

My experiences as a student have informed the way that I approach teaching. Through my undergraduate and graduate student experiences, I learned both how I want to teach and, more importantly, how I do not want to teach. The instructors that helped me to understand the material the most were the ones that were able to apply the topics and concepts from the material in a way that personalized the material to me, which led me to understand the material better than if it were merely an abstract topic. In order to apply that method of learning to my students I facilitate discussion, utilize an active classroom with demonstrations and presentations, and encourage students to reach out to me outside of the classroom.

My goal as an instructor of political science is two-fold. First, I want to impart the knowledge from the material onto my students so that they may have an academic understanding of the material and the skills needed to navigate their professional and academic life outside of my classroom. Second, I am able to assist my students in becoming better democratic citizens by learning about political science. They are able to learn about the functions of government in a more nuanced and hands-on way that allows them to leave my classroom to engage and understand with the political world around them. For students taking my *Introduction to American Politics* course as a requirement for their degree, this may be their only encounter with a political science course. I feel that there is a responsibility to engage with them and encourage them to engage with the literature in order to better understand the functions of government and what is expected of the government as an institution and of themselves as citizens. Having my students understand the functions of government is important but understanding how those functions affect them as citizens is equally as important. In addition, having my students understand what it means to be a citizen and the roles and duties required of them as citizens goes beyond the general factual understanding of what governance is and what citizens are.

For example, I assign group presentations on different public opinion topics (e.g., abortion, gun rights, the Electoral College, etc.). For this assignment, I have the students rank order their favorite topics, but have them research and defend their least favorite topics. I do this so they can step outside of their own information circles and begin to understand why individuals may have differing opinions on these, often times, controversial topics. I also incorporate into many of my lectures time to discuss and debate the topics covered in the readings and lecture. Although not every student opts to engage, I do have students come to my office during office hours and they highlight how the class discussions are an important aspect of their learning. This is because often times there is a student who has addressed a belief that other students held and the quiet students were able to engage in a passive way, by soaking in the debate and details shared by their fellow classmates.

Respect is paramount for any course that I teach. That includes respect not only between students, but also between myself and my students. My hope is that my classroom is an environment that students can feel comfortable with exchanging ideas and challenging their peers on their views on the topics. I routinely use the role of devil's advocate in order to challenge my students to have them think about alternative viewpoints. Although the topics that are discussed in my classes may at times be personal in nature, I strive to have the students view controversial topics objectively by using facts and data to support their assumptions.

Additionally, I allow students to engage and ask questions with their peers. I use this time to mediate the conversation and, while I believe in having an organic classroom, I try to reign in their discussions in the event that it falls too far outside the bounds of appropriate classroom behavior.

Finally, one aspect that I find crucial for student success is my ability to be accessible outside of regularly scheduled class time. Holding office hours and encouraging students to visit has been extremely helpful for those students that have utilized it. Having the one-on-one time to assist students as they learn the material is important because I understand that not every student is able to learn in a lecture setting. While I encourage questions during class, I understand that for some students asking questions in that environment can be difficult for students. By keeping myself open outside of class I can still reach those students who may be uncomfortable asking difficult questions in front of their peers.