

# Teaching Statement: Philosophy and Experience

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11 April 2017

## Teaching Philosophy

My goal as a teacher is to instill a passion among my students for understanding political phenomena. I emphasize to my students that politics and political processes are to be actively interrogated, questioned, and analyzed, and not just passively observed. After taking my courses, I want undergraduate students to emerge as more sophisticated and nuanced consumers of political information. Furthermore, I want my undergraduate students to acquire the basic methodological tools to analyze and explain the political phenomena they observe.

Creating an inclusive learning environment is a critical component of my goals as a teacher. Students come from diverse backgrounds, and my classroom accommodates their unique perspectives, contributions, and ways of seeing the world by including open class discussions and course content from a wide variety of cultural and geographical perspectives. At the same time, the study of comparative politics challenges students to appreciate the points of view of the countries and political leaders under examination. For example, students that participated in the Model Arab League team that I organized had to adopt the perspectives of the government that they represented on different policy issues facing the Middle East. These types of classroom activities encourage students to broaden their intellectual horizons by critically reflecting on their own beliefs and cultural assumptions about the world.

My classroom activities are also designed to develop argumentation skills and the application of theory to real-world events. For example, in a course on civil wars and ethnic violence, I designed an assignment that asked students to explain the occurrence of a contemporary civil war. Each student was assigned to a team that had to argue with another team over which theory of civil war occurrence best explained the case. They were instructed to not only explain why their theory was correct, but to point out potential flaws in the reasoning of the opposing team. The result was that each team member had a better appreciation for how to critically apply theory to real-world phenomena.

I strongly believe in multiple modes of evaluation to showcase different strengths of students and provide multiple opportunities to apply the course material. Student comprehension is assessed through in-class quizzes, writing assignments, and mid-term and final exams. I also promote learning activities in my classes that provide professional development opportunities for students. For example, in my Human Rights course, students had the option to develop a blog on rights issues or to create a service learning project. One student group invited a speaker to campus who works on refugee resettlement in Kentucky. My comparative government course asked students to present research at a social science fair, while my course on American Diplomacy included a simulation of the National Security Council.

Finally, effective teaching and research go hand in hand. My research activities keep me cognizant of the latest developments and cutting-edge findings and allow me to integrate them into my classroom activities, lectures, and materials. This is especially important for students who are considering graduate study and would benefit from familiarity with current debates in the field. Furthermore, my teaching strengthens my research agenda. Undergraduate students raise new questions and think of creative approaches to topics that the field has not yet addressed. I encourage undergraduate students to engage in research activities, as doing so can benefit their careers and, most importantly, their education.

## **Teaching Experience**

I have taught 11 courses at Campbellsville University, including Introduction to American Government, First-Year Seminar, Introduction to Political Science, Comparative Government, Global Human Rights, American Diplomacy, and International Organizations. In these courses, one of my top goals was to encourage students to connect the course material to real-world events through the writing of weekly journal entries. These entries would summarize a recent political event, and then describe how it relates to the themes and ideas presented in the course.

The International Organization course was built around student participation in a Model Arab League conference. The students spent the first half of the semester preparing background material on their assigned country and practicing parliamentary procedure. After the conference, students reflected on their experience and connected their experience to the real world of international diplomacy. The students had a lot of positive feedback about the conference, and one student even remarked that he learned more in the three-day conference than in any other class he had taken. We were also able to team with another university to attend the National Model Arab League conference in Washington, DC.

At the University of Texas, I served as an assistant instructor for a course on Applied Research Methods and Politics and Government in Contemporary Texas. For the Applied Research Methods course, students developed their own research projects over the course of the semester that they carried out and presented at a student research conference. In addition, through the *Intellectual Entrepreneurship* mentorship program, I designed and led a one-on-one reading course on international relations with an undergraduate student. As a result of the course, my student is better equipped to digest and engage with challenging texts, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of how scholars approach the study of international politics. After participating in this program, my mentee went on to graduate study in political science.

My teaching evaluations and mentoring experience demonstrate that I am an effective and conscientious teacher. I am passionate about the study of politics, and believe that I can spark some of those same interests in my students. My hope is that this spark helps students engage in a lifelong pursuit of learning more about politics and its importance in our world.