

DEVELOPING SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

If you want to spend your entire semester behind a desk taking lecture notes, don't come to faculty member, Marlena Rodriguez' Intro to Sociology class. Now that it is extended to a full year course offering, she promises a ten month experience that examines the historical, theoretical, and practical elements of sociology.

The course is divided into three segments. The first, entitled "Developing a Sociological Perspective", introduces students to the field of sociology. Consideration is given to how social factors affect daily lives. Areas of study include social organization, tools of sociological research, culture and diversity, socialization and society, social influences and interaction, and collective behavior and social movements. This segment was offered during the fall 2008 semester. The second segment, "Inequality in America", looks at how differences of class, race, and sex are transformed into various inequalities in American society. The class, offered in the winter semester, will also examine the consequences that people confront when they are categorized. Finally, students will consider responses that they make towards inequality. The final segment, "Gender, Sex, and Sexuality", offered in the spring semester, will look at how society affects outlooks on sex, gender and what is "normal". This class will examine the consequences and/or inequalities that people confront when they are categorized by gender, sexuality and normalcy. Topics of discussion will include marriage, families, education, diversity, social issues, deviance and violence, and social stratification.

In this past semester, Marlena assigned the students tasks rooted in ethno-methodology. "They were challenged to perform an action that went against the social norms on campus," said Marlena. "For example, the senior girls went to study hall dressed in dresses, and high-heeled shoes. Normally, students at this time go in sweatpants and t-shirts. The freshmen girls saw them walk in all dressed up. Immediately, these ninth graders went back to their rooms, changed, and returned all dressed up."

"This class is great," said Andrew Romanella, who acted like a monkey for 30 minutes in his dorm's common room for his ethno-methodology project. "In addition to the classroom time, we have a chance to do lots of hands-on work." Marlena adds, "My students will go out into campus and study other people without them knowing."

Sociology students also learned to design surveys utilizing random samples on topics ranging from athletics at The Gunnery, politics, and sexuality. "We gave the students a survey about the recent presidential election," said Alex Vazzano. "We asked if they were choosing a candidate based on their principles or their parents. The class really opened me up to a whole new way of thinking."

"I love this class," said Nicole Julich. "Over Thanksgiving break, I went home and found myself watching people around me and assessing them on what I learned in this class which I feel is applicable to everyday life."