

# Teaching in the Social Laboratory and the Mission of SSSP: Some Lessons from the Chicago School\*

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Eighty years ago, Robert Park published an essay titled, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment" (1915). Over the next two decades, Park, his colleagues, and students at the University of Chicago developed these suggestions into an unprecedented program of empirical research on urban life and social problems. The accomplishments of the Chicago School have become a sociological legend. Starting virtually from scratch, a handful of faculty built a thriving research enterprise that shaped social problems inquiry throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

The theme I chose for the 1995 annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, "The Problems and Prospects of Urban Society," is addressed to concerns that motivated the work of Park and his colleagues. Park (1925:22) wrote that the urban "community is in a chronic condition of crisis." Consequently, his research agenda focused on the city as a social laboratory for the investigation of how the media, political movements, and the economy figure into the crises of industrial society. A number of sessions at this meeting of SSSP highlight continuities in the urban crises that Park envisioned as research problems. Many of the papers being presented reflect the methodological and theoretical heritage of the Chicago tradition. The work of community activists that is featured in sessions and with our Social Action Award carries on the grassroots spirit of the Chicago Area Project — in which sociologists worked with community volunteers in social action on the problem of delinquency (Finestone 1976). In these and other respects, our 1995 meeting adds new support for Skura's (1976) claim that the scholarly mission of SSSP is rooted in the rich traditions of Chicago sociology.

For my part, I want to deliver on some promises I made during SSSP elections by presenting a case study of the teaching and research community at Chicago during the "golden era" of urban sociology. When I was a candidate for Vice President, I wrote that SSSP should give "greater attention to the teaching of social problems — a critical practice that annually involves thousands of students and faculty." As a candidate for President, I said that our 1995 meeting should focus on "the troubles of urban society." I can think of no better way to combine these themes than to take you back to Chicago in the 1920s for a field trip to Professor Park's neighborhood. The Chicago School was a unique academic community in which teaching was intimately connected to scientific inquiry into urban problems. Members of the faculty were dedicated and innovative teachers who used the city as an extension of their classrooms. They created a tremendous sense of excitement about sociology among their students.

This sense of excitement comes through clearly in interviews that James Carey (1975) conducted with individuals who were graduate students at Chicago during the golden era of

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the 1920s. Earnest Mowrer (in Carey 1975:155) recalled that students “always seemed to talk sociology — talked shop in other words, whether it was at meetings or otherwise.” Another student, Edgar Thompson (in Carey 1975:155), agreed that they

talked sociology from morning till night. We interrupted a conversation to go to class, and then [would] come back and continue with it after class. Or we continued that class after the bell rang. We went to coffee, we went to lunch, full of this stuff, the excitement of the place.

Herbert Blumer (in Carey 1975:158) recounted that students who engaged in field research in the late 1920s “constituted a group. . .with a tremendous amount of camaraderie and a tremendous amount of close contact with one another.” As Carey (1975:159) concludes, the Chicago School was a vibrant intellectual community in which a “strongly cooperative spirit prevailed” among students and faculty.

This tone was set by the close collegial relationship between the two most influential members of the faculty, Park and Ernest Burgess. In his own reflections on the era, Burgess (1964:3) provided the following account of the daily routine in the office he shared with Park throughout the 1920s:

It was my good fortune to be placed in the same office with Dr. Park. . .and we began a collaboration that continued as long as he was at the University of Chicago. . . . Dr. Park had a most creative mind. He lived and slept research. I never knew when I would get home for dinner, because we would spend whole afternoons discussing both theoretical and practical aspects of sociology and social research.

Students who went to Park and Burgess’s office for a conference with one of them would often get drawn into a discussion with the other as well (Bulmer 1984).

Of course, the faculty and students at Chicago did not spend all their time talking about sociology; they also did an incredible amount of work. The ultimate testimony to the vitality of that academic community — and to the quality of teaching at Chicago — is the impressive body of research produced by students during the 1920s. Park and Burgess’s students developed seminar papers, theses, and dissertations into landmark studies of delinquent gangs, slum and ghetto life, homeless men, and many other urban problems. Park and Burgess also made important contributions through their own research and writing during the heyday of the Chicago School. Yet, they made their most profound and enduring contributions as teachers and mentors, as the architects and twin pillars of a strong academic community.

