

I had the wonderful opportunity to travel to the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society (MSS) this year, between the dates of April 17-20th, 2019. I will discuss how this opportunity contributed to the areas of scholarship, service, and teaching for myself.

Teaching: Although I will separate the areas of teaching and scholarship, they truly do go hand in hand as I bring new research in my subject matter back into the classroom—however, will utilize this space to speak specifically to teaching strategies, then will discuss new research in the Scholarship section to follow. One particularly thought provoking session explored the use of podcasts as an assignment, but also as an alternative (of sorts) to reading. This is a struggle that educators often discuss, how to get students to read? There were very interesting and passionate discussions on this topic, one quote that has stuck in my mind is to “meet students where they are”, in the sense that we don’t throw out reading, but we also recognize the course-load, responsibilities and lives of our students, that many simply do not have the time to read extensive, dense book chapters for each class every week. Through recognizing this issue, there can be some sort of compromise that can be accomplished in a few ways. First, was the suggestion of podcasts assignments, which I hope to attempt this Fall in at least one of my courses. Also noted was the use of documentary films, which I presently incorporate. The idea is to take non-academic podcasts to use as an example of the course content discussed in class, this allows the content to become more meaningful to the students, but is also flexible as it can be done on the go (in the car, at the gym, during lunch). I work a lot with bringing the “real world” into the classroom and think that this would be one approach that may prove successful, not in place of reading, but in addition to the reading to help subject matter “come alive”. Along these same lines, another presentation focused on reading—but specifically in online classes, with the question of “do reading quizzes promote reading”. This is a question I often struggle with--if I assign online quizzes, are students actually reading, or simply looking for answers to a question. What was interesting is that although students did report often skimming or simply making guesses, although some students were actually reading—the main outcome was that students recognized that the quizzes themselves were helpful at motivating them to read and the quiz themselves helped students to retain information, drawing the conclusion that through searching for answers—regardless if they are reading every word, skimming (and reading quizzes) actually work towards positive course outcomes. It was also raised that it is increasingly important to assist students in developing critical thought as we encounter so much information on a daily basis, thus teaching how to discern fact from fiction through assignments that require students to follow the news, fact check, but also follow news that they may not typically seek out in hopes of increasing media literacy, as well as develop critical thought.

Above are more in the classroom issues, but also mentioned were institutional concerns of accessibility and inclusivity. The first is a move on some campuses from accommodation towards accessibility, which encourages both instructors, but the institution as whole to push towards classrooms, classroom spaces and beyond, to be accessible to all students (learning styles, dis/abilities, bodies) without putting the onus on the student to make requests for accommodation, or at least alleviate some of the student led requests. Of course, not to take these processes away, but to simply make a campus one that adopts more of a universal design in building and structure across pedagogy (thinking

about how we deliver and present content), but also construct our learning spaces. This was a really powerful lecture, which I intend to implement in the classroom. However outside of the classroom, on the institutional level, is an initiative that feels very overwhelming, but one that I hope is part of LU's future. Last, was a program focused on retention and I feel that we are moving in this direction, which is rooted in relationship building with new cohorts of students. I have had the opportunity as a Freshman Advisor to do some of these things (put names with faces, send personalized emails, develop a relationship, etc.), which in research have been shown to increase retention---when students feel that they belong and they matter, they will stay. I would like to work on the use of interdependence within the class, in a way that is not just group work---the idea being that many students enter with a pressure of needing to do things on their own, and a sense of failure if they cannot (as most individuals cannot). The program used in the session was similar to Outward Bound, so beyond the scope of what LU may be able to do, but the teambuilding was really useful in terms of relationship building. As we move toward block schedules for Freshmen, I would like to use this similar logic in bolstering their cohorts within the classroom, as it does seem to be a great recipe for retention.

Scholarship: My primary areas of teaching and research are in the family and gender. I teach both The Family and Sociology of Gender on a regular basis and work to keep abreast of new research with the primary goal of keeping my courses fresh and up to date. In the area of family, research was shared on LATs (Living Apart Together) relationships, which are a small, but growing trend in the US---although much more present in other cultures, particularly in Europe. Other research included preliminary research on newly married LGBT couples, contrasted with long-term couples, and their narratives of marriage/wedding and meaning making that differs between these groups. One area that I would like to enhance in my family course, is in the area of youth sports---as families have continued to actively enroll their children in sports, especially as opportunities for upward mobility seem less certain for some, youth sports have had an increasingly powerful presence in families. The study explored the motivations for youth sports, but also the role that these sports played for the parents in terms of socializing, instead of just a socialization practice for children. Of course, this does come at a detriment to families that do not have access to the breadth of opportunities presented. I also learned new areas of research, such as "double mothers" (stepmothers and biological mothers), as well as "unretirement" (retired individuals moving from retirement back into the workforce).

In the area of gender, but also family, research was shared in family planning choices in both hormonal and non-hormonal birth control methods, revealing some very surprising findings from the non-hormonal method (also known as the "rhythm method") and relationship outcomes. As well, as caregiving patterns for sibling sets---one interesting finding: although daughters are more likely to care for adult parents, if sons have sisters they are more likely to care for parents than if they only had brothers---which leads to issues of both the sandwich generation, but also gendered caregiving for women---not only of their own parents (and children), but of their partner's parents if in a heterosexual relationship. I am excited to bring these topics into the classroom in the Fall.

Service: This is my first year serving as a committee member for the MSS as a member of the Women in the Profession Committee. I attended the meeting and it provided a

wonderful opportunity to interact with members from other Midwest institutions, as well as to become more familiarized with MSS in my second year of membership after a long pause post-graduate school which took me to a separate regional conference. We brainstormed a series of potential panels and workshops for the 2020 meetings to be held in Omaha, NE. These panels seek to explore issues related to gender and academia, such as maintenance of work-life balance, promotion and leadership, which have disparate experiences for women in academia which influence tenure and advancement in the career---these issues noted similarly outside of academia. An important issue was raised in terms of the naming of committee, which in name may remain exclusionary to individuals across the gender spectrum. Like many organizations/groups/committees a reflection upon the mission and history must be compared to the current context, thus expansion to include gender identity and sexuality within the naming is apt. The group intends to work toward this goal, along with efforts to increase visibility. As well, the committee worked to determine future awards sponsored by the committee. As a newbie to the group, I felt invigorated once leaving for the next three years on the committee. These are issues that are not only important to me personally, but also align with the work that I do in academia everyday in both my own teaching and research pursuits.

In sum, this was a wonderful and valuable experience to be able to attend and participate in the MSS Annual meetings. I was able to utilize the opportunity to expand my networks outside of those in the mid-Missouri area, as well as enhance my knowledge in my areas of teaching/learning. As well, I was connected to a range of new strategies to take into the classroom to enhance student learning.