

Protest Speech, Miami, March 10, 2024

Among the many issues that everyone is talking about, a recent development in Florida is the exclusion of sociology from the universities' general education requirement. This means cutting off an important channel to the sociology major. The hostile move threatens the vitality of a popular discipline in Florida's public universities.

Today we have heard from distinguished speakers how the conservative forces in Florida are threatened by anything that supports diversity, that supports a curriculum that tells the truth about enslavement, that supports the rights of LGBTQ people, and they are ALSO trying to destroy unions.

But why the hell do they care about SOCIOLOGY? Have they ever even heard about this strange "s" word? OF COURSE to promote their vision of the world, which is based on individualism, whiteness, ethnocentrism, sexism, and multiple injustices targeting vulnerable populations – with such a vision they need to also destroy the very field – sociology – that in the current day does the exact opposite of what they want. Sociology helps students understand how society is collective, the role of race, of class, of gender. Sociology is the scientific study of inequality and the oppression this entails. Sociology studies the very exclusions promoted by the conservative forces here in Florida. But we study exclusions not to advance them but to recognize and publicize them, and to better understand how they can be contested and reversed.

I teach at the University of California at Berkeley and there sociology is one of the most popular majors as it is in Florida. It attracts the very students who know the meaning of inequality in their daily lives. So racial minorities compose 52% of the major; transfer students from community colleges are 51%; first generation students are 57%. Sociology students are twice as likely to be in these categories than the overall undergraduate population. These are the students who flock to sociology because it speaks to their experience, and gives them the insights, the confidence to climb the inequality ladder. These are the students who go on to be teachers, civil servants, lawyers, nurses, social workers and yes unionists – workers who serve the public, especially important in these precarious times. These are the workers whose job it is to tackle homelessness, discrimination, harassment, addiction and ignorance – that is, to make this a safer world for all.

As a sociologist I am here to support your struggles in Florida. Sociology, along with other contested disciplines, supplies the public science to fight the battles ahead. Florida is the battleground for such important struggles. We must make our stand here, stop the deadly virus in its tracks before it spreads to other states; stop the dismantling of the gains made by the progressive social movements of the past century. We must uphold the Freedom to Learn and the Freedom to Read – freedom for all.