There will never be another place and time like Chicago in the 1920s, but we can still learn some valuable lessons from the teachers who worked there. In fact, I have my own “Top Ten” list: The Top Ten Lessons from the Chicago School. My list includes a number of innovative features of the teaching process at Chicago that encouraged collaboration and productivity. In addition, we can learn a few lessons from the limitations of the Chicago School. So, here are ten lessons — both constructive and cautionary — from the classrooms and social laboratory of Chicago.

### **Lesson #1: A Few People Can Make a Major Difference**

As I noted earlier, the Chicago School was built by a handful of faculty. During the mid-1920s, the teaching staff of the department consisted of only three sociologists — Park, Burgess, and Ellsworth Faris (Bulmer 1984:110). Faris became department chair in 1925 following the retirement of Albion Small, who had served in that position since 1892 when he founded the department. Faris and Small were effective administrators and capable scholars, but Park and Burgess shouldered most of the responsibility for graduate teaching and research supervision. Although other people and organizational factors contributed to the rise of Chicago sociology, it was Park and Burgess who made the major difference.

Park and Burgess were talented and hard-working individuals; but I agree with Bulmer (1984:95) that their intense collaborative relationship was the catalyst for the development of the Chicago School. Perhaps the main lesson here is that it usually takes more than one person to make a difference. Whereas other early departments tended to center on prominent individuals, such as E.A. Ross at Wisconsin or Franklin Giddings at Columbia, Albion Small promoted a cooperative environment at Chicago — and the Park-Burgess team fit that model well. Park was 22 years older and served as a mentor to Burgess. Early in their careers at Chicago, their team-teaching in introductory sociology led to co-authorship of a classic text that defined the field, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Park and Burgess 1921). They shared responsibility for teaching the graduate seminar in field methods, which put students to work gathering empirical data in the social laboratory of the city. The research that students conducted in this course frequently served as the springboard for theses and dissertations under the supervision of Park or Burgess. Park and Burgess's personal styles and intellectual skills differed; but, in their multiple collaborations as teachers, colleagues, co-authors, and academic leaders, they reinforced and complemented each other extremely well. This is how they made a difference during the golden era, and the importance of collaboration is the most basic lesson of the Chicago School.

## **Lesson #2: The Excitement of Scientific Sociology**

Much of the excitement and collective energy of the academic community at Chicago was generated by a strong sense of mission — the mission of building a science of sociology. The excitement that pervades students' accounts of their research during the era reflects a conviction that they were making a contribution to this mission, that their work was loaded with scientific value.

Park and his colleagues saw their scientific research on the city as an inductive enterprise, analogous to field biology or astronomy. Park's (1952) theoretical work on human ecology portrayed urban communities and other structural features of the urban environment as products of natural forces. In his view, the inexorable processes of competition, conflict, and differentiation that formed "natural areas" in the city were no more controllable than was the weather or the movement of the planets. Park's vision of the "Big Picture" mapped out a natural world that was waiting to be discovered, explored, and charted scientifically.

This mission of scientific discovery and understanding held a powerful appeal for students. Guided by Park and Burgess's conceptual models of natural areas and concentric zones, students went into the field to bring back new empirical knowledge from the social laboratory. For instance, as Edgar Thompson (in Carey 1975:155) recalled, "Thrasher and Landesco were bringing back stuff about [gangs, and] Ruth Cavan was bringing stuff back about suicides." Students spent hours discussing and analyzing the scientific significance of their findings in seminars, in meetings of student organizations, and in conferences with Park or Burgess. Although Park treated the mission of building a scientific sociology as serious business, it is clear that students who took part in this exciting enterprise had a great deal of fun in the process.

We should not lose sight of the importance and excitement of science in our own teaching. If the inattention to scientific method in recent social problems texts is any indication, students often leave our undergraduate classes with little understanding of how scientific evidence is used — and misused — in social problems inquiry and in claims-making activity. We should not only teach students the rules and logic of scientific method, but we should also show them how science works. We can convey some of the excitement of research on social problems by telling students about our own "field experiences." Yet, as the Chicago

sociologists knew, there is no substitute for getting students directly and collectively involved in the process of scientific exploration and discovery.

### **Lesson #3: Cumulative Research and Social Solidarity**

Park, Burgess, and Faris encouraged collaborative work among students in their graduate classes (Carey 1975:156-58). Young students were often assigned to work with more experienced students on group research projects in seminars. This practice produced strong bonds between students and led to publication of a number of collective works.

