VSU faculty. She is highly desirous of sharing her expertise of using the Clickers with other interested faculty.

Seventh, Dr. Lowney is not only concerned about the quality of her teaching in the classroom but is concerned with campus curriculum overall. She has provided a valuable service to the University for five consecutive terms (since 1996) by serving as an active member of the University Academic Curriculum Committee. Her interest in other dimensions of teaching and the curriculum is recognized as she has served as a member on the Core Curriculum Initiative Committee and as a member on the Graduate School Curriculum committee. Her service and expertise has been instrumental in enhancing existing courses and programs as well as in enlarging curriculum and new programs across the academy.

In my impression Dr. Lowney epitomizes the characteristics of a superior teacher. These seven factors and observations serve to underscore the significant features which demonstrate high caliber and exceptional attributes of teaching worthy of awarding the highest recognition for her teaching excellence. It is without reservation that I support Dr. Lowney for strong consideration of this important award in teaching.

Sincerely,

Darrell L. Ross, Ph.D.

Darrell L. Ross, Ph.D.

Professor & Department Head

S, A, CJ, & MFT

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February 28, 2011

Dear Dean Richards and the College of Arts and Sciences' Faculty Excellence Awards Committee:

Theodore Roosevelt once said "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are" and Dr. Lowney has taught me that very statement through my years at Valdosta State University.

I feel that I have had a unique experience at Valdosta State University and with Dr. Lowney. I have had Dr. Lowney as my professor as an undergraduate non-sociology major, an undergraduate sociology major, as her graduate teaching assistant for her super-section introduction to Sociology class, as a graduate student, and finally as her colleague. Working with Dr. Lowney at a variety of levels there are several very consistent attributes about her that I admire. Dr. Lowney, more than any professor I have ever met, absolutely goes above and beyond what is required. I have never turned in a single assignment that was not promptly graded with detailed feedback. She has a phenomenal ability to engage students without coming across as superior, but still establishing herself as the authority within the classroom.

Dr. Lowney is dedicated to her vast areas of expertise, but is always willing to hear a new perspective. She facilitates student's stretching their intellectual muscles using encouragement, curiosity, detailed lessons full of 'real life' examples, classroom discussions, and my personal favorite of the "Dr. Lowney look" that just non-verbally screams elaborate on that you are about to have an intellectual epiphany. Rather than proving to students that she is better than them with her vast knowledge she shares it in a manner like a grandparent wanting their grandchild to understand their wisdom.

There is no question that Dr. Lowney is the hardest professor I have ever had. I have taken her for four undergraduate classes and one graduate class, for a total of five classes and a total of five hard earned B's. Dr. Lowney helped me understand something about myself that I have never been able to believe, that I was smart and that I had something to offer the world. When I took Dr. Lowney for the first time I thought "what have I done to myself there is so much work, the syllabus is ten pages long, and she even wrote the text book for the class!" I thought that there was no way that I would make it, but I did and I changed my major to sociology that same semester.

Dr. Lowney has never pushed me or dragged me along in my education. She made it very clear that it would be work, but she would be there if we needed her. She always kept that promise. Over the course of knowing Dr. Lowney she has never cancelled, been late to, or rushed an appointment. Dr. Lowney made sure that I was responsible for my own education and I thought at the time she was just being hard but looking back on it I realize she was making me self sufficient. She, by not dragging me along, was teaching me something it is impossible to learn without a phenomenal teacher, that I could accomplish something bigger than myself.

Dr. Lowney is an amazing woman, she is the type of person that most academics strive to be like. Students who take Dr. Lowney learn past the textbook facts and figures, they learn that society

is vastly interconnected and that sociology is not just something created by ivory tower academics but rather is a part of our everyday lives in each interaction, situation, and institution. She teaches this through a variety of methods which include her overstuffed binders of notes, YouTube clips, articles she has found, news reports, with a variety of technological whistles to get students engaged without letting anything overpower the ultimate goal of learning.

When I was hired as a full-time temporary professor at Valdosta State I immediately went to Dr. Lowney to ask her advice on how to be an effective professor. I sat down and modeled my classes after Dr. Lowney's classes. I knew if I wanted to be the best I needed to work based off of the best's model. I regret my upcoming leaving of Valdosta State University, a part of that realizing that I will not be able to go to Dr. Lowney for advising. I know that the skills that she has taught me and convinced me that I have had all along will allow me to be successful beyond the hallow halls of Valdosta State.

