

Teaching Philosophy

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My teaching philosophy centers around this core principle: students can make significant contributions to their own learning experience and they should be empowered to do so. I purposefully design my lectures to ensure that students actively participate, build community, and make thoughtful contributions throughout the course. One way that I help my students to achieve this active approach to their own education is through active learning assessments. For example, in my American Government course, my students are assigned groups and asked to take on the task of ratifying a constitution. In order to complete the assessment the students must use key terms and arguments, like those of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, to create a constitution for their new country. Activities like this allow my students to engage their peers, the content, and myself in a meaningful manner and to more fully understand political issues, institutions, and actors. Consequently, students come to understand that they are entrusted with a responsibility to themselves and their fellow students during the learning experience.

Another touchstone of my teaching philosophy is to motivate students to learn through multiple methods. While learning may come easier for some, I believe that every student can achieve success with the right guidance and support on my end, and proper motivation on theirs. To foster effective learning, I like to use simulations and active learning techniques to build critical thinking skills and student engagement. I can instantly see the “buy-in” from my students as they realize that the journey we are about to take is an important and exciting one. For example, in my Introduction to International Relations course, students participate in the Statecraft Simulation, which is an online re-creation of a world populated by states that the students control. Students work together to create states, take on leadership roles, and interact with other states run by their fellow students. Throughout this simulation, students learn about core theoretical concepts like realism and liberalism, not just through lectures, but by actively translating their own behavior in the simulation to these core theories and concepts.

Developmental learning is another pedagogical technique that I use as a teacher. For instance, I assign a research project in each course that I teach. The project begins with a simple brainstorming session, moves toward a research question assignment and the submission of annotated bibliographies, and culminates in final paper or portfolio. Throughout the iterative assessments, I interact with the students, provide guidance, and encourage students to pursue their own research interests. At the same time, by providing detailed feedback and communication at each step, I also verify that they have a firm grasp of the course content.

Teaching at Oregon State university (OSU), the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and the University of West Florida (UWF) has given me the opportunity to work with diverse student populations. For instance, UNLV has just been ranked as the most diverse campus in the nation according to US News and World Report and has been designated as

a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), and an Asian-American and Native-American, Pacific-Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI). Teaching at UNLV has demonstrated the value of diversity during the learning experience. For example, I have found that students often self-segregate along multiple dimensions. Consequently, I ask students to participate in peer to peer assessments, group projects, and in-class exercises that force them to engage with one another in randomly assigned groups. I also create assessments and activities that encourage students to place themselves in roles that are not representative of their own demographic or socioeconomic background. It is my experience that the use of these techniques has opened up the eyes of many of my students and allowed them to understand both the similarities and differences that they share with others, and how these factors affect political outcomes.

Understanding the diversity of students, their interests, and their needs is the foundation of successful teaching and mentorship. As a first-generation American, a first-generation college student, and a veteran, I can identify with the unique challenges faced by many students. For instance, my mother was from the Netherlands and my father was from rural Kentucky. In many ways, I feel like a “first generation” American due to my upbringing, but I can also identify with students from rural areas in America. I use my own personal story to help students realize that they can overcome their obstacles and to help make connections to students who may normally shy away from opening up in class.

My pedagogical training includes the completion of the UNLV Graduate College Teaching Certification, the UNLV Graduate College Mentorship Certification, participation at the APSA 2017 Teaching and Learning Conference, and teaching-centered workshops at ISA Annual Conferences. I have also been a roundtable participant at the 2015 and 2016 ISA Annual Conferences where we discussed the issues facing study abroad programs and the challenges of international and cross-national education. Additionally, my pedagogical training and experience has led to my appointment as the first UNLV Department of Political Science graduate teaching mentor where I have assisted other graduate students with their courses concerning syllabus design, assessment construction, and how to deal with issues in the classroom.

Through the use of a variety of teaching approaches, I have not only improved the learning experiences of my students, but I have continued to improve as an instructor. By valuing diversity in the classroom, I have helped students to understand differing viewpoints and grow as individuals. I challenge my students in the classroom, but I am also sensitive to the situations that happen around them. This is reflected in my teaching evaluations, and I am proud to know that I have made a difference in the way that students approach learning. I believe my students’ success is the greatest testament to the teaching philosophy I have adopted.