Perhaps the most crucial feature of the collaborative projects assigned in seminars was the cumulative nature of many research assignments. This was especially the case with Burgess's map-making assignments. Helen McGill Hughes (in Bulmer 1984:155) describes the cumulative quality of graduate students' work on "spot maps" as follows:

We were given seven-foot-long blank maps of Chicago, where only the community boundaries had been entered. On these we each plotted the index we were dealing with. [These maps were then] superimposed upon spot maps made by others of us — locating alcoholics, or divorced couples, or persons of a specific ethnicity, for instance, — one could instantly see that these indices were lacking on some parts of the city, while in other local communities they clustered.

Through these mapping exercises, students could literally see how the work of individuals made interdependent, cumulative contributions to the analysis of patterns and relationships between social phenomena.

Similarly, Burgess's concentric zone model was the organizing scheme for cumulative ecological research on the distribution of social problems in the urban environment. As Smith (1988:28) notes, "There is no more famous diagram in social science than that combination of half-moon and dart board depicting the five concentric urban zones [in] Chicago." Burgess's (1925) initial presentation of this model in the mid-1920s included an inventory of student research projects that would provide a cumulative empirical picture of the patterning and correlates of social disorganization.

Whereas ecological research on rates of social problems provided insights into overlapping and correlated phenomena, a different kind of cumulative process was apparent in case studies of distinctive forms of urban life in Chicago. Here, a mosaic portrait of diverse and contrasting "natural areas" was built up as individual students added colorful pieces like *The Hobo* (Anderson 1923), *The Ghetto* (Wirth 1928), and *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Zorbaugh 1929) into a composite "Big Picture."

It doesn't take a Durkheim to grasp how these parallel and differentiated forms of cumulative work strengthened the solidarity and sense of collective purpose in the scientific community at Chicago. Aside from reminding us of the value of involving students in group projects, the fundamental lesson and real genius of the teaching process at Chicago was the use of coordinating schemes — maps and conceptual frameworks — that represented scientific knowledge as an emergent, collective product of the interdependent contributions of group members. Years before Blumer (1966:540) used the term "joint action" to refer to the "larger collective form of action that is constituted by the fitting together of the lines of behavior of the separate participants," he and his fellow graduate students were learning to conceive of scientific work as a larger, cumulative form of joint action.

### **Lesson #4: Constructive Criticism and Teaching by Editing**

The intellectual environment at Chicago encouraged debate and criticism. This critical activity was an integral part of the research and training process. As Carey notes (1975:156),

graduate students “were very critical of each other’s work, and there were periodic meetings to review what each was doing.” Meetings of the Society for Social Research provided a forum for the discussion of research projects and exchange of constructive criticism among faculty and advanced graduate students (Bulmer 1983). By all accounts, Park was the energizing force behind the critical spirit of the Chicago School.

It is important to distinguish Park’s constructive contributions as a thoughtful and incisive critical analyst from his opinionated and divisive attacks on “reformers,” “do-gooders,” and, occasionally, statisticians. Even though he could be quick to prejudge and dismiss viewpoints that he saw as antithetical to “scientific sociology,” most of his students and colleagues came to know him as a patient mentor and constructive critic who tried to bring out the best in others’ work. Drawing upon skills he learned as a journalist, Park practiced “teaching by editing” (Hughes 1979:188). Although some students were initially devastated by Park’s pointed critiques of their writing, they found that he would spend hours with them in his office talking through conceptual, organizational, and stylistic problems in their work, and suggesting how they could move beyond those problems. Park’s aim as a teacher-editor was not to impose a particular intellectual framework, but to show students how to think analytically and write clearly about their own research (Bulmer 1984). As Park advised one of his students, Pauline Young (in Hughes 1979:185), “You are not writing for professors; train yourself to write for the general public.” Many of these students became excellent writers and reached a broad audience by contributing monographs to the University of Chicago Sociological Series — one of the richest legacies of Park’s constructive criticism and teaching by editing.

The teaching of Howard Becker (1983, 1986), one of the leading figures of the “second” Chicago School (Fine 1995), illustrates how we can introduce our own students to the benefits of collaborative work and constructive criticism. In his seminar, “Freshman English for Graduate Students,” Becker reworks Park’s practice of teaching by editing into a collective activity, in which students edit and critique each others’ writing. Anyone who has read Becker’s account of his seminar — or who, like myself, has taught a similar course — will understand why students who participate in this collaborative process of editing, revising, and critical give-and-take not only become better writers, but better colleagues as well.

