

NCSA 2023 Presidential Address: Sociology Strong: What Does This Mean for the Profession?

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Keywords: Presidential Address; Sociology; Advocacy

Publication Type: NCSA Presidential Address

Preferred Citation: Towns, Tangela G. "NCSA 2023 Presidential Address: Sociology Strong: What Does This Mean for the Profession?" *Sociation*, 24(1), 12-13.



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Introduction

I pose this question: Sociology Strong; what does this mean? It may conceptualize the historical reflections and contributions of the discipline of Sociology. To me, it reflects action-based work. It suggests putting our toolbox of sociological skills to use.

Today, I challenge those of us in discipline and within academia to think beyond the classroom, whether you are faculty or a student scholar. I urge you to share these skills with our student scholars and to serve and engage our communities. Use your proficiencies to apply our research skills to assist local businesses so that they may thrive, or to advocate for empowerment through policy development as we network with organizations that serve our communities. I challenge you to use our sociological skills to improve upon and build a stronger collective through public sociology, as we have the power to shape public agendas through engagement with our communities.

The times are upon us that we move beyond our classrooms to enlighten the general public and implement change. Employ our agency as professors, community sociologists, student scholars, and activists [collectively] to fight for justice and societal advancement.

As academicians, attendance at research conferences provides us with a platform to share ideas and research findings about some element of a social problem. Whether it concerns education, family, race, crime, social inequities, or health care. Many of us in the social sciences all harvest the passion and elements

for change at some level. Many faculty in academia conduct research and publish; but where does the information land and what is the ultimate impact? I challenge us to think deeper about the work we do. Going beyond the classroom with our work adds value to our discipline, our communities, and our lives.

Sociology Strong...

Oh, the lives that we change based on the data we share, the programs we assess, and the communities we serve through community service-learning projects, our grantsmanship, and our interactive engagement and experiential learning.

Sociology Strong could sing the echos of W.E.B. Dubois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). The first of its kind; embedding sociological research to highlight racial and health disparities, and social and political inequities within an ignored & marginalized community throughout the North Ward of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The work advocated for structural improvements and made political demands to improve upon the African American community. The research findings can be generalized and applied to social disparities of the current era.

Sociology Strong reminds me of the works shared by many of our scholars at the NCSA Conferences. The grit that it takes to work alongside or in the trenches with the community. We honor the work of local North Carolina sociologists such as Dr. Daniel Rose (of Winston-Salem State University) and Dr. Tyson Brown (of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). As sociologists, we often walk the

community in the fight for change. We use our skills to organize, advocate, and direct centers that supply the needed tools and data resources which are often powerful enough to create impactful social change.

Sociology Strong: a concept that I would say needs added visibility instead of dismissal. The visibility that exudes the skills of sociologists (both inside and outside of the “ivy walls”) includes: demographic work, program evaluations, social activism, community organization, data analysis, and more. With our sociological skills, we solve real social problems, organize communities, analyze data, as well as assess structural and institutional concerns. In the present climate, we must reveal our strengths and our value. Through our sociological lens, we not only identify causal problems, but illuminate techniques and methods of organizational change. So, today, I charge each of us to present our toolbox, pack the toolbox with items needed beyond the classroom, and head towards an area that you know needs sociological attention. Pull out a hammer along the way, add nails to mend broken fences. Let’s help restore and strengthen partnerships along your path!

We may start with conducting work through organizations such as North Carolina Sociological Association (NCSA). Sociology Strong through the work of NCSA, as we wish to see it, is envisioned by interactive workshops and community events over the course of the year. It is active student-based committees and a network of partnerships (community sociologists, faculty and students work collaboratively) that stretches from our North Carolina coast to across the mountain range! We encourage you to work with us to enrich our communities, community colleges, colleges and universities. Let us build together, let’s increase the visibility and value of the discipline of sociology together.

Collectively, we have the power and agency to create social change. At our annual conferences our panelists, past presidents, and presenters share pieces of their toolbox. From this, let us depart from the conference having added something new to our personal toolbox so that we may do the work beyond the classroom to build an improved community through justice, power and agency!

References

Dubois, W.E.B. (1899). *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Author Biography

Tangela Towns, PhD. is an Associate Professor of Sociology and the Director of the Office of Undergraduate Research at Winston-Salem State University. Three key words encapsulate Dr. Tangela Towns’ professional brand: **empowerment, advocacy, and awareness.** Dr. Towns’ teaching and mentorship empowers young scholars to think critically and with the confidence to be aware of human behavior and interaction, social systems, understanding systems, all while having the skill to advocate for social change. Her scholarship focuses on health behaviors, health disparities, health outcomes (obesity and diabetes) and food security, food environment/access in the African American Community. She teaches Sociology of Mental Illness, African American Health and Society, Sociology of the Family, and Medical Sociology. Her research advocates for improvements in despaired communities, informs the community by empowering those with the agency to utilize best practices to improve health outcomes.