

## **Teaching Philosophy**

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“You know it when you see it.” That’s often how a great teacher is identified. And for good reason – it is difficult to put into words the characteristics and qualities that make a teacher stand out. As a first-generation college student at a small liberal arts school, I was bright-eyed but lost. The quality of teaching and mentorship that I received led me to my major(s), graduate school, and, ultimately, a career in academia. I take teaching seriously because frankly, I would not be where I am without great teaching. My experiences as a student and, more recently, as a teacher, have led me to several conclusions about how to be effective. I outline those below.

First, my primary goal for student learning, and an overarching theme of my approach to teaching is to foster skills that have real-world applicability. By and large, college is a time of discovery. Naturally, many students are choosing a major and developing their own interests, but they are also becoming citizens and finding their place in a global society. It is my responsibility to not only promote students’ intellectual development through content, but also to develop critical thinking skills and to encourage students to discover new, sometimes challenging ways of thinking about the social and political world. For instance, I was a graduate instructor for a course on Political Strategy and Debate. In class, students were placed in small teams and required to participate in a formal debate, typically assigned a position that was in conflict with their stated preference. In the real world, many of them will never need to participate in a formal debate; however, most of them will need to communicate effectively to their peers, to develop the interpersonal skills necessary for working in groups, to take a perspective that they might not otherwise choose, and to use their own strengths to find a solution to a problem.

My second goal for student learning is to teach political science as a discipline. That is, rather than focusing solely on civics and textbook-style learning, political science has a research tradition that involves various methodological approaches, standards of evaluation, and theoretical traditions. And while these may not all be discussed in any single course, an Introduction to American Government course, for example, ought to not only highlight the history of American political parties, but also draw attention to the way in which survey research has informed our perspectives on public opinion and game theoretic models have transformed our understanding of American institutions, among others approaches. To do so, all of my courses will involve reading recently published and/or seminal political science research. What’s more, I’ll encourage students to approach course content as scholars: to hone in on key arguments and evidence, critique assumptions, and engage in peer discussions that emphasize the relative nature of politics.

To achieve these goals, I use a broad range of teaching methods. These include interactive techniques such as in-class debates and small group work, student generated discussion questions, and PowerPoint lectures. To gauge how well the goals of the course are being met, I employ a variety of

techniques. For students' benefit, I strive to maintain a consistent degree of both low-stakes feedback and more formal assessment. In the short term, I generally use three approaches: two-minute papers, wherein students are asked to write a brief ungraded essay in class on a particular course topic, quizzes, and at the conclusion of many sessions, a discussion of student perspectives on the muddiest or most unclear topic from that day. In the long term, I have used term papers, exams, and final presentations to assess how well the goals of the course are being met. When providing feedback on term papers, two techniques have proved particularly helpful. First, I have asked students to engage in "metacognition" and offer informal comments in the margins of their draft about what they were thinking while writing a particular paragraph or section of the paper. Often, students' comments indicate where they may be struggling with particular language or what their thought process might have been and, crucially, their level of understanding is revealed in a manner that the paper itself typically has not done. Second, I have also used screencasting to provide visual and audio feedback on written work. By allowing me to capture video of the student's draft while discussing my feedback aloud, I've found the feedback to be more extensive and specific, though not significantly more time consuming to create. Students report that the tone of voice and added specificity make it feel as if they stopped by office hours, thus making it more intelligible overall. What's more, I always solicit feedback directly from students at mid-semester. Once received, I summarize it for the class and make changes where appropriate to address what is and is not working well.

I believe that an effective teacher pays particular attention to the learning environment, striving for one that fosters student engagement on a regular basis. Specifically, I encourage collaboration, with myself and with peers, because working side by side fosters creativity, participation, and gives students hands-on experience. Broadly, the interactive teaching methods I use are intentionally varied and designed to take account of how students learn in different ways. To further encourage participation, I seek to create an inclusive and respectful learning environment. For example, when engaging in large group discussion, I rarely call on the first person to raise their hand, thus developing a norm of waiting for several students to be prepared to respond before moving forward. It is a small change that I believe makes a difference in the classroom environment.

Effective teachers tend to be easy to recognize yet difficult to become. Whether moderating a lively debate over a current issue or introducing a new concept, I strive to help my students develop a skill set that extends beyond the classroom. Through a wide range of teaching methods and assessment techniques, I hope to foster their curiosity and engagement with course material on a regular basis. Politics is often passionate – but by building a foundation of mutual respect, setting goals, and monitoring how well the goals are being met - passion in the classroom is always a good thing. Looking ahead, I expect to spend much of my career revising and updating my teaching methods in an attempt to maintain a high level of effectiveness. It is a challenge that I am eager to meet.