

As an instructor of record and teaching assistant during my graduate school tenure, I have developed a deep commitment to not only scholarly research and exploration, but to educating and engaging students who seek to learn more about the discipline of political science. My experiences teaching and preparing multiple undergraduate American politics courses, including *Introduction to Government in the United States*; *The President, Congress, and Public Policy*; and *Parties and Elections*, allowed me to develop a teaching philosophy that is supported by four main components. The first is that making students feel welcome and included is the most fundamental part of teaching, and without acceptance and inclusion of diverse voices, as well as a diversity of ideas, effective teaching would be impossible. Next, learning, particularly in political science, cannot take place in a one-size-fits-all manner, and that it is best achieved through a mixture of teaching techniques and evaluation tools that are responsive to all different types of learners. Third, students of political science in effective teaching environments should gain valuable critical thinking and problem solving skills that they are able to apply in upper level courses, as well as outside of an academic environment. Lastly, being an effective teacher should also incorporate opportunities for students for mentorship.

My own personal experiences as a student have shaped the way that I strive to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in courses that I teach. Growing up in a rural, homogeneous small town as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I rarely encountered individuals who had the same shared experiences that I did, and often my teachers did not encourage diversity of thought and inclusion, leaving a large void in my learning experiences. Once I attended college, however, I was amazed at how much better the quality of discussions in classes and seminars were and how much more I was learning about the world, as I heard from students from various backgrounds. In many ways, I learned almost as much from these conversations as I did from the course material, and I began to feel more comfortable with myself and with my position in the world. These are invaluable components of an educational experience, and I understand firsthand the need for these in the classroom.

Topics in American politics courses often challenge personal beliefs for students, and can naturally cause discussions to become inflammatory and heated. Often, students may feel uncomfortable to state their opinion, or may feel that their opinion is not being valued, often times because they come from underrepresented groups. As an instructor, it is my responsibility to bring these students into the conversation in some way. In my teaching experience, I have aimed to do this through in-class discussions, online forums to replace discussion for students who feel more comfortable discussing their opinions online, and through written assignments throughout the semester that asks them to argue for or against controversial

issues in American politics. I have strict rules about respecting individuals in class and in forum discussions, however it is rare when students disrespect one another, as they, from my experience, are mostly interested in hearing different viewpoints. These are experiences that lecturing alone cannot provide for. I also provide an anonymous way for students to submit comments or questions about topics discussed in class, if they are uncomfortable sharing or if they feel they aren't hearing their viewpoint discussed in class. I make it clear to students that I am always available if they need to discuss anything, if they need a listening ear, or if I need to direct them to university resources if I cannot help. I recognize that I do not share the same experiences as some underrepresented groups, while I do with others, so part of being an effective instructor is knowing when to provide resources for students to speak with individuals who do. Being comfortable and feeling accepted is vital to higher education, and learning cannot effectively take place if students do not feel welcome. As a result, promoting acceptance, diversity, and inclusion is the most important part of my teaching philosophy.

In addition to providing an accepting, equitable environment to students, I also believe that an incorporation of various learning techniques, as well as evaluation tools, are essential to a successful classroom environment. It is well-documented that all students do not learn in the same way. As a result, I aim to structure my courses in a way that allows for a multifaceted approach to teaching. While I include lecture notes and slides as an important part of my course, I also aim to include visuals, such as graphs, charts, and videos to accommodate those who are more visual learners. Further, I aim to reserve a significant portion of each class for discussion of the topics that we covered in class, to ensure that students understand what has been discussed, and that they are able to think critically about the material and form strong, scholarly opinions about them.

I have also found that students in political science courses are more engaged with assignments that connect current political events to class concepts, so I incorporate those in my courses, as well. For example, during the fall semester of 2020, I assigned a project to the students in my course on the presidency and Congress in which each of them were assigned a specific state to research regarding the 2020 presidential and congressional elections in that state, after which they would use class concepts to make an informed prediction about who would win that state, and their predictions were used to make a class Electoral College and U.S. Senate map. Students were able to engage in current events, as well as apply class concepts and defend their choices to their classmates. I also conducted a mock congressional session in this course, as well. Based on feedback I received from students, these hands-on, applied ways of learning were their favorite parts of the course, and they reported learning more from these activities. These types of assignments also allow me to fulfill a second critical piece of my teaching philosophy, and that is to equip students with critical thinking skills that allow them to solve problems in the real world. A primary focus of my courses is

to introduce students to collective action problems, and have them form solutions to these real-world issues. These are skills that students will be able to take with them once they leave academia and enter the workforce, and are perhaps more critical than specific terms or definitions that students may be asked to memorize in college. Equipping students to problem solve and think about the American system of government in a critical, thoughtful way is a primary goal of my teaching philosophy.

Not only is it important to teach material in multiple ways that foster critical thinking, but it is also important to fairly assess students in a variety of ways. As a result, I aim to spread out the grade distribution in my courses, allowing students to compensate for missteps in assessments in which they may not do as well on. I include exams, writing assignments, participation, “clicker” or PollEverywhere questions, and reading comprehension quizzes to allow various ways for students to prove their mastery of the material. Teaching and grading should not be punitive, but instead should allow for students to demonstrate how well they have understood the material, and that may prove difficult for students who are not natural test takers, for example. Thus, it is vital not to rely on a single method to evaluate students.

Lastly, I strongly believe that being an effective mentor is an important component of being an effective teacher. Building rapport with students and taking an interest in their academic careers allows for instructors to effectively keep their students engaged, and also allows for teaching to take place in a more practical, hands-on way. Thankfully, I was able to have an excellent mentor when I was an undergraduate who supported my undergraduate research and allowed me to serve as a research assistant on her projects, an experience I never had encountered before. This exposure, as well as excellent mentorship by my advisor in graduate school, allowed me to develop a passion for political science, and ultimately helped to guide me in my academic path. As a professor, I hope to return this to my students, and to help guide them on their academic journeys.

I am excited about growing as a teacher and implementing my teaching philosophy to become the best professor that I can be. I am able to teach several courses in American politics, including introductory courses to American politics and government, parties and elections, and courses on the U.S. Congress and the presidency. Given my training, I am also able to teach courses in political methodology, covering both quantitative and qualitative analysis.