

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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As an instructor of political science, I aim to guide students as they improve their knowledge of key concepts in political life, develop important skills, and connect the study of politics to their own practice of politics. In my courses, I strive to engage students by connecting the study of politics to pressing political and moral issues, assist them as they learn to critically evaluate their own political instincts, beliefs, and commitments, and come alongside them as they develop their capacity to act as reflective and responsible democratic citizens.

Political science and political theory constitute the study of the institutions, norms, values, and habits that enable and encourage human beings to live, grow, and flourish together. Many students, however, lack clear understandings of the basic concepts and ideas that underpin political life. I select and organize course readings to emphasize and engage with critical questions, puzzles, and questions across the history of political thought, such as the relationship between power and justice, or between liberty, equality, and self-government. In so doing, concepts such as rights, freedom, and democracy come into focus, improving students' ability to make sense of complex political discourse. Early in each term, I use short-answer exams and quizzes to measure and stimulate students' capacity to distill complex questions, debates, and concepts into clear, precise, and accessible language.

Equipped with this knowledge, students in my courses then turn to developing the central skills of democratic citizenship, such as listening, thoughtful engagement, and critical analysis. Seminar discussions, written work, mentorship, and extracurricular learning opportunities all provide opportunities for students to build these skills. In the classroom, students practice critical analysis through careful and close engagement with texts, their experiences of the world, empirical data, and each other. By emphasizing an open and respectful ethic of engagement, classroom discussions prove meaningful opportunities for careful self-reflection and analysis. Thinking well, however, is a collaborative as well as individual exercise. I use peer review, small group work, and individual reflective writing as tools to actively engage all students in conversation, including those who may find traditional models of classroom discussion intimidating. By pairing Socratic self-understanding with collaborative learning, students master the ability to evaluate their own beliefs—as well as those of their peers—with empathy, rigor, and respect.

I am committed to cultivating an intellectual environment of open inquiry that welcomes a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and ideas. I work to develop conditions under which students feel free to disagree with me and their classmates—and even themselves—as they wrestle with complicated questions and ideas. Students regularly comment on this feature of my classes, emphasizing that I both “promote a climate of mutual respect,” and “emphasize critical thinking,” with a median rating of 5/5 in each category across all terms. My emphasis on openness, integrity, empathy, and understanding serves students of all backgrounds and identities. One student, reflecting on their experience in a course on American Political Thought, wrote that the course “helped me navigate and discover my ... patriotism for our country, without allowing me to sacrifice or forget about the ... abuses that also pervade the American narrative.” My commitment to open dialogue extends to feedback on my own teaching, as I include students in conversations about curricular decisions and course goals. I also circulate questionnaires periodically throughout the term, allowing students to offer feedback on course structure and assignments. This feedback proves invaluable as I adapt each course to the needs and capacities of enrolled students.

Clear and effective communication skills are invaluable to students in any career path or course of study. Academic writing, however, can be a source of anxiety for many students. I carefully design writing assignments to help students articulate their own beliefs while honing the skills of persuasion through assignments that build on prior work. In American Political Thought, for example, students complete three primary writing assignments, each of which aims at cultivating a particular skill. In the first short paper, students articulate brief linear arguments in favor of or opposed to ratifying the U.S. Constitution. In a second paper, students learn to carefully interpret texts through evaluating a puzzle in the thought of Frederick Douglass. The final paper builds on the skills developed earlier in the term, giving students the opportunity to author a longer paper concerning a pressing question in American political culture. In past semesters students have produced thoughtful essays outlining the promise and peril of ‘technocratic environmentalism,’ considering the relationship between the market economy and women’s liberation, and analyzing U.S. foreign policy through the lens of natural rights. This approach facilitates excellent written work by progressively providing students with the skills needed for success. As one student remarked, “I never felt stressed out but I still felt challenged.”

I aim to connect the study of political science to students’ own practice of politics. I embrace a widely democratic approach to political theory, which shapes my selection of course readings. Students in my courses read not only the works of eminent theorists like W.E.B. Du Bois and Hans Morgenthau, but also speeches, popular press articles, and works by musicians such as Duke Ellington and Dolly Parton, artists like Jacob Lawrence and Norman Rockwell, poetry, and creative fiction. This approach, I have found, encourages students to see political thinking not as the exclusive domain of an ivory tower elite, but as the work of individuals and communities collectively developing their own self-understandings, political values, and institutions. Students have responded well to this pedagogical approach, nominating and selecting me to receive a competitive campus-wide Student Undergraduate Teaching And Staff Award, placing me in the top .5% of instructors at Carolina.

As an instructor at Carolina, I have prepared and taught a wide variety of courses across multiple subfields of political science in traditional, condensed, and online course formats. As instructor of record or teaching assistant, I have experience with courses in Modern Political Thought, American Political Thought, Introduction to International Relations, The Ethics of Peace, War, and Defense, and Civil Liberties. I have completed additional graduate coursework in judicial politics and law, American politics, and research methods. I am prepared to offer introductory and advanced courses in historical and contemporary political theory, American government, constitutional law and judicial politics, political economy, and international relations. I am also eager and able to teach in cooperative or interdisciplinary programs, offering courses in the ethics of peace and war, religion and politics, philosophy, politics, and economics, wealth and inequality, and comparative constitutional law. Syllabi and teaching evaluations for a number of courses are available [on my website](#). While at Carolina, I have gained experience in using a variety of new learning tools, including in-class simulations and online learning platforms. As a faculty member, I would be happy to fill departmental instructional needs across my areas of competence, as well as developing new courses including writing-intensive classes, first-year seminars and service-learning courses, or courses related to my research interests, including utopian and dystopian political thought, political ethics, inequality, and toleration. I am eager to join with faculty in your department to aid students as they engage in rigorous political study, enriching their own understanding and practice of politics.