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THEN AND NOW: USING SYLLABI TO SHAPE THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2015

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

While the college classroom has been researched, its climate has received little attention in research. This study analyzes the climate of the classroom using 189 syllabi from various sociology courses. Drawing from data collected by Grauerholz and Gibson (2006) and syllabi from the Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology (TRAILS), the current study compares college classroom syllabi from two different times periods (pre-2005 and post-2010) to analyze the frequency of classroom climate statements, the variables that may contribute to the presence of a statement, and common language/themes existent in syllabi that did contain a statement. Results showed a large increase in climate statements between the two time periods. The findings also indicated that compared to post-2010 syllabi, those with climate statements from the pre-2005 sample were more likely to also include a statement showing a sense of collaboration among students. The themes and language used in the statements were very similar, however syllabi after 2010 placed a stronger emphasis on behavioral expectations and contained punitive language. Since syllabi are available the very first day of class, these findings suggest that more instructors believe addressing behavioral expectations and shaping the dynamic of the classroom is important.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	3
Classroom Climate and Syllabi.....	3
The Changing College Classroom .....	4
Growth in Student Enrollment .....	5
Diversity in the Classroom.....	6
Controversial Courses.....	8
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	10
Data.....	10
Sampling and Coding.....	10
Variables .....	12
Dependent variable .....	12
Independent Variables .....	12
Analytical Strategy.....	13
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	14
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	26

Strengths and Limitations: ..... 29

Future Research: ..... 30

APPENDIX A: LIST OF ASA SECTIONS AND CORRESPONDING RESOURCE GUIDES  
ANALYZED BY GRAUERHOLZ AND GIBSON..... 32

APPENDIX B: LIST OF SUBJECT AREAS FROM TRAILS ..... 36

REFERENCES ..... 38

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Word Cloud of Classroom Climate Statements in Pre-2005 Sample (N=17).....	20
Figure 2: Word Cloud of Classroom Climate Statements in Post-2010 Sample (N=27) .....	20



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Frequencies for Pre-2005 and Post-2010 Samples .....	15
Table 2: Cross Tabulation of Year and Classroom Climate Statement .....	16
Table 3: Cross Tabulations between Classroom Climate Statements and Independent Variables for the Pre-2005 Sample .....	17
Table 4: Cross Tabulations between Classroom Climate Statements and Independent Variables for the Post-2010 Sample.....	18

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

College classrooms have been studied in various capacities. For instance, Roberts and Smith (2002) considered the roles of emotions in a college classroom while Pittman (2010) studied race and gender oppression in the classroom among female faculty. While the college classroom has been studied, its climate has received very little attention. This may be because when discussing classroom climate, there is no single definition. While examining the “climate” of a classroom, researchers will often use words such as: expectation, etiquette, environment, sensitivities and more (Sulik and Keys 2014; Davis 2005; Pittman 2010; and Wentling, Windsor, Schilt, and Lucal 2008). The nature and definition also can vary depending on grade level or discipline. In the current study, I defined classroom climate as behaviors and content used to create and shape the social and emotional dynamic of the classroom.

Studying classroom climate is important because how a classroom is socially constructed can affect student participation, engagement, and success. For example, research has shown that subtle forms of discrimination or sexist humor in a classroom can lead to a “chilly” climate for female students (Atkinson 2009). This chilly climate results in less participation among females, “undermines their confidence, and hinders career aspirations” (Atkinson 2009:238). In controversial courses, it is likely that students will hold different views which can affect the dynamic of the classroom. For this reason, it is critical to create a safe space when encouraging discussion among certain topics.

There are various methods instructors will utilize to create a neutral or positive classroom environment. For instance, some instructors will distribute a survey at the beginning of the semester to gauge the climate (Davis 2005), while others will use their syllabus. Classroom

syllabi are a tool for shaping the tone and climate of a classroom, yet discussion in research of its effectiveness is rare (Slattery and Carlson 2005). The current study uses syllabi from face to face courses to track an important component of the sociology classroom environment: classroom climate. Syllabi from two time periods (pre-2005 and post-2010) were compared to explore my three research questions: (1) is there an increase in classroom climate statements between these two time periods? (2) what type of course is most likely to have a climate statement in the syllabus? and, (3) what language do these statements utilize to shape the positive classroom climate?

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Classroom Climate and Syllabi

A syllabus can be defined as a contract between an instructor and student. It is an essential component of a course because it provides students with an introduction to the course, the subject, and the instructor. Additionally, from the first day of class, students have access to the schedule of assignments, readings, the activities, and a sense of the course (Nilson 2010). Research on the syllabus shows that it is crucial in shaping the conditions for not only teaching, but learning as well. The syllabus communicates the expectations of the instructor and serves as a socializing mechanism (Sulik and Keys 2014). Sulik and Keys (2014) argue that the syllabus serves four functions: “(1) documenting pedagogical practices, (2) promoting student success, (3) shaping class climate, and (4) stipulating expectations and obligations” (p. 152).

While a syllabus can be very effective, it is important to make note of the wording used in a syllabus. For example, Slattery and Carlson (2005: 160) state that a less friendly syllabus that is detailed and unimaginative may lead a student to believe that their professor will expect them to not succeed, leading “to a self-fulfilling prophecy,” whereas a syllabus that is friendly and warm will be associated with more positive results. Perrine, Lisle, and Tucker (1995) found in their study that students were more willing to seek help from instructors with supportive statements in their syllabus than those with neutral statements. Syllabi with punitive statements made students more hesitant to ask for help from instructors (Ishiyama and Hartlaub 2002).