### **Lesson #5: Research Problems and Methodological Eclecticism**

Despite the myth that research at Chicago during the 1920s relied almost exclusively on qualitative evidence, both Bulmer (1984) and Harvey (1987) show that, in actual practice, faculty and students were methodologically catholic. Very few theses or dissertations relied on a single method of data collection, and many were quite eclectic in drawing upon qualitative and quantitative evidence (Bulmer 1984). For instance, Harvey Zorbaugh based his classic study of *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929) on archival documents from the Chicago Historical Society, quantitative data from public records, interviews with residents and officials, field observation, and other qualitative evidence from reports and newspapers.

Although Park was outspoken about limitations and misuses of statistical data, he nonetheless worked closely with students and colleagues who employed quantitative techniques in their research. For example, Emory Borgardus credited Park with the initial idea and guidance for the development of his social distance scale (Bulmer 1984:154). Burgess had been involved in quantitative research before he joined the faculty at Chicago, and he “encouraged students to make use of statistical data wherever appropriate” — often in conjunction with case studies and other qualitative evidence (Harvey 1987:87-89). However, both Park and Burgess taught that the process of sociological inquiry should not be driven by a preoccupation with statistical “technique.” As Cottrell (in Harvey 1987:88) recalled, Park objected to

“people who started on a problem with ‘lets get some quantitative data’ ” rather than starting with a conceptually-focused research problem that was grounded in direct experience of the social world. And, for students at Chicago during the golden era, a primary source of that direct experience and of promising research problems was fieldwork in the social laboratory of the city.

### **Lesson #6: Fieldwork and Sociological Insight**

For Park and Burgess, fieldwork was more than a research method. It was an essential part of the teaching and practice of sociology. They saw no substitute for direct experience — or at least first-hand observation — for gaining sociological insight into the nature of urban life. Park not only encouraged students in his courses to “get the seat of your pants dirty” on the doorsteps of flophouses or in hotel lounges, but, on many occasions, he served as a field guide on lengthy explorations of the city. For instance, Park spent an entire day taking Norman Hayner on a tour of locations and agencies that related to Hayner’s research on hotel life (Bulmer 1984:97). Burgess also “conducted excursions to give his classes a close look at some of the communities and institutions of special sociological interest” (Faris 1970:64). For students at Chicago, direct observation of characteristic natural areas and neighborhoods in the social laboratory was no less important than are basic anatomy lessons in biology.

Members of SSSP are applying this lesson in contemporary social laboratories as different as Dayton, Ohio, and Los Angeles. Pestello et al. (1996) describe a comprehensive reorganization of the undergraduate curriculum and research program at the University of Dayton around a “community-based” model inspired by the Chicago School. Starting with an elective 15-hour field experience for students enrolled in Social Problems, a series of courses involving field observation, ethnographic work, and internships provides students with “the chance to explore the community in progressively greater depth” as they move from their first year to graduation (Pestello et al. 1996:153). This community-based model encourages collaborative research among students and faculty, where undergraduates are active participants in projects focusing on questions of interest to community agencies as well as on broader sociological issues.

As Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff (1994) report from their work with students in Introductory Sociology at the University of Southern California, well-designed community service-learning programs also provide valuable opportunities for sociological insight through field experiences. The Joint Education Project (JEP) places students in volunteer positions in schools and adult learning centers in low-income Latino and African American communities in Los Angeles. In the Introductory Sociology course, students in JEP placements prepare weekly journals and respond to “academic questions” that ask them to relate their field experiences to sociological topics being covered in class. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff note limitations of community service-learning projects that do not provide active mentoring, constructive criticism, and conceptual guidance to students. However, when students are adequately prepared to think sociologically about their field experiences in ethnically diverse urban communities, even these brief introductions to the social laboratory can “make classroom and textbook concepts come alive” and spark transformations in students’ perspectives (1994:253).

### **Lesson #7: The Academic Community as a Process**

A dual concern with *community* and *process* runs through Park and Burgess’s research and writing on the city. They focused on growth and change in the urban environment, and on

the “natural” processes of competition and conflict, invasion and succession that shaped and modified urban communities. They saw the community — with viable local institutions and thriving primary group relations — as the main line of defense against the crises and disorganizing conditions of urban life. In this view, urban communities could survive and adjust to urban conditions through on-going processes of adaptation and reorganization (Park 1952:152-153). The successful community was a community in motion, a community that grows, adapts, and remakes itself.

