

# Teaching Statement

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My teaching experience, educational training, and pedagogical philosophy enable me to construct a dynamic environment for student learning at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In the sections below, I describe how I use my formal training in education to design political science courses, and explain how my experience and philosophy inform specific learning activities.

## Teaching Experience

At Syracuse University, I teach courses that cover topics in American politics, public policy, and research methodology. Specially, I instruct undergraduate courses in American National Government and Politics, The Politics of Income Inequality, and Introduction to Political Analysis. At the graduate level, I instruct seminars in Social Welfare Policy and Political Parties and Elections. While at Washington State University from 2010-2013, I similarly taught a wide range of courses that included topics in American politics, public policy, and quantitative methods.

I have taught well-received undergraduate courses in American politics for a decade. My introduction to American government course is organized around the question of whether the federal government more closely operates as a democracy, an oligarchy, or something