

Teaching Philosophy Statement

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Political science is a field in which students must learn to differentiate between theory and reality, to defend and critique ideas, and to engage with difficult and controversial topics. Data analysis is a crucial tool for achieving these learning goals in the modern social science classroom, and skills in data analysis extend far beyond the university classroom with a wide range of real-world applications. Helping students refine these skills, while building a connection with them, is my primary goal in the classroom.

Students learn best when they are able to make connections between existing knowledge and new ideas. To facilitate this process, I heavily employ the Socratic method to help students come to their own conclusions about the course material. In methods courses, this often means utilizing activities based around a series of leading questions designed to guide students to a new understanding of a concept. For example, in a recent class on the interpretation of the intercept term within the classic linear regression model, I had students work together in groups to run bivariate regressions in R on readily interpretable data, some with intercepts and some without. Rather than lecture students about the meaning of the intercept, I encouraged them to come to their own conclusions with their group members based on their understanding of the data and the output they received from the various regressions. Students were surprised to realize that the intercept had an intuitive interpretation, and they remembered this information more readily on future assessments due to this step-by-step process of discovery.

When it comes to assessment, I strive to practice total transparency and take care to frame failure as an important and even sometimes necessary step towards learning. I publish clear directions, example assignments, and rubrics well in advance so that students have models for their work. I also extensively use office hours as an opportunity to discuss students' work and help them improve. In a course I taught that required learning the basics of coding in R, I made sure to give partial credit on assignments when students were on the right track but faced an unexpected error message. Encouraging students to try and fail (and then try again) and normalizing this process of trial and error as part of learning how to code resulted in many more coding skills gained by the end of the semester than would have been had I taken off points less discriminately. I also rely heavily on live feedback to ensure that my teaching practices are effective and well received. In a recent class on game theory, I taught the students how to read a normal form game and identify Nash equilibria. I then had them complete a Google form in which they found the Nash equilibrium of a game they hadn't yet seen. As I watched the answers come in, I gained valuable information about whether to go over additional examples or move on.

Underlying many classroom discussions of quantitative methods lie a variety of challenging past experiences and limiting beliefs that students bring to the classroom. If left unaddressed, a large portion of students will remain unengaged and distant from the course content, believing it is simply "not for them." To help mitigate this, I dedicate significant time during the early days of a course to directly addressing these experiences and beliefs. I speak openly with students about

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math anxiety and other mental health concerns. We also discuss and debunk stereotypes about who is good at math, and we identify ways that statistics has been used historically to harm and marginalize particular communities. By creating a space where we can openly discuss these issues, students who might typically feel alienated from the quantitative aspects of a course often become motivated to engage more actively and to push themselves to continue learning even through discomfort. Along the way, I seek to empathize and provide support for the students to encourage these transformational learning experiences.

In all my interactions with students, I strive to cultivate a dynamic of trust. If a student tells me they can't make it to class or needs an extension, my default is to believe and empathize with the student. By cultivating trust and open communication, I encourage students to take ownership of their learning goals and create an environment in which students from diverse backgrounds can succeed in spite of the many demands life may place on them. Whether as a high school algebra tutor, an ESL instructor, or a university teaching assistant, I have always tried to make learning as inclusive and accessible as possible. When handling students' requests for accommodation, I apply the principle that an accessible classroom is good for everyone and creatively implement accommodations in an across-the-board manner rather than singling out individual students as "disabled" or "different."

At this point I have spent nearly ten years teaching in some capacity; six of these years have been in the postsecondary context. I have demonstrated my flexibility, tackling both lower-level courses and upper-level courses, courses that focus on concrete skills and ones that focus on abstract concepts, those that emphasize quantitative methods and those that emphasize qualitative methods, courses that implement innovative new teaching methods and ones that stick to tradition, and navigating the sudden transition to online learning that took place during winter of 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout these courses and experiences, I have yet to find a concept that I can't break down in an understandable way or a group of students that I can't create a connection with. These connections are often just as meaningful to me as they are to the students, which is why pedagogy remains one of my top priorities and most significant callings.