Nilson (2010), in her research based resource guide for college instructors, provided a list of suggested items to be included in a syllabus. The 15th item is labeled *Policies on classroom decorum and academic discourse*. Under this heading she states:

Classroom and general social incivility has increased in recent years, and having policies and ground rules defining appropriate and inappropriate behavior can go far in preventing class disruptions, name calling, personal attacks, and other demonstrations of disrespect. State any consequences for disruptive behavior specifically and clearly, and explain the nature of, value of, and rules for civil discussions. (Nilson 2010: 35)

Although Nilson (2010) does not use the words “climate,” her policies on classroom decorum focuses on items that shape the classroom environment. She advises that not only should rules be given, but consequences for inappropriate behavior as well.

Syllabi have also been used as sources of data. Grauerholz and Gibson (2006) analyzed syllabi in courses to examine learning goals and means. Additionally, Sulik and Keys (2014) looked at introductory course syllabi as a tool for socialization from two different time periods. In this tradition, I will be analyzing data from syllabi to gauge instructors’ ideas about classroom climate and to gain insight into how sociological instruction has changed in recent decades.

### The Changing College Classroom

Syllabi can help shape classroom climate, but also reflect changes in the classroom and higher education more generally. Thus, as higher education shifts in terms of enrollment and student demographics, we would expect syllabi to change. There are two important shifts in higher education in recent decades—growth in student enrollment and increasing diversity—that are likely to reshape the classroom and in turn, the syllabus.

## Growth in Student Enrollment

Increased earning potential in the marketplace is a rationale often given from young adults deciding to attend college. In 2016, the Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI) annual survey reported that 84.8 percent of its respondents went to college in order to have a higher income. However, the growing number of incoming students in undergraduate classes over the past four decades has led to several challenges for instructors. Attaining a college degree no longer has the guarantee of success that it once had. As the size of universities continue to increase to accommodate these students, classes are more brief and impersonal, possibly contributing to a more uncivil classroom environment (Royce 2000).

Nilson (2010) explains that this increase in incivility has two facets. First, Millennials believe that by paying for education, they are entitled to receive good grades. Academic entitlement can be described as the view that students are paying customers for their education and like any service, they deserve customer satisfaction. These students believe that by paying tuition, the expectation is that they receive an A and their degree is purchased, rather than earned (Sohr-Preston and Boswell 2015). As students continue to regard college education as a consumer marketplace, their expectation is to be amused rather than challenged or receive constructive criticism (Delucchi and Korgen 2002).

Second, Nilson (2010) argues that the emphasis Millennials place on lucrative careers and possessions also decreases the respect they have for instructors and education in general. This consumer mentality that students have shapes their views on classroom expectations, course content, and grades. To achieve academic success, students will often contest grades or grading decisions. Refusal of leniency from an instructor may lead to confrontations with students and

result in an uncomfortable environment. (Lippmann, Bulanda, and Wagenaar 2009). A strategy that can be used when dealing with entitled students is providing clear expectations in syllabi (Lippmann, Bulanda, and Wagenaar 2009). Greater clarity in these expectations will reduce ambiguity and leave less room for negotiation among students and instructors.

### Diversity in the Classroom

The more students attending college, the more diverse the classroom becomes. With diverse populations also comes different personal experiences and viewpoints. Many students do not share the same academic traditional values, norms, or ways of communicating (Nilson 2010). However, the increase in diverse students can be a positive thing. Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004:530) argue that “a student’s interpersonal interaction with peers is one of the most powerful educational resources in higher education” for the student development. Lyon and Guppy (2016) explain that sociology itself highlights this interaction as a source of information and personal development. Having structured interaction between students with diverse experiences encourages positive learning outcomes. Students from various places may have different structural inequalities, but the classroom can serve as a common space for them (Lyons and Guppy 2016).

Growth and diversity in classrooms are not only growing among students, but instructors as well. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) from fall 1993 to 2013, there has been a 45% increase in full time faculty. In fall 2013 of full time faculty in degree-granting post-secondary education, “43 percent were White males, 35 percent were White females, 3 percent were Black males, 3 percent were Black females, 2 percent were Hispanic males, 2 percent were Hispanic females, 6 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males, and 4

percent were Asian/Pacific Islander females” (NCES 2013). Despite this increase, women and faculty of color remain a minority and face additional challenges in the classroom. For instance, Pittman (2010) examined what experiences women faculty of color have when interacting with their students. She found that women instructors had challenges almost exclusively with white male students. Four major themes found in her study of male students were: (1) challenging authority, (2) questioning teaching competency, (3) disrespecting scholarly expertise, and (4) engaging in threatening and intimidating behavior (Pittman 2010).

Moore (1997:128) discussed how student resistance to feminist principles in her courses are a result of the gender of the messenger. She defines resistance as an “unwillingness to consider research or theories that contradict one’s sense of social order.” Moore (1997) found that students will dismiss the results of research and instead characterize the ideas as “male bashing” or “victim blaming.” However, when inviting a male professor to lecture the same message, the ideas were more accepted.

These studies have implications for the current study. With the growing number of students and diverse populations, instructors may be more likely to include statements in their syllabus to ward off potential problems that these changes can produce. By looking at two different time periods, I will be able to determine if there has been an increase or change in statements. Additionally, with women and faculty of color facing greater resistance from students, they may be more likely include a climate statement outlining certain expectations and etiquette for the classroom. By looking at gender of instructor and language used in these statements, I will be able to examine if there is an increase in women faculty members including statements as well as what language they use to help shape the dynamic of the classroom.