This processual conception of community, which was central to Park and Burgess’s work on urban problems, guided and animated their work with students. Park was quite explicit about this in a paper he presented at the end of his career, “Methods of Teaching: Impressions and a Verdict” (1941). In his reflections on teachers who had influenced him, Park (1941:39) recalled John Dewey’s characteristic method of teaching:

[H]is students always seemed to have had the notion that he and they were somehow engaged in a common enterprise. With [Dewey] learning was always . . . an adventure; an adventure which was taking us beyond the limits of safe and certified knowledge into the realm of the problematic and unknown.

He was also greatly impressed by Booker T. Washington’s methods of grassroots, participatory education at Tuskegee Institute, which, in Park’s words, “illustrate what every form of education might well strive to be, namely, at once a voyage of discovery, and a means and medium for . . . participation in the life of a community” (1941:44). In summing up his own views, Park argued that sociology must move beyond scholasticism and, like communities, adapt to conditions in the real world: “Sociology must be empirical and experimental. It must . . . learn by doing; it must explore, invent, discover, and try things out. So must students; so must education” (1941:45).

As Park’s reflections suggest, the Chicago faculty did not see themselves as keepers of a scholastic tradition to be passed on to their students. Rather, they viewed graduate teaching and research as a developmental process to which students themselves contributed. This participatory, processual approach to graduate education made a sharp break with earlier academic traditions. In turn, to advance the mission of SSSP in our own teaching and scholarship, we must transcend some serious limitations in the theory and practice of “scientific sociology” at Chicago.

### **Lesson #8: The Narrow Vision of “Natural” Processes**

Despite the progress they made in the study of social interaction in natural settings and community processes, the Chicago sociologists failed to contribute substantially to an understanding of the political, structural, and historical context of these processes. Critics have argued that limitations in the ecological framework and community-level research of the Chicago School contributed to the decline of the department’s preeminence after the early 1930s (Gottdiener 1994). In fact, the Chicago sociologists failed to attend to political movements and economic structures that had a direct bearing on their scientific studies of local communities and institutions in the 1920s.

At the same time that Park and Burgess were writing about impersonal ecological processes that created distinctive, segregated “natural areas,” the Chicago Real Estate Board was spearheading a massive legal campaign in white communities to confine African Americans within the boundaries of the “Black Belt” (Philpott 1991). The major weapon in this campaign was the restrictive covenant, which was a “contractual agreement among property owners that none of them would permit a ‘colored person’ to occupy, lease, or buy his property” (1991:191). The Real Estate Board sent speakers to property owners’ association meetings, Kiwanis clubs, churches, and other community organizations to warn of an impending

invasion of “colored blockbusters.” In the face of this putative threat, white property owners readily agreed to defend their neighborhoods with the “model” restrictive covenant developed by the Real Estate Board. By the end of the 1920s, the Black Belt was solidly sealed off from surrounding white communities by a network of restrictive covenants.

During this same period, one of Park’s most talented students, Everett C. Hughes (1931), was conducting his dissertation research on the institutional history and activities of the Chicago Real Estate Board. Yet, in a section on “Negro Housing,” Hughes included only a vague reference to “organizations of real estate men. . . trying to present a solid wall to the negro invasion.” Instead, Hughes took the view that “the negro quarter. . . is a *natural area*,” and offered an ecological indictment of “blockbusting” as a practice that “takes profit by accelerating a natural process of neighborhood deterioration” (1931:94-95, emphasis in original).

There was hardly anything “natural” about racial segregation in Chicago during the 1920s. It was maintained by a highly organized coalition of political, business, and community organizations. And, there was nothing “natural” about the history of economic exploitation of immigrants, concerted and violent oppression of African Americans, and political dominance of the city of Chicago by industrial and finance capital. These real historical forces that shaped the class, race, and ethnic divisions of Chicago were obscured in Park and Burgess’s ahistorical vision of natural ecological processes. We must teach our students to be wary of any claims that assign the products of human agency and social relations to the forces of “nature.”

### **Lesson #9: Diversity and the Boundaries of Community**

Although Park’s vision of scientific sociology provided the Chicago School with a clear and unifying mission, it excluded other viewpoints and other traditions of inquiry. Park drew sharp boundaries around his scientific community with aggressive attacks on “do-gooders” who offered alternative approaches to urban problems. In his zeal to insulate science from reformism, he diminished the earlier contributions of women and men who did pioneering studies of poverty, housing, and labor exploitation in Chicago (Deegan 1988). Christian sociologists who helped build the department and feminist scholars who worked out of Hull-House were essentially purged from the record of scientific sociology in the 1920s. Park’s hostility toward social reform was a major source of the tension between his department and the Department of Social Service Administration, whose most distinguished faculty, Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge, were women.

