



## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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One of the reasons I became a political scientist was to enjoy the opportunity of ushering a group of committed students through in the process of defining their own worldview. I use the word “usher” purposefully, as I generally do not see it as my role simply “to teach.” Rather, my role is to introduce the students to the complexity of politics and international relations and help give them the tools to chart their own course in the world.

By focusing on skills as well as substance, my students will be able to apply their intellect and critical thinking ability to whatever pursuits they undertake. Rather than teaching students simply “about” Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, I concentrate on making sure they have the ability to construct compelling, consistent, and comprehensive arguments of their own about the state of the world. Past intellectuals have no monopoly on the truth of things, and today’s students and tomorrow’s scholars must have the ability to critique them, expand upon their ideas, and establish a world of their own.

What exactly are these tools? My students must be able to critically analyze authors and their arguments, pick them apart, and recognize their assumptions. Whereas many teachers stop there, I engage the students in activities to improve on those very ideas in order to start ushering them along the path of knowledge *production*, not just critique. Whether my students aim to be journalists, bloggers, columnists, marketing professionals, or lawyers, they will (with any luck) emerge from my class with the ability to grab their reader’s (or listener’s) attention and persuade them with finely tuned arguments and strategically employed evidence.

Along the way, I aim to foster a collegial atmosphere with my students. I want them to feel comfortable approaching me on campus, outside of class. This atmosphere encourages a productive and open discussion in class, where students are not afraid to be wrong. Robust dialogue and skilled argumentation can only be learned through engaging in active debate.

A relaxed atmosphere further encourages the mutual exchange of evaluation, which is always a two-way street. Students must always have opportunities to approach me with constructive ideas for improving their learning experience. Likewise, I constantly engage in exercises to determine their progress in the skills that I aim to instill in them. The course should always be flexible to adaptation required by either student or teacher. With this approach, I aim to produce strong bonds between the students and myself and help guide them along the path of professional success in whatever field they pursue.

This is something that I have consistently received strong marks on in my student evaluations. However, other students have been less favorable toward the collegial atmosphere that I attempt to foster, and they prefer a more traditional structure. After each semester, I take a thorough look at teaching evaluations, and I adapt my teaching for the following semester. The feedback that I have incorporated have made my successive teaching experiences more well-rounded and calibrated for the needs of the students.

More concretely, I have learned a tremendous amount from my advisors at the University of Texas. Students learn today much differently than they did even in my time as an undergraduate student ten years ago. Pat McDonald has created an innovative online course methodology here at UT that focuses on quick, hard-hitting segments of 5-10 minutes each, followed by mini-quizzes and responses from the

students. This keeps students engaged and interacting with the material, rather than acting simply as passive recipients.

I also place a premium on student presentations. Each class, a select set of students should “brief” the class on the reading materials for that day. The briefings are ungraded, as long as students actually conduct the briefing. Classmates and myself are then free to ask questions about the reading for clarification and relationships to other course content. The social pressure of a public presentation keeps students engaged and prepared. Each student briefs at least once, and more depending upon the number of students in the class, and it provides a valuable opportunity to practice public speaking in a non-graded, low-pressure environment, while keeping the students attentive and interested in order to ensure they appear competent during their own briefing.

These are not only tricks to maintain student interest and engagement, but they are highly valuable items to the learning process. Students gain experience in necessary skills to the working world, like public speaking, polite questioning, and the ability to see connections between multiple topics during presentation, along with the way others view the same material differently. These items, combined with traditional response papers and essays form a well-rounded educational experience for the students, and it prepares them for the working world and future academic pursuits.

On a personal note, I entered graduate school loathing the idea of teaching. I wanted to focus on research alone. However, the experiences that I have had at the University of Texas and the University of Wisconsin have revealed my love of the enterprise. I am able to present cutting-edge research in the field of political science with impressive young students, who bring fresh eyes to the issues, force me to grapple with new lines of inquiry, and refine my own understanding of the material. I find teaching to be incredibly enjoyable, because these are topics that I love to talk about on my own time. Discussing topics that occupy my mind with dedicated, interested, engaged, and motivated students is invigorating. It further informs my own research, improves my ability to present, and constantly challenges me with new ways to reach students. I am excited by the opportunity to spend my career in this worthy endeavor.