## Controversial Courses

Concerns about classroom climate may be heightened in courses that are perceived to be controversial such as race, class, gender or sexuality as they can be seen as uncomfortable (Jakubowski 2001). These courses can be described as those that expose relationships of exploitation, oppression, and domination in society (Hedley and Markowitz 2001). Lichtenstein and DeCoster (2014:140) explain that a role of sociology teaching is to challenge a student's way of knowing and to "challenge commonsense views" that may prevent them from learning. Controversial courses are no exception and perhaps are even more likely to challenge students' assumptions.

In cultural diversity classes, the aim is for instructors to educate students how to respect and appreciate the differences that arise (Roberts and Smith 2002). In these classes involving diversity and inequality, misconceptions can create difficult problems in the classroom. Students without prior sociology courses have an underdeveloped sociological imagination resulting in deeply ingrained misconceptions (Goldsmith 2006). Goldsmith (2006) explains that these misconceptions may lead to confrontations and a sour environment when students resist new knowledge that challenges their beliefs. Depending on how these emotions are handled, it could be potentially damaging or it could enhance a positive classroom environment (Roberts and Smith 2002).

Controversial courses are also challenging because students can have emotional reactions to course materials or discussions due to personal experiences they have had. Murphy-Geiss (2008), who has taught a domestic violence course, mentioned that there is always a subgroup of her students that has had an experience with domestic violence. When teaching controversial

courses, it is imperative to create and maintain a classroom environment that is both safe and comfortable for students. It is expected that certain topics or readings may generate discussion. Due to the strong feelings that students can bring into the classroom, it is essential to know how to use and manage emotions in the classroom. When identities are threatened, student may respond in anger, defensiveness aggressiveness, withdrawal, or subgrouping (Spelman 2010). Emotions that are left unattended or unacknowledged can cause a student to become distracted and unable to engage further (Davis 2005).

Davis (2005) also stresses the importance of creating a safe classroom environment in her sexuality class. She explains that comments made in the classroom are sometimes made innocently or flippantly, yet to other students the comments may generate feelings of outrage, isolation, or depression. One strategy utilized to combat this emotion early in the course, was including a paragraph on classroom etiquette in the syllabus. The statement “helps to recognize and legitimize the strong feelings the course generates” without limiting the other students’ divergent views (Davis 2005:23). By looking at types of courses in my study, I will be able to examine if instructors believe that shaping the climate is crucial in courses with controversial topics. Additionally, my study will also examine the language instructors use in syllabi to create a safe space for students in these courses that challenge commonly held views.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### Data

The data for this study were taken from 189 published sociology syllabi. This study compares syllabi from two different time periods, pre-2005 and post-2010. Of the 189, 139 syllabi were from pre-2005 while 50 were from 2011-2016. In 2006, Grauerholz and Gibson conducted a study using classroom syllabi. For the current study, I utilized data collected by Grauerholz and Gibson (2006) for my pre-2005 sample. The syllabi were taken from the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Teaching Resource Center's (TRC) resource. Syllabi in this guide were written by instructors and selected by editors to be included in these guides (Grauerholz and Gibson 2006). This sample is not completely representative of all sociology courses, but there is still a variety of courses and information included in the syllabi. The syllabi from the after-2010 sample were gathered from the Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology (TRAILS) of the ASA. TRAILS is an online database that has replaced paper volumes. Sulik and Keys (2014) report that in 2012, TRAILS had over 6,000 visits and 114,000 page views.

### Sampling and Coding

For the pre-2005 sample, collected by Grauerholz and Gibson (2006), syllabi were taken from commonly taught courses where the resource guides had a corresponding ASA section devoted to that topic. In addition, courses such as "Introduction to Sociology," "Social Problems," and "Sociology Stratification" were also included since they are taught in most departments. The guides coded were those that covered topics that were closely related to the

section. Out of the 62 guides listed on the ASA website, 44 were coded by Grauerholz and Gibson (2006) (See Appendix A).

For the pre-2005 syllabi, ten undergraduate syllabi were randomly selected from each resource guide. If fewer than ten syllabi were available in the guide, all were coded. For any courses that were dual-level, only undergraduate information was coded. Syllabi were coded twice, first by Gibson and secondly by Grauerholz. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved jointly.

Syllabi for my after-2010 sample were taken from similarly commonly taught courses from the TRAILS website. The syllabi were coded by the subject area listed on the TRAILS website. Since there were not syllabi available for every subject area during this time frame, of the 82 subject areas listed on the TRAILS, only 19 were coded to match the Resource Guides used in the pre-2005 sample (See Appendix B). Syllabi within these 19 areas were used for the after-2010 sample.

In order to make the two years compatible, similar sampling and coding procedures were used. For 2011-2016 sample, I randomly sampled 50 of TRAILS' most recent published syllabi and labeled them with an ID number. For syllabi for both undergraduate and graduate students, only undergraduate requirements were coded. Syllabi that were from online courses or solely for graduate students were omitted.

## Variables

In their study, Grauerholz and Gibson (2006) used a series of questions to analyze classroom syllabi. For the current study, I drew from their past questions and coding in my study to examine classroom climates in more detail and answer my research questions.

### Dependent variable

The question used for my dependent variable was, “Is there a statement regarding classroom conduct/climate?” The variable was labeled “ClassConduct” and was coded (1) Yes, (2) Somewhat, (3) No, and (4) Unsure. If a syllabus was coded 1 or 2 on this variable, I conducted further qualitative analysis of its content.

