

Teaching Statement

I have had the privilege of being instructor of record for courses across the political science curriculum—American Government, World Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Ideologies, Middle Eastern Politics, and Arab-Israeli Conflict—delivered in in-person, hybrid, and online formats. I have observed that most of my students in entry-level courses are satisfying general education requirements or are taking my courses as part of their social science or education degree. Political science minors and majors are usually working towards public sector employment, non-governmental organizations, or law school. With these student goals in mind, my courses seek to challenge student disillusionment with politics and higher education, develop skill sets central to a political science education (namely reading and writing), and promote learning through collaboration.

Most of my students have expressed disillusionment with the political process and public actors, frustrated with polarization and gridlock and their own perceived lack of efficacy. Effective democracy requires an engaged and informed citizenry. My coursework is designed to enhance political knowledge and citizenship skills. For example, my American Government course asks students to draft a brief reflection essay on what citizenship means and assessing their own citizenship skills. From a menu of prompts that reflect the course material, they select three projects. For example, they may talk to a police officer about civil liberties, observe a courtroom, take a quiz to learn about their own partisanship, or create a voting plan. At the end of the semester, they annotate their original essay, reflecting on what they learned through their projects. Flexible design gives students choice and taps into intrinsic motivation. They learn from other students through conversations during peer review sessions. They explore politics by talking to people doing the work of politics and government, and almost always walk away with both more understanding of the course material, a sense of connection to their community and political actors, and greater efficacy.

My students also often express skepticism that the ivory tower has much to say about the “real world.” My courses are built to challenge this assumption. For example, my Middle Eastern politics class is built around a single question: Can democracy take root in the Middle East? Every week features a question about the role of political economy, civil society, religion, etc. in democracy, and a different case study. A framework of questions stimulates curiosity, and each question reflects a serious disciplinary debate with real-world implications. In International Relations, students keep a current events journal in which they must summarize a current event, summarize a concept in class, and explain how the current event illustrates the concept. Not only does this serve as a check on understanding, but students have commented that the practice has radically transformed the way that they experience both news and their academic work by revealing the interplay between the two.

To address apathy as response to perceived political intractability, I ask students to explore multiple perspectives on controversial issues. My Arab-Israeli Conflict course ends with a multi-day simulation in which students play the role of Israeli, Arab, and American officials negotiating a final settlement, and I often require students to take positions they have expressed opposition to in class.

This activity helps students to have a greater understanding of actors with diverse perspectives. Finally, I discuss political science theories and concepts in relation to contemporary issues. Bargaining strategies help us predict when civil war may occur, the concept of public goods helps us understand why climate change is difficult to address, and social identity theory helps us understand partisanship. Students come to see that concepts and theories can clarify the issues that affect their lives, that politics affect them every day, and that their own behavior, and that of other citizens and elites, matters.

My courses also train students in skills they need to succeed in other courses and in the workplace—namely reading and writing skills. Understanding and distilling key points from difficult texts is a skill that requires development for success in higher education, especially for struggling students. In my Ideologies class, I assign brief selections from key thinkers and prioritized face-to-face class time for discussion of these texts. Students are challenged to identify a single sentence that served as a thesis statement and then justify their choice, or to compare and contrast the ideas of two different thinkers, using the texts. In upper-level courses, I assign articles from academic journals. My syllabi include suggestions for identifying the research question and main findings, and for methods-heavy texts I provide reading guides to help students stay focused on the argument being made. As students engage in this manner with complicated texts, they develop critical thinking skills, such as differentiating between different parts of an argument and seeing how arguments interact. Strong written communication skills are another hallmark of a political science education, and all of my courses include some kind of written component. My introductory courses often feature several brief writing assignments, asking students to apply concepts to new situations (like current events) or reflecting on a personal experience in light of course material. Upper-level classes include a research paper. Because most students have never written a political science paper, I point out strong writing in assigned articles, scaffold the assignment so that students receive feedback at each step (research question, literature review, theory and design, findings), and provide revision opportunities. These practices, rooted in the concept that growth is possible and happens through practice, help all students hone their written communication skills, but are especially helpful for students who are intimidated by or struggle with writing assignments.

Finally, I believe that students learn best when they learn in collaboration with others. I set a tone of transparency through weekly announcements that lay out key themes for the week, checklists of weekly tasks, and due date reminders. I organize the course learning website so students can easily access each week's material with the click of a button. Rubrics for all assignments for the semester are included in the semester syllabus and completed rubrics are returned with each graded assignment, and I make myself available for both in-person and virtual office hours. Students also learn from each other. I have found that students are most engaged on discussion boards when they are encouraged to share and then discuss relevant information. For example, during a unit on fascism, a student posted 1940s German propaganda poster he'd seen in his history book and pointed out its connections to our unit's themes. Constructive debates about the propaganda's content spilled over into the classroom. Students also teach each other through think-pair-share class activities and peer review sessions. I try to

engage the broader campus and community as well by hosting poster displays or world geography fairs, publicized to the entire campus.

Addressing student disillusionment and developing strong reading and writing skills are important elements of political science coursework, and students benefit from strong learning relationships with their faculty, peers, and communities. Students have commented that my classes “made it interesting to learn about politics”, in part by “being able to choose different activities and do different things like lead discussion” and “encourage[d] strong learning and created an enjoyable class atmosphere” by “leading discussion amongst her students in a way that makes her classes fun and academically stimulating at the same time”. I firmly believe that a vibrant democracy depends on the engagement of its citizenry, and my courses aim to boost political interest, equip students with necessary skills, and promote learning communities—one class at a time.