Respectfully,

Raeda K. Anderson, M.S.
Full-Time Temporary Professor of Sociology
Valdosta State University

February 14, 2011

Valerie Bland
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Valdosta State University
College of Arts and Sciences
Attn: College of Arts and Sciences' Faculty Excellence Awards Committee
1036 Hugh C. Bailey Science Center
Valdosta, GA 31698

Dear Dean Connie L. Richards and Awards Committee:

I am honored to write this letter to you on behalf of Dr. Kathleen Lowney. She is a passionate and intelligent Sociologist that deserves recognition for the exceptional level of dedication that she portrays in every aspect of her work.

I took Dr. Lowney's Sociology 1101 class during the Spring 2010 semester. Right away it was obvious that she was very committed not only to the field of Sociology, but to making sure that all 150 students in the class came away with a thorough understanding of the subject and how it can relate to their everyday lives. To achieve this, Dr. Lowney incorporated technology in the classroom and outside as well by taking advantage of the many features offered in Blazeview. She explained theories and concepts in easy-to-understand ways, and even shared stories from her own life and research to help students relate and learn lessons. Dr. Lowney even gave students the opportunity to be involved in the creation of assignments by asking for their input. She was careful to make learning difficult topics much easier by using varied methods and techniques that appeal to different learning styles. However, her test questions and online discussion post topics were challenging and thought-provoking so as to not coddle students and give away grades as some less committed professors often do.

Dr. Lowney is proactive in getting to know her students, which encourages them to take more interest in the class because her sentiments resonate with them. It is evident that by getting to know her students, she continuously evolves her teaching methods to keep up with the ever-changing world, and thus always allowing her to be an effective teacher, no matter what generation she is teaching. An example of this is how when getting to know her students, Dr. Lowney learns everyone's name, despite the large class size. Other students I have met who have taken her class always have positive things to say about her and what they learned and experienced in her class. This positive "buzz" is what led me to seek out her course when fulfilling my AREA E (Social Sciences) pre-requisites.

In reflection, I have compared her to a professor whose class I am currently in; this professor confusingly uses the same materials for my class as is used for a higher level class, and then just tells us what materials to ignore. Also, it is obvious that the materials used in this class were created from a textbook that is no longer in use because almost nothing matches up between the lecture notes and the book, which makes learning difficult and discouraging. The format of this current class clearly

leads me to see how other professors would greatly benefit from observing Dr. Lowney, and so would their students.

Another difference I have observed is how Dr. Lowney is conscientious of the demands on a college student, and therefore goes above and beyond traditional expectations to make her herself available to her students. One way that she does this is by holding office hours at different locations on main campus in areas easily accessible by many students, such as Odum Library and Bailey Science Center. She even schedules meals at the dining halls and invites students to dine with her to discuss the class, ask questions, and share ideas. Dr. Lowney is online often and always replies quickly to emails and discussion posts, and even holds online chats before tests to help students study. I appreciated her for being so generous with her time and making herself available and accessible, especially since her office is located in a building off of main campus that is not very convenient. Her actions in these areas are the exception rather than the norm of most professors and highlight her sustained commitment to educating students from a myriad of backgrounds and constraints.

Aside from being an excellent educator, Dr. Lowney is an amazing person. She is very approachable and patient, which is comforting to the average overwhelmed college student whom sometimes just needs someone experienced to listen and be understanding of what they are going through. She makes the class feel more like a family than a room full of strangers, and encourages that family to help each other inside and outside of the class. She also incorporates her love for the community into her teachings by activities like holding canned food drives and encouraging students to help others by donating food in exchange for extra credit. This activity informally supports a studied tenant of Sociology while at the same time providing a positive role model and example to students.

In summary, of all the professors I've met, none come anywhere close to matching Dr. Lowney in terms of professionalism, passion for their career field, enthusiasm and effectiveness in educating students or consideration for others. I am not a Sociology major, but if I were, I would be ecstatic in knowing that such a remarkable, intelligent and dedicated woman was there to teach and guide me.

Sincerely,

Valerie Bland
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