### Independent Variables

The independent variables used in this study were gender of instructor, community of learners statement, and type of institution. *Gender of instructor* was labeled as “Instructor” and coded as (1) Male, (2) Female, (3) Both, and (4) Unclear. For *Community of learners*, the question asked was “Is there a sense that the class involves a ‘community of learners’ or collaboration among students?” I read through the syllabi and looked for statements on discussions and/or group work. The variable was labeled “ComLearn” and coded (1) Yes, (2) Somewhat, (3) No, and (4) Unclear. For *controversial course*, the question asked was “Is this course controversial?” The variable was labeled “Contro” and was coded (1) Yes and (2) No. Courses focused on race, class, gender, and sexuality were coded “yes” and all others, “no.” Lastly, *Type of institution* was labeled as “TpyofInstn” and coded (1) Doctoral Universities, (2) Masters Colleges and Universities, (3) Baccalaureate Colleges, (4) Associate of Arts College,

and (5) Unknown. Data on type of institution were based on the Carnegie Classification System (Carnegie 2017).

### Analytical Strategy

This study is a content analysis that is both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitatively, I looked to see if there were a significantly larger number of syllabi including a climate statement published after 2010 than those in pre-2005, by conducting a cross tabulation. Additionally, I used a cross tabulation to examine which courses are more likely to include a statement and if gender of instructor is associated with the presence of classroom climate statements. Syllabi that contained statements were saved by ID number in a separate document and later analyzed by themes and language. When examining the wording and language used in the statements, I first looked qualitatively at the frequency of commonly used words using word clouds. To analyze the themes and language of the classroom climate statement statements further, I took a qualitative approach. Each statement was read multiple times, specifically to look at any patterns in tone or attitude and its context.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

Table 1 displays the frequencies of the syllabi used both in pre-2005 and post-2010. My sample size for pre-2005 was 139 and 50 for post-2010. The most notable similarity between the two samples was the percentage of controversial courses versus non-controversial courses. In the pre-2005 sample, 49.6% were from syllabi of controversial courses, while 50% were from controversial courses in the post-2010 sample. In contrast, there were several differences between the two samples. In the pre-2005, the number of males and female instructor were nearly equal (51.8% vs 46.8%) respectively, while in post-2010, the number of female instructors doubled the number of males (66% vs. 32%).

Table 1: Frequencies for Pre-2005 and Post-2010 Samples

	<i>Pre-2005 Sample</i>		<i>2011-2016 Sample</i>	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Classroom Climate</b>				
Yes	17	12.2	27	54.0
Somewhat	15	10.8	5	10.0
No	107	77.0	18	36.0
Total	139	100.0	50	100.0
<b>Instructor</b>				
Male	65	46.8	16	32.0
Female	72	51.8	33	66.0
Both	0	0.0	1	2.0
Unclear	2	1.4	0	0
Total	139	100.0	50	100.0
<b>Community of Learners Language Used</b>				
Yes	34	24.5	35	70.0
Somewhat	39	28.1	7	14.0
No	66	47.5	8	16.0
Total	139	100.0	50	100.0
<b>Controversial Course</b>				
Yes	69	49.6	25	50.0
No	70	50.4	25	50.0
Total	139	100.0	50	100.0
<b>Type of Institution</b>				
Research Universities	65	46.8	--	--*
Doctoral Universities	14	10.1	31	62.0
Masters Colleges and Universities	31	22.3	6	12.0
Baccalaureate Colleges	17	12.2	8	16.0
Associate of Arts College	2	1.4	2	4.0
Other / Unknown	10	7.2	3	6.0
Total	139	100.0	50	100.0

FOOTNOTE—In 2015, Carnegie used Doctoral Universities to encompass both Research and Doctoral Universities

My first research question was to determine whether there was an increase in instructors deciding to include classmate climate statements in their syllabi. For this study, a significance value that is less than .05 is considered statistically significant. After running a cross tabulation



between year and classroom climate statement, the model was shown to be significant with a p value of 36.917 and significance of 0.00. Table 2 shows that in the pre-2005 sample, 17 out of 139 syllabi (approximately 12% of syllabi) contained a classroom climate statement. For the post-2010 sample, 27 out of 50 (54%) syllabi had a statement included, over four times the amount in the pre-2005 sample.

Table 2: Cross Tabulation of Year and Classroom Climate Statement

	<i>Classroom Climate Statement?</i>			Total
	Yes	Somewhat	No	
<b>Year***</b>				
Pre-2005	17 (12.2%)	15 (10.8%)	107 (77.0%)	139 (100.0%)
Post-2010	27 (54.0%)	5 (10.0%)	18 (36.0%)	50 (100.0%)
Total	44 (23.3%)	20 (10.6%)	125 (66.1%)	189 (100.0%)

$\chi^2=36.917, p < 0.00***$

For my second research question, I wanted to know the different variables that may contribute to the presence of a climate statement. For my pre-2005 sample, gender of instructor and type of course institution were not significant indicators of the presence of a climate statement. Due to the number of cases in certain cells, significance could not be determined for sense of collaboration among students and type of institution for both samples.

