

Teaching Philosophy

As a researcher of the international politics of religion, a field characterized by conflicts of seemingly irreconcilable worldviews, I know firsthand the crucial role education plays in teaching more open-minded and creative modes of engaging with opinions and experiences vastly different from one's own. I strongly believe higher education should stimulate more nuanced and creative modes of problem-solving. In pursuit of this goal, my primary principles as an instructor are to prepare students to 1) generously and critically evaluate varied arguments about politics 2) demonstratively improve their abilities to read, write, speak, and think clearly about dynamics of power and authority 3) put those skills into practice, through experiential learning opportunities and collaborative research projects.

I want students in my classroom to master the ability to evaluate competing arguments about controversial issues. To practice this, I intersperse seminar discussions with small group assignments where groups either (A) evaluate arguments from their readings using an external example, or (B) apply course materials to contemporary issues. For example, in my International Political Economy section, I asked small groups to craft a development plan for a hypothetical country with principles applied from readings on import-substitution industrialization (ISI), NGOs, foreign aid, and neoliberalism. Groups then presented their arguments to the class, followed by class discussion where I asked them to reflect on the power distributions each policy perpetuates or challenges. During my US Foreign Policy sections, I had students give 10-minute presentations, each followed by a short class Q&A, where they applied course readings to a contemporary event or an example from their other courses. Both exercises highlighted the wider relevance of the course readings to students wider interests as well as stimulated reflection on the limitations of each approach.

Learning how to present ideas in a persuasive, coherent manner takes a lot of practice and as much feedback. As such, I frequently assess my students' ability to interrogate course material in both written and oral form. I use frequent short reading responses that ask students to select and briefly explain a particular concept/phrase/word from the readings, analyze what this illuminates about an aspect of the overall argument, and to raise a question or concern about it. For longer papers and research projects, I assign two preparatory assignments that allow me to provide specific feedback about how to approach their question and what readings and sources to consult: a short 1-2 paragraph research proposal and an annotated bibliography. So that students can practice speaking and responding to others, I assign various presentation projects. For example, I use "pair presentations" where students work together to summarize central themes of the readings and raise questions for discussion, group research projects, and assign author defendant roles.

What students learn in the classroom is as valuable as the ways in which they learn to apply it in the world beyond it. I encourage students to see me as a mentor in their own pursuit of independent research projects and their professional goals. In my Introduction to International Relations sections, I intentionally incorporated readings related to theoretical and methodological prompts related my own work on emotional politics into the course assignments. I asked students to use these broad questions as a jumping off point to explore within their own research projects. Using a topic I was researching fostered an ethos of collaboration, and encouraged students to apply their coursework to real-world debates and have confidence in their ability to make original contributions. The student papers that resulted were fantastic: ranging from arguments over the applicability and inapplicability of emotion theories and methods to the study of nuclear deterrence, interrogating the status of emotions within traditional levels of analysis approaches, to an exploration of the 'emotional diplomacy' of the India-Pakistan conflict.

My teaching philosophy reflects my commitment to embodying those principles that inspired me: that great professors help students learn how to engage with material rather than recite it.