

Teaching Philosophy Statement

Let me begin by sharing my first experience teaching an undergraduate course on interest groups in American politics. I knew the field well and felt confident I could teach it effectively. However, when I received students' evaluations at the end of the term, I realized that I had a lot of work to do. Students commented that the material was not engaging. I modeled the course around my own experiences as an undergraduate student. Still, many students viewed this type of class structure as outdated. This early struggle was a formative experience for me that shaped my teaching in a few crucial ways. When preparing courses, I am thoughtful and intentional about how I can get students to connect with the material. I also carefully design formative and summative assessments that work in concert to enhance student learning outcomes. Finally, I use experiential learning activities to solidify student knowledge.

I encountered many graduate and undergraduate lectures that involved an instructor standing at the front of a room lecturing to students, occasionally allowing students to ask questions. After trying this style of teaching, I committed to learning about more engaging ways of structuring and organizing my lectures. I now develop discussion questions every few slides that are likely to be thought-provoking and engaging for students. These questions often focus on recent research findings or unresolved issues in contemporary politics. For example, when I discuss presidential unilateralism, I ask students whether presidential signing statements should be categorized as orders in the same way that executive orders and memoranda are. I use this question to get students thinking about what makes a presidential order an order, providing examples of the types of phrases and text scholars search for when identifying the effects of these documents. The use of discussion questions has made my lectures more effective, striking a balance between presenting information and engaging students. Further, these structural changes expand the types of knowledge and skills I am passing on to students. The lecture components improve students' understanding of key concepts. At the same time, the discussions give them practice evaluating and applying concepts to contemporary political issues.

Another area of growth in my teaching has been my use of formative and summative assessments of student learning. When I assign students summative term papers, I also develop a set of formative assignments and activities to help students develop the skills they need to succeed. In my interest groups course, students submit and receive feedback on a paper topic proposal early in the class. Students then participate in several formative activities and assignments as they prepare their final papers. First, students participate in a research workshop focused on helping them learn about different aspects of social science research, including how to develop a strong research question and hypotheses, where to find relevant scholarly sources, and where to find relevant data. Students also participate in question-and-answer sessions and are required to meet with me individually to discuss their research progress. In addition to these trainings, students also submit several formative assessments, such as annotated bibliographies, paper outlines, and rough drafts of their papers. I find this model to help build students' skills, confidence, and knowledge, and it encourages ongoing engagement throughout the course.

I also want to discuss is my use of non-traditional activities in the classroom. Students can better understand political institutions and processes through experiential learning. I design activities and simulations in my courses that give students opportunities to experience political dilemmas and trade-offs first-hand. I use these types of interactive course structures to improve

student engagement. Still, they can also address inequalities faced by students. For example, my U.S. Congress course includes an 8-week simulation where students develop practical knowledge of the legislative process by roleplaying members of Congress, the president, and interest groups. I believe that interactive classrooms are critical to celebrating the diverse backgrounds of students and empowering students to take an active role in their learning.

I strongly believe in the unique value of liberal arts education. I am a graduate of a small liberal arts college, UNC Asheville, and I have always appreciated the breadth of knowledge and experiences I received there. My appreciation for liberal arts institutions only grew after I moved to a large research university for my doctoral degree. My experiences in graduate school contrasted sharply with my experience as an undergraduate at a small liberal arts institution, where education felt like a process of personal growth and community-building. I have fond memories of taking all my major courses with the same 2-3 professors and working with them on individual research projects. In my experience, these types of opportunities are far less accessible to students at large universities.

Finally, I am firmly committed to serving others, especially people who have faced discrimination and/or structural barriers to their success. After my undergraduate education, I served as an AmeriCorps VISTA member in a rural, impoverished community in North Carolina near where I grew up. That experience gave me a deep appreciation for the power of education. As a first-generation college graduate, seeing the struggles and perseverance of the people I worked with made me incredibly grateful for my educational opportunities. I carry these experiences with me in my teaching and mentorship. I have mentored students throughout my time at Wofford and UCSB in several capacities, and I will continue to do so for the remainder of my career.

I am committed to improving as a teacher throughout my career, and I have demonstrated my ability to do so successfully. My thoughtfulness and willingness to experiment with different pedagogical strategies are two of my biggest strengths as a teacher. My courses have become more engaging and effective for students over time. I listen to student feedback and regularly revise aspects of courses, replacing them with new assessments and activities that improve student engagement. These practices help me to keep students engaged as active learners and promote inclusion for students from diverse backgrounds.