Table 3: Cross Tabulations between Classroom Climate Statements and Independent Variables for the Pre-2005 Sample

	<i>Classroom Climate Statement?</i>			Total
	Yes	Somewhat	No	
<b>Instructor</b>				
Male	5 (7.7%)	8 (12.3%)	52 (80.0%)	65 (100.0%)
Female	12 (16.7%)	7 (9.7%)	53 (73.6%)	72 (100.0%)
Total	17 (12.4%)	15 (10.9%)	105 (76.6%)	137 (100.0%)
<b>Community of Learners</b>				
<b>Language Used</b>				
Yes	7 (20.6%)	5 (14.7%)	22 (64.7%)	34 (100.0%)
Somewhat	6 (15.4%)	7 (17.9%)	26 (66.7%)	39 (100.0%)
No	4 (6.1%)	3 (4.5%)	59 (89.4%)	66 (100.0%)
Total	17 (12.2%)	15 (10.8%)	107 (77.0%)	139 (100.0%)
<b>Controversial Course</b>				
Yes	7 (10.1%)	6 (8.7%)	56 (81.2%)	69 (100.0%)
No	10 (14.3%)	9 (12.9%)	51 (72.9%)	70 (100.0%)
Total	17 (12.2%)	15 (10.8%)	107 (77.0%)	139 (100.0%)
<b>Type of Institution</b>				
Research Universities	8 (12.3%)	6 (9.2%)	51 (78.5%)	65 (100%)
Doctoral Universities	2 (14.3%)	3 (21.4%)	9 (64.3%)	14 (100.0%)
Masters Coll. and Uni.	4 (12.9%)	6 (19.4%)	21 (67.7%)	31 (100.0%)
Baccalaureate Coll.	2 (11.8%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (88.2%)	17 (100.0%)
Assoc. of Arts Coll.	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Other / Unknown	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (100.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Total	17 (12.2%)	15 (10.8%)	107 (77.0%)	139 (100.0%)

Table 4: Cross Tabulations between Classroom Climate Statements and Independent Variables for the Post-2010 Sample

	<i>Classroom Climate Statement?</i>			Total
	Yes	Somewhat	No	
<b>Instructor</b>				
Male	8 (50.0%)	1 (6.3%)	7 (43.8%)	16 (100.0%)
Female	18 (54.5%)	4 (12.1%)	11 (33.3%)	33 (100.0%)
Total	26 (53.1%)	5 (10.2%)	18 (36.7%)	49 (100.0%)
<b>Community of Learners</b>				
<b>Language Used</b>				
Yes	17 (48.6%)	4 (11.4%)	14 (40.0%)	35 (100.0%)
Somewhat	7 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (100.0%)
No	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	4 (50.0%)	8 (100.0%)
Total	27 (54.0%)	5 (10.0%)	18 (36.0%)	50 (100.0%)
<b>Controversial Course</b>				
Yes	13 (52.0%)	3 (12.0%)	9 (36.0%)	25 (100.0%)
No	14 (56.0%)	2(8.0%)	9 (36.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Total	27 (54.0%)	5 (10.0%)	18 (36.0%)	50 (100.0%)
<b>Type of Institution</b>				
Doctoral Universities	15 (48.4%)	4 (12.9%)	12 (38.7%)	31 (100.0%)
Masters Coll and Uni.	4 (66.7%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	6 (100.0%)
Baccalaureate Coll	5 (62.5%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (37.5%)	8 (100.0%)
Total	24 (53.3%)	5 (11.1%)	16 (35.6%)	45 (100.0%)

For my third research question, I wanted to explore the language/themes used in the classroom climate statements. I first looked quantitatively at the 17 statements from pre-2005 and the 27 statements from 2011-2016 by using word clouds to display commonly used words (Meanwell and Kleiner 2014). In the word clouds, the larger the word, the more common it appeared in the statements.

As shown in Figure 1, in the pre-2005 sample, the syllabi made references to the material (14 times), discussions (10 times) personal (10 times), participation (9 times), respect (9 times), diverse experiences (6 times) and views (6 times). The word “climate” was only mentioned in one statement. Figure 2 shows how classroom climate statements used in syllabi after 2010 used many of the same words (respect, discussion, participation, material, and behavior). However, one thing worth noting is that in syllabi after 2010, 23 out of 27 (85%) contained some form of the word “respect” (respect, respectful, disrespect). Other common words include: discussion/discussions (12 times), participate/participation (12 times), ideas (9 times), views (9 times), environment (8 times), behavior (8 times), controversial (5 times), and sensitive (5 times). Similarly to the pre-2005 sample, only one statement contained the word “climate.”

Overall, the language used between the two years were very similar. Many of the statements encouraged active participation and discussion, yet set the expectation that students must be respectful. One major difference was that in the 2011-2016 sample, 9 (30%) of syllabi discussed behavioral expectations in the classroom, with 5 using the word “disruptive.” In the pre-2005 sample, disruptive/inappropriate behavior was only mentioned in 3 syllabi. Other common wording present in the 2011-2016 sample were that 6 (22%) of the syllabi discussed discriminatory language, 6 (22%) mentioned a safe environment, and 7 (24%) of the syllabi used words of ‘emotion’, such as sensitives, empathy, and compassion in their statement.



When looking at the themes present in the classroom climate statements, the results showed a couple differences between the two years. In the pre-2005, statements were positive, open, encouraging, and collaborative. For instance:

***Race, Class, Gender Course***

*“Class climate: It is my goal that you should all feel comfortable drawing on your own experiences in this class as well as the course material. The idea that a debate only has 2 sides is preposterous. I encourage you to raise questions and debate issues because it is through discussion that I believe we work out the complexity of issues and solidify concepts in our minds. I also believe that each of you is capable of contributing a unique and useful perspective from which others can learn. The material covered in this class will hit home with many of you in a variety of ways. I ask you to keep in mind your own and others’ possible personal investments in the class content/ issues, to treat one another with respect regardless of views expressed, to allow one another to finish stating thoughts, and to keep your minds open to new ways of thinking. If you have a problem with class interaction at any time please let me know.”*

***Sexualities Course***

*“...my values will almost certainly sometimes affect the ways in which I select and present material for this class. However, I am not here to impose my values upon you. Your values are matters of your own conscience. I do not expect you to adopt any of the various perspectives I present. I do, however, expect you to know various viewpoints and to be able to discuss them. I also expect you to respect others in class even though their*

