

Teaching Philosophy

Teaching in political science requires the communication and exploration of puzzles, theories, and evidence in ways that foster an understanding that is more expansive than these constituent parts. I have had the opportunity to teach a broad range of courses on topics such as introduction to world politics, political institutions and behavior, politics of development, European politics, and media and public opinion, as both a graduate student instructor and as a primary instructor. I view teaching as an opportunity to help students develop the habit of thinking scientifically about the social world, and, quite frankly, to share why the things I spend my time researching are interesting and relevant. With these dual goals in mind, my approach to teaching focuses on fundamental puzzles, testable theories, and empirical evaluation of those theories through application to both historical and contemporary cases. Students ought to leave a course with both an intuition for the material and the ability to critically evaluate new arguments and evidence in the future. While facts are needed to evaluate the validity of competing arguments, they are easier to acquire than fundamental logics. The emphasis on logic and how to evaluate supporting evidence provides students with skills they can build upon throughout their education and lives. However, understanding the implications of theory and evidence for normative values is also important. I encourage students to challenge the theories they encounter, think about how they fail to explain puzzles they see, and what these theories imply for how they view and interact with the world.

My teaching competency is demonstrated in part through student evaluations. For example, after the Spring 2014 upper level undergraduate *Contemporary European Politics* course that I designed and taught as the primary instructor, 12 out of 15 student respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that I was an excellent teacher; 14 of 15 strongly agreed with the statement that they learned a great deal from the course. I value my relationship with students and work to emulate the respect and mentorship I have received from professors at Michigan. As such, I take great pride in the fact that in evaluations for the classes I have taught in the past year, *all* respondents have agreed with the statement that I treat students with respect, each time placing me comfortably in the highest quartile of all instructors at the University of Michigan (the highest reference category provided). In the evaluations from my Spring 2014 course attached below, you can read the positive feedback and constructive criticisms I received from students. I believe that their willingness to share concrete suggestions for how to improve the course come from knowing that their contributions are valued.

A large part of the value I provide to students is finding ways to help them not only understand important concepts, but connect these concepts to each other and the broader world. I use lecture, assigned reading, active participation, collaboration, written assignments, and examinations to structure learning. I believe that students learn best by explaining the material to one another, and my methods are designed around this. My lectures provide students with necessary background, explication of key concepts, and clarification of how to evaluate evidence. I assign textbook chapters in combination with peer-reviewed publications and some popular press articles from sources such as *Der Spiegel* or policy briefs from government agencies and private consulting firms such as Stratfor. This combination of readings provides students with broad theoretical frameworks, specific applications of arguments, and contemporary cases to evaluate, helping them engage the material in multiple concrete ways.

I provide many avenues for student participation. I have used strategies such as assigning students “resident expert” roles during the term, formal debates, in class group research and presentation assignments, free form discussion, and playing games that put them in the role of politicians. As resident experts, students provide discussion questions for their peers and write short papers that expand upon the work of one of the week’s readings.

During formal debates, students work together to articulate ‘their’ side’s arguments and anticipate both the weaknesses of alternatives and defenses against the counterarguments that are likely to be levied against them. Students have said that this was particularly useful for understanding and organizing

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arguments in the literature. Group research teams are randomly assigned to engage in quick (10-15 minute) research of various institutions, actors, or facts that are then presented to the class. To discourage free riding, students grade their teammates' contributions.

Students express their understandings of concepts and arguments through free form discussions. In these discussions I encourage students to think about the engaging theory from a number of view points by providing a space in which partially formed, factually unsupported, or indefensible ideas can be shared with little consequence, but opportunities to discuss what might constitute a more fully formed, supported, and defensible idea abound. I also integrate technologies such as course blogs to provide another opportunity for participation. This allows students who are less comfortable speaking in larger groups the chance to share their understandings of concepts or their views on current events to the class as a whole without the feelings of discomfort that public speaking can elicit.

I have also developed several games to simulate the strategic behavior of politicians. For example, students in my *Contemporary European Politics* class students played an opportunistic election timing game. This game demonstrates how strategic politicians might behave under conditions of chance. Many students remarked that the opportunistic election timing game allowed them to better understand why politicians would want to end their terms early.

My multidimensional approach to participation allows students with varying strengths a number of ways to contribute to the class as well as multiple means of evaluation. Students are evaluated based on their contribution to class learning and their performance on up to four papers (typically two to three two-page briefs and one longer research paper) and a up to two exams. The short papers are opportunities for students to practice the skills they are learning while the examinations and research paper allow them to demonstrate proficiency. This also lowers the stakes of any assignment, ensuring that no one instance of poor performance has an overly detrimental effect on their grade. By lowering the stakes, students seem more relaxed and open to exploration in learning since they do not always need the "right" answer.

Given my training and research, I am particularly interested in teaching courses on political institutions and political behavior, comparative and international political economy, and European/EU politics. I am prepared to teach general comparative politics and/or international relations, elections, research design, microeconomics, and statistics. The diversity of these courses offers opportunities to use an array of techniques to help students learn about the specific course materials and about the more general means of understanding the social world. I value the experience of relearning material through teaching, the relationships I develop with diverse students, and the ability to aid in the development of skills that students can use to understand the social world for a lifetime.