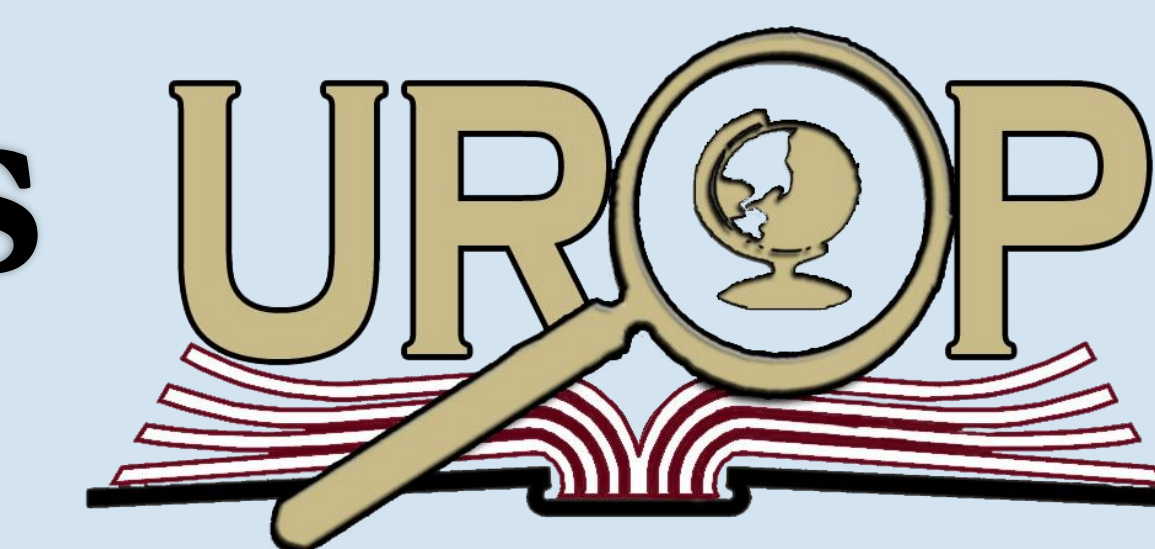




# Graduate Students' Construction of Professional Selves



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## Background:

- Professional identities are enduring configurations of “attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences” connected to how people see themselves in a professional role (Ibarra 1999, 764).
- While professional identities are constantly being constructed and negotiated over time, they are most mendable early in one’s career (Ibarra 1999).
- Furthermore, researchers suggest that the construction of professional identities can be gendered (Cech 2015) and racialized (Pan 2015).
- Florida legislation restricting teachable materials (Florida HB7,1557) influences classroom content and instructional identities
- Little research examines how students leverage teaching as a tool in shaping and solidifying their professional identities.
- The aim of our research is to unravel how experiences in teaching help develop and refine their professional identities.

## Methods:

- Participants:
  - Sociology, graduate students attending Florida universities
- Methods:
  - Interviews conducted over Zoom
    - Questions varied between asking about demographics, experience teaching sociology courses, opinions regarding Florida’s education bills, and general life experiences.
  - Conversation transcribed on Otter
    - There will be a later evaluation of the similarities between participants' responses to draw further conclusions.

## What Instructors Have to Say:

*"I'm absolutely teaching critical race issues. I'm breaking every rule."*



*"I could not be more dissatisfied with the current administration and the way that they're handling legislation for education."*

*"You're going to be fighting an uphill battle, no matter what."*



## Analysis:

- Socialization and activism were key components in how graduate student instructors constructed professional identities.
- In Florida, **policies restricting academic freedom** and the removal of introductory sociology from the core curriculum of state universities reflect a shifting atmosphere that poses significant challenges to instructors' professional identities.
- In response to this challenging environment, instructors expressed a range of fears, particularly those whose identity as teachers was particularly salient. The fear of becoming targets of political backlash loomed large.
- To shield themselves from being labeled "too progressive," instructors employed various strategies, such as evoking empirical language, emphasizing sociological research, minimizing engagement with controversial topics like critical race theory, and fostering an open forum for diverse perspectives.

## Conclusion:

In observing the interviews, there was a noticeable trend of graduate students reporting that Florida education bills such as the STOP WOKE Act, House Bill 7, and House Bill 1557 has been a substantial impediment to their teaching of the Intro to Sociology course. The prevention of teaching Critical Race Theory has the potential to prevent education on the ramifications of being a minority race. In turn, this will lead to systemic discrimination remaining institutionalized. This research is ongoing as the passage of this legislation evolves in the state of Florida.

## References