*views may differ from your own. We are not to stand in judgment of views with which we differ, we are here to learn from each other.*

*Build on each other's strengths. Encourage, support, and honor the unique talents of each member. Become better communicators, teachers, and thinkers together. Use this opportunity to learn new public speaking and team building skills the EASY WAY."*

### ***Medical Sociology Course***

*"Because of the potential for course subject matter to affect students personally, and because of the potentially emotional and volatile nature of topics, it is expected that all persons in the class respect the privacy and confidentiality of class discussions. As such, all discussion which is of a personal nature to individuals that is shared in the class should remain within the confines of the classroom. If during the course of the semester, students wish to be excused from participation in particular discussions for personal reasons, and/or wish to be excused from watching a particular film or video, please discuss this with me prior to the class period which will be affected"*

The overall theme of climate statements in the pre-2005 sample was openness. Many of the statements addressed open communication, not only between peers, but instructor and student as well. Several of the statements contained a sentence or two encouraging students to discuss any concerns with their professor. The statements addressed expectations, yet were far more focused on opposing views and experiences.

In the 2011-2016 sample of classroom climate statements, the overall theme was quite different. Similarly to the pre-2005, a few statements included open and encouraging language.

However, a majority of statements contained far more restrictive and punitive language. For instance:

***Medical Sociology Course***

*“CLASSROOM CONDUCT: Please arrive to class on time and do not leave early. If you are planning to be late or need to leave the class early due to extenuating circumstances, please let me know prior to class. Please turn off all cell phones prior to the beginning of our scheduled class time. Texting or taking phone calls during class is not permitted. Your attention for the full duration of our class sessions is expected and appreciated. In return, I will show all students the same respect and will not engage in cell phone use during class or during meeting times outside the classroom. Laptop usage is not permitted. Additional guidelines will be discussed in class. We may discuss topics where individuals have conflicting viewpoints. I encourage all students to participate in class discussions and critically engage with the material learned in this course, however, 2 respectful discussion is a requirement in this course in both your in class participation and written assignments. Diverse viewpoints yield dynamic and enlightening discussions but it is important to maintain respect despite different opinions. All faculty, staff, and students are responsible for understanding and complying with harassment policies.”*

***Introduction to Sociology Course***

*“... We will be looking at many topics, some of which you may find controversial or uncomfortable. When we agree that civility is an essential part of learning we can engage in controversial discussions. Discriminatory and inflammatory remarks will not be tolerated and will result in students being asked to leave the class for the evening.*



*Students will also be asked to leave class for excessive talking, snapchatting, Facebooking, newspaper reading, sleeping, computer gaming, texting, or other disruptive behavior.”*

### ***Race, Class, Gender Course***

*“Due to the nature of some of the topics in this course I must insist on a policy of respect, understanding, compassion and empathy. Anyone displaying attitudes and behavior that can be construed as disrespectful, rude, vulgar or offensive will be dismissed from class and receive a zero for class attendance and participation for that day. Academic interactions between and amongst students and with the instructor will be respectful, cordial and civil.”*

### ***Sexualities Course***

*We should all treat each other with respect. I will give you my undivided attention, when you are speaking. I expect you to do the same, when I am speaking. You should also use this same rule when your peers are speaking. Any student engaging in inappropriate behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. If asked to leave the student should do so immediately without further disruption. The student may return to the class only after an out-of-class meeting with the professor and department chair (or suitable substitute). Each violation of the courtesy policy (such as talking during lecture, a ringing cell phone) will result in a 1% point deduction from your final grade.*

As opposed to the pre-2005 sample, many of the post-2010 statements focused more on classroom behavior rather than varying views. The statements emphasized what students should *not* to do and behaviors that would *not* be tolerated. A noticeable pattern in climate statements in my post-2010 sample was punitive language. Several of the statements contained consequences of poor behavior, such as: being asked to leave class, grade deduction, and disciplinary action by the university. While many statements in the pre-2005 sample addressed expectations, almost none included consequences or punitive language.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The data provides great insight into the contents of sociology classroom syllabi, and more specifically, the way instructors choose to shape the dynamic of their college classroom. The findings showed that compared to the pre-2005 sample, current syllabi are much more likely to include a classroom climate statement. When looking at the different variables that contributed to the presence of a climate statement, data showed that syllabi containing language of collaboration among students were more likely to also include a statement on climate statement.

I was not very surprised that syllabi that showed a sense of collaboration among students were more likely to include a classroom statement. Many of the classroom climate statements discussed active participation and discussion. This reveals that the more the students collaborate and contribute, the more instructors feel the need to set expectations and guidelines for participation. This ties back into the literature of the growing and diverse classroom. Naturally, instructors want active involvement from students, however as the literature mentioned, when classrooms grow and become more impersonal, uncivility increases. Additionally, with diverse views and more collaboration, the more likely it is that students' views may be challenged.

The findings also showed that some factors did not contribute to the presence of a statement like I had originally expected. In the pre-2005 sample, gender of instructor and types of courses were not significant predictors of having a climate statement. Women instructors were not much more likely to include a climate statement than men instructors. The increase in climate statements between the two samples were equally the result of both male and female instructors. The small gap between the two genders actually became narrower in the post-2010 sample. This goes against prior research that discussed the challenges and resistant that women faculty face. It

may be possible that women faculty choose to address expectations verbally in class, as opposed to a written climate statement.

Surprisingly, type of courses was also not a contributing factor of a climate statement. Non-controversial courses were just as likely to include a statements as controversial courses. Similarly to gender of instructor, the gap between the two narrowed compared to the pre-2005 sample. While prior research suggested greater resistance and emotions in the classrooms of controversial topics, the results show that this does not contribute to a climate statement. A possible explanation is that instructors may use alternative means to address the course topics and explanations. For instance, Davis (2005) distributes a survey on the first day of class to gauge the climate of her sexuality course.

When looking at the wording and language present in the classroom climate statements, I believe the increase and difference between the two samples are a result of the changing classroom. As opposed to the pre-2005 sample, most of the statements in the post-2010 sample addressed (dis)respect and behavioral expectations such as remaining present, not being late, and/or being on cell phones. This ties back to the literature that discusses the increase in enrollment. Prior research discussed that increase in student enrollment may lead to a more uncivil classroom. This would explain why language on behavioral expectations were more emphasized in the post-2010 sample of climate statements compared to pre-2005. This also ties back to the research about entitlement and the consumer mentality that some students have. Nilson (2010) discusses how many students view the classroom as a consumer marketplace, where they expect to get an A by simply attending class. The literature warns that this mentality may led to incivility and disrespect. I believe this why is there was an increase in statements

addressing respect, as well as the increase in punitive language used. Greater clarity in expectations will leave less room for ambiguity between the instructor and students (Lippmann, Bulanda, and Wagenaar 2009). Another implication from the study is the increased use of technology. With the advancement of technology, it also makes it easier for students to disconnect and distract peers. I believe this is why many of the classroom climate statements from the post-2010 sample set expectations not only for behavior, but appropriate use of technology.

Another major theme present in the post-2010 sample of classroom climate statements was the use of punitive language. Although several prior studies advised against the use of punitive statements in syllabi, this does not seem to be the case for more current syllabi. While nearly nonexistent in the pre-2005 sample of syllabi, punitive statements were very present in the post-2010 sample. A majority of the climate statements included consequences for inappropriate or disruptive behavior. This ties back to Nilson's (2010) research based resource guide for college instructors where she suggests including consequences in syllabi. Instructors deciding to add punitive wording suggests an increase in incivility and disrespect.

Punitive language may also be more common in the post-2010 sample because of universities that require syllabi to contain language on classroom conduct. In a few climate statements from the post-2010 sample, instructors directly quoted a part of their institution's Code of Conduct in their climate statement. This requirement could also be a contributing factor to the increase in statements across both samples, since there were no university policies quoted in the pre-2005 sample.

After conducting my research, I recommend that more instructors utilize classroom climate statements in their syllabi to shape the dynamic of the classroom. The increase in statements, along with the changes in tone and language, suggest that climate statements are an effective tool to convey the expectations of the classroom to students. I encourage instructors to set the tone for the classroom early on to avoid some of the conflicts in the classroom that research has presented. I believe this study also sets implications for student learning as well. The statements in post-2010 focused less on the material, and more on the behavioral issues. This suggests that student learning is not necessarily being halted by conflicting viewpoints, but instead behaviors that prevent the discussions of viewpoints.

#### Strengths and Limitations

While syllabi have been used as sources of data before, few have used syllabi to explore classroom climate. The contents of college syllabi are all similar to some extent. Syllabi provide information about the instructor, the objectives of the course, the requirements, grading scale, and more. However, when it comes to discussing the “other” parts of the syllabus such as ground rules, classroom conduct/etiquette, or course expectations and policies, research is rare. The increase in this “other” shows that more instructors feel the need to address classroom expectations early on in the course. This study adds to the literature because it compares two different time periods to track the frequency and language of college classroom climate statements. The results show that climate statements have become more common in syllabi so hopefully that will result in further research being done on the topic. A limitation of the study was the size of my sample for post-2010. I believe some of the variables were not statistically significant because of my small sample size. Another limitation is that it is possible that editors

of the syllabi or instructors themselves may have removed “extraneous” information, such as statements. However, I do not think this would differ across the two time periods.

### Future Research

The increase in classroom climate statements containing words of “respect” and the increase in behavioral language demonstrate that the college classroom is changing. Future research should continue to use classroom syllabi as a source of data. As the classroom continues to change, it would be interesting to see if the appearance of climate statements continue to increase in syllabi and other variables that may contribute to the increase. Future research can explore this topic in multiple directions. For instance, participation in discussions was very common among the syllabi containing a climate statement. As student enrollment increases, the growth of online courses and face to face courses with online components also increases. It may be possible that online courses are more likely to include a climate statement. In face to face courses, students may be hesitant to raise opposing views or even speak in class. In contrast, online courses are often large and discussion based. In these online courses with discussions, it is usually a requirement to participate. Due to this, students are more likely to present their varying opinions and viewpoints. This may increase the likelihood in instructors electing to include a climate statement discussing ground rules for the course.

Another opportunity for further research exists in class size. With growing classroom sizes, the more likely students are to have opposing views. It may be possible that instructors feel the need to set expectations early on in the course. However, the opposite could be true as well. Courses with smaller class sizes, such as upper division courses, may be more intimate and

personal. It is possible that smaller class sizes lead to more participation among students, which in turn gives the opportunity for more opposing views.

Future research can also look at different disciplines to compare whether the increase in climate statements exists solely among sociology courses or across other disciplines as well. This is important because the language and themes of climate statements are shifting from a focus on course content, to now an emphasis on behavioral expectations. This shift may result in an increase in classroom climate statements across multiple disciplines that do not necessarily contain sensitive topics or varying viewpoints. Lastly, research can also expand more into types of course. The current study looked broadly at types of courses by breaking them into two groups: controversial versus not controversial. This factor can be narrowed by looking into specific courses. It may be possible that certain courses are more likely to include a statement, whether they are controversial or not.



