

SCHOOLS

Jerry Seinfeld the Sociologist?

Yes, he is — not that there's anything wrong with that

By Fred A. Mohr
Staff writer

Walk into Tim Delaney's office at the State University College at Oswego and the first thing you'll notice is a framed 2-by-3½-foot poster of Kramer, from the "Seinfeld" TV series.

The assistant professor of sociology said it's a good icebreaker, especially with younger students.

"They come in and don't know what to expect," he said. "I find it puts them at ease. . . . They all know the show."

Delaney is a big fan of the 1990s comedy starring Jerry Seinfeld, who attended Oswego State, Michael Richards, Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Jason Alexander.

He's used examples from the series' 180 episodes to highlight sociological issues in the classroom for several years. But he began to realize that a show about four self-centered urbanites and the mundane details of their daily lives might be worthy of a book and its own course.



IN HIS NEW BOOK, "Seinology," State University College at Oswego sociology teacher Tim Delaney uses examples from the landmark television comedy "Seinfeld" to teach basic sociology

lessons. Show co-creator Jerry Seinfeld and star attended Oswego State for four semesters from 1972 to 1973. His office includes a framed portrait of show character Kramer.

Photo courtesy of the State University College at Oswego

"It may have been a show about nothing in that it didn't try to solve any great social ills," he said. "But it was really a show about everything; sexuality, religion, race, aging, death, the family, every social institution there is. . . . There're so many sociological insights that I thought there's got to be a book here."

That was the genesis of "Seinology," Delaney's new book, which also will be the textbook for a course, "The Sociology of Seinfeld," a 300-level class that will be offered next year. Each chapter uses an episode to highlight a sociological issue and includes a catchphrase from the show.

For instance, a discussion about religion could be keyed to

the "Happy Festivus everyone" episode, where George's father, dissatisfied with Christmas and Hanukkah, creates his own bizarre holiday.

"We can talk about the way people who are unhappy with organized religion may engage in their own secular celebrations," he said. "So you have Festivus, a festival for the rest of us."

Delaney said the show's humor makes it easier to introduce sensitive subjects like religion, race and prejudice. And though "Seinology" is intended as an introductory textbook, it's also written and organized to appeal to fans of the series and pop culture.

"With 180 episodes they cover almost every possible situation," he said. "I think it will be popular. . . . Anybody who

At bookstores near you

"Seinology," published by Prometheus Books, retails for \$19 and is available at major book stores.

liked 'Seinfeld' will like the book."

Delaney researched the book by turning on his television. The TBS and Fox channels rerun two episodes each on weeknights, he said.

"I treated the project as if it was a night class, and the show was my professor," he said.

Delaney, who also teaches courses titled, "The Sociology of Sports" and "Gangs in American Society," is already thinking about a follow up tome.

"I'm pretty sure I'm going to write about 'The Simpsons' next," he said.