

Alexis MacLennan Kenney is a PhD Candidate in Sociology focusing on sociology of knowledge and social movements. She has a BA in Philosophy from University of Chicago, and an MA in Sociology from UNM.

Alex teaches Sociological Theory, (SOC 371) a required, upper division course for all undergraduate Sociology and Criminology majors and minors. This is a challenging course since it requires students to read the original texts of theorists that some may find a bit daunting. However, Alex finds a variety of ways to make her students understand the material and see its relevance to their own lives and communities. For example, one of her homework assignments that asks students to apply Durkheim's theory about religious rituals to their own experience with fans of sports, Stark Trek, or Harry Potter.

In the classroom, Alex makes students feel visible and welcomed. In a class of 50 students, she knows each one by name. She has a superb sense of timing, knowing how to shift focus from group discussion to lecture to applied exercises, and she is excellent at soliciting student participation and engagement.

The Chair of Sociology wrote in her nomination letter:

“Without hesitation, I can say that Alex is one of the most talented instructors I have observed in the 25 years that I have been a professor. She possesses the powerful combination of natural teaching instincts, creative pedagogical techniques, an ability to quickly develop rapport with students, impressive academic knowledge, a commitment to student-centered learning, and an incredible work ethic.”

Alex consistently gets rave student evaluations, such as:

“Ms. MacLennan's charismatic and captivating way of teaching often felt like an interactive performance rather than a lecture. Our group work in class was always very fun and structured.... I would rearrange my entire schedule around to take another course by Ms. MacLennan if it were ever an opportunity.”

In the Spring 2020 semester, when courses had to abruptly be moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Alex quickly figured out how to transform her course to remote instruction. She ended up providing help to one the senior faculty who was less comfortable with online learning; and also provided peer mentoring to her fellow graduate students by offering advice on navigating graduate school and preparing for comprehensive exams. It is clear that Alex finds ways to teach not just undergraduates, but her graduate student peers and faculty, too.

The College of A&S was particularly impressed by Alex's work engaging students in SOC 371, her innovative assignments, and her efforts to be sure that all students could participate in remote learning. These contributions to the university are far beyond the norm for teaching assistants.