**APPENDIX A:  
LIST OF ASA SECTIONS AND CORRESPONDING RESOURCE GUIDES  
ANALYZED BY GRAUERHOLZ AND GIBSON**

1. *Aging and the Life Course: Teaching Sociology of Aging and the Life Course*. 5th ed. 2000.
2. *Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco: The Sociology of Alcohol and Drugs*. 2000.
3. *Children and Youth: Sociology of Children/Childhood*. 2d ed. 2003.
4. *Collective Behavior and Social Movements: Social Movements and Collective Action: Syllabi and Instructional Materials*. 3d ed. 2003.
5. *Community and Urban Sociology: Rural Sociology: Teaching About the Complexities and Diversities of American Rural Life*. 2003.
6. *Comparative & Historical Sociology: Syllabi & Instructional Materials for Teaching Comparative & Historical Sociology*. 2001.
7. *Crime, Law, and Deviance: Teaching Criminology: Resources and Issues*. 2000.
8. *Crime, Law, and Deviance: Teaching the Sociology of Deviance*. 2003.
9. *Culture: Course Syllabi on the Sociology of Culture*. 2d ed. 2000.
10. *Economic Sociology: Economic Sociology: Syllabi & Instructional Materials*. 2d ed. 2002.
11. *Economic Sociology: Social Stratification Courses: Syllabi & Instructional Materials*. 5th ed. 2004.
12. *Education: Teaching Sociology of Education: Syllabi and Instructional Materials*. 5th ed. 2000.
13. *Emotions: Sociology of Emotions: Syllabi and Instructional Materials*. 1999.
14. *Environment and Technology: Syllabi and Instructional Materials in Environmental Sociology*. 5th ed. 2003.
15. *Family: Teaching about Families: A Collection of Essays, Syllabi, Projects, and Assignments, Websites, and Bibliographies*. 2004.
16. *Family: Teaching about Family Violence: A Collection of Instructional Materials*. 3d ed. 2003.
17. *International Migration: Issues in U.S. Immigration: Resources and Suggestions for High School Teachers and College Instructors*. 2004.
18. *International Migration: Internationalizing Sociology in the Age of Globalization*. 1999.

Appendix A. cont'd

19. *Latino/a Sociology: Chicano/Latino Studies in Sociology: Syllabi and Instructional Materials*. 5th ed. 2002.
20. *Law: Syllabi and Instructional Materials for Sociology of Law*. 2d ed. 2000.
21. *Marxist Sociology: Teaching Sociology from a Marxist Perspective*. 2d ed. 2002.
22. *Medical Sociology: A Handbook for Teaching Medical Sociology*. 4th ed. 2001.
23. *Mental Health: Teaching Materials for the Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*. 2000.
24. *Methodology: Qualitative Research Methods: Syllabi and Instructional Materials*. 3d ed. 2001.
25. *Methodology: Research Methods Courses: Syllabi, Assignments and Projects*. 5th ed. 2000.
26. *Methodology: Syllabi and Instructional Materials for Social Statistics*. 2000.
27. *Organizations, Occupations and Work: Organizational Sociology: A Handbook of Syllabi and Other Teaching Resources*. 2002.
28. *Organizations, Occupations and Work: Sociology of Work and Occupations*. 5th ed. 2002.
29. *Peace, War, and Social Conflict: Teaching Sociology of Peace and War: A Curriculum Guide*. 4th ed. 2003.
30. *Political Economy of the World-System: Syllabi and Teaching Resources for the Sociology of Development and Women in Development*. 1999.
31. *Political Sociology: Political Sociology: Syllabi and Instructional Materials*. 4th ed. 2000.
32. *Population: Syllabi and Instructional Material in Demography*. 4th ed. 2003.
33. *Race and Ethnic Minorities: Teaching Race and Ethnic Relations: Syllabi and Instructional Materials*. 4th ed. 2001.
34. *Race, Gender, and Class: Race, Gender, and Class in Sociology: Toward an Inclusive Curriculum*. 5th ed. 2003.
35. *Religion: Teaching the Sociology of Religion*. 4th ed. 2004.
36. *Science, Knowledge, and Technology: Syllabi & Instructional Materials for the Sociology of Science, Knowledge, & Technology*. 4th ed. 2003.

Appendix A. cont'd

37. *Sex and Gender: The Sociology of Gender: Syllabi & Other Instructional Materials*. 5th ed. 2002.
38. *Sex and Gender/ Organizations, Occupations and Work: The Sociology of Gender and Work: Syllabi and Teaching Materials*. 2d ed. 2002.
39. *Sexualities: The Sociology of Sexuality & Sexual Orientation: Syllabi & Teaching Materials*. 4th ed. 2002.
40. *Social Psychology: Teaching Social Psychology*. 2d ed. 2003.
41. *Sociological Practice: The Clinical Sociology Resource Book*. 5th ed. 2001.
42. *Theory: Resource Book for Teaching Sociological Theory*. 4th ed. 2001.
43. *Introductory Sociology Resource Manual*. 2000.
44. *Instructor's Resource Manual on Social Problems*. 3d ed. 2001.

**APPENDIX B:  
LIST OF SUBJECT AREAS FROM TRAILS**

1. Community
2. Criminology/Delinquency
3. Cultural Sociology
4. Stratification/Mobility
5. Education
6. Environment Sociology
7. Family
8. Migration/Immigration
9. Latina/o Sociology
10. Medical Sociology
11. Political Sociology
12. Race and Ethnic Relations
13. Race, Class and Gender
14. Religion
15. Sex and Gender
16. Sexualities
17. Social Psychology
18. Theory
19. Introduction to Sociology/Social Problems

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