

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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On the first days of teaching discussion section for POL 51 The Scientific Study of Politics, many students come in convinced they are not able to code or that the class is the most difficult for undergraduates in political science. The course is often their first encounter with statistics and coding so many are resolved to need to struggle throughout the quarter. By the final weeks, some of those same, discouraged students are debugging their own code and arguing with evidence what a result actually means. The shift from apprehension to genuine curiosity is the moment I strive for in teaching. I truly believe that people hold intrinsic curiosity and my central goal is to build an environment to tap into that curiosity. This interest guides students through difficult material.

My aim as an instructor is for students to leave the class with transferable, analytical skills rather than temporary recall of facts, with the confidence to see themselves as critical thinkers, and with the ability to ask good questions. In political science, the subject is often real, lived experiences for the students. This means the aim is to help students move from hearing claims to evaluating them by distinguishing between well-informed arguments and confident claims. This may be interpreting numeric representations of data or theories of identity and representation. I see the field as a set of tools for thinking about power, evidence, and democracy, and I want students to walk away being able to use them to evaluate unassigned questions.

To reach these goals, I connect new material and complex theories to what students already know by situating abstract ideas in concrete, recognizable cases. It can be easier to grasp a topic when it is anchored to a current event, familiar institution, or a salient political debate. For instance, walking students through bad data visualizations pulled from current news sources shows the stakes of good design and ties directly to course concepts, or using real U.S. election and survey data to illustrate the distinction between correlation and causation makes the idea less abstract. Bringing in real data, current methods, and my own research questions helps ground canonical theories in the contemporary. Varying classroom resources is also a key component. Some concepts are best to read, others to see, and others to do or apply. Implementing focused explanation alongside a worked example, paired student discussion, or brief writing prompt about the same concept can help students digest the material. Breaking up lectures with learning activities keeps attention and gives students a chance to digest the materials and test their understanding where the stakes are low.

One-on-one conversations in office hours also offer a place to clarify complex materials, with students often stating these moments help carry them through more difficult weeks.

Getting students in the door takes deliberate effort. I say directly that office hours let me get to know them and see the effort behind their work. Additionally, office hours are a place to troubleshoot code or concepts one-on-one that may get lost in a large lecture. Attendance in office hours also contributes to participation grades, and I aim to stay as available as possible with regular and by appointment office hours.

Teaching across audiences of undergraduates, graduate students, and a range of scholars, it is important to meet students where they are rather than where I happen to be. Most students are not desiring the same career path or wanting to become experts in the field. It is crucial to format learning objectives to students' goals instead of my own trajectory.

That same attentiveness to students shapes the classroom climate I try to build. Having a classroom where students feel they belong makes rigorous learning possible when students don't have to first spend their energy protecting themselves or feeling guarded. On the first day of class, I spend real time walking through classroom policies, directing students to relevant campus resources, and asking directly what might make discussion most useful to them. This is a top priority in courses on gender, race, and identity where discussion may become charged. The conversations must be productive by hearing out differing positions without reacting against them, inviting students to argue opposing views, and asking them to consider limits in their own arguments. When a comment is underdeveloped, off-topic, or could be perceived the wrong way, I try to offer an alternative perspective or point the student toward relevant resources rather than simply shutting the idea down. Students engage more openly when the classroom is a place to think out loud.

Assessments are designed to build understanding rather than simply measuring it. Using Bloom's taxonomy considerations, I design assignments staging from recognition and explanation towards application, analysis, and creativity. I aim to move students over the course from defining concepts to thinking of their own research questions. Mixing problem sets, short analytic writing, and exams build a place for students to demonstrate their thinking and understanding.

My own teaching is something to be tested and revised. I gather feedback early and often to adjust over the course of a class. Using direct student feedback tells me when to reconsider an explanation, use different examples, or modify an activity to reach the learning goals. Teaching across introductory to upper level undergraduate courses, graduate methods, and mixed-audience programs has made me more adaptable. I expect to continue to learn from every new group of students I work with. I remain consistent in my ultimate goal: to motivate students to tap into their own curiosity and leave my class more capable, confident, and eager to keep asking questions.