Within the sociology department itself, Vivien Palmer performed valuable “invisible labor” in working closely with graduate students as research coordinator (Bulmer 1984). Palmer wrote one of the earliest texts on research methods (Palmer 1928) and was directly responsible for a major effort to map the 75 “natural areas” of Chicago, which is typically credited to Burgess alone. Even though she coordinated “all the research being done in the department,” organized student work groups, and supervised their field investigations (Bulmer 1984:118-119), her crucial contributions as a scholar and mentor are overlooked in many accounts of the golden era (e.g., Faris 1970). Like other women who were at Chicago during the 1920s, Palmer was relegated to a subordinate, supportive position within that patriarchal academic community (see Deegan 1995; Hughes 1973).

If we value the idea of a tightly integrated academic community, we should also be aware of its contradictions. Strong communities, like the circle of scientific sociologists at Chicago, may form rigid, uncompromising boundaries that exclude alternative viewpoints and close off avenues for productive exchange. Following the Chicago and SSSP tradition of interactionist research on labeling and social control, we must examine our moral, political, and professional boundaries critically, and consider carefully whom we have forgotten or



treated as “outsiders” (Becker 1963). Neither can we adopt a traditional image of the patriarchal rural town like Park’s boyhood home of Redwing, Minnesota, as a model for our academic communities (see Park 1973; Raushenbush 1979). Instead, in SSSP and in our relations with colleagues and students, we should look to the urban mosaic — with its patterns of diversity and contrast — as a more inclusive and authentic vision of the Good Community.

### **Lesson #10: Teaching as Activism**

The teachers of the Chicago School were agents of change. Through their work with students during the golden era, they transformed sociology and made a lasting difference in our understanding of the city and its problems. Despite their own reservations about the prospects of altering the natural course of community life, Park and Burgess provided their students with tools and opportunities to pursue more progressive visions of the sociological mission. Based on their training and research in the social laboratory, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay returned to the community in the Chicago Area Projects and developed grassroots organizations to take action on the problem of delinquency (Finestone 1976). Students from the golden era — Herbert Blumer and Louis Wirth — and many later Chicago graduates were actively involved in the founding and early leadership of SSSP (Skura 1976). In my own area of drug and alcohol studies, Chicago-trained scholars like Alfred Lindesmith, Howard Becker, and Joseph Gusfield used qualitative research as a powerful critical tool in landmark studies of the moral politics of drug problems and social control (Galliher 1995). We owe many advances in our mission of engaged scholarship to the teachers who engaged their students in a mission of scientific discovery at Chicago.

Now, as we near the end of the twentieth century, the scope and complexity of urban problems present a daunting challenge for teaching, research, and social action. In an era where powerful national media and a global political economy shape the images and realities of urban life, the kind of “laboratory work” that students conducted 70 years ago in Chicago may no longer seem relevant. Yet, what better lens is there than direct experience to correct distorted views of urban communities and to gain insight into the human consequences of broader economic transformations? Although urban crises have advanced and multiplied, so too have the critical tools that we can put at our students’ disposal for sociological comprehension and political analysis of those crises. Developments in constructionist, feminist, and Marxist theory have overcome important constraints of the Chicago sociologists’ vision of urban problems, inequality, and oppression. We can draw upon the history of Chicago and other cities to show our students that, if urban crises are to be resolved, these changes will not occur “naturally.” Progressive change can only come through the action of people — collaborative action in neighborhoods, in grassroots organizations, and in positions of civic and professional leadership. If our students go back to their communities and put this lesson to work, we too will have made a difference and advanced the mission of SSSP.

### **Conclusion**

The honor of serving as your President is especially gratifying because I join a line of scholars, teachers, and activists that reaches back to the first President of SSSP, Ernest W. Burgess. I want to conclude with a proposal that I think would be a fitting tribute to Burgess’s contributions to the academic community at Chicago and to the teaching mission of SSSP. In addition to our annual awards for distinguished achievements in scholarship, humanistic service, and social action, I believe we should recognize the work of communities of

scholars, like Burgess, Park, and their colleagues, who have made a difference through collaborative contributions to teaching. I propose an annual SSSP Teaching Community Award that would honor a partnership, department, or some other teaching collective that has maintained the best traditions of teaching in the Chicago School and of the progressive mission of our Society. I think a collective award would be consistent with the spirit of teaching in the social laboratory — where collaboration in teaching and the pursuit of knowledge gave individuals an opportunity to do far more than they ever could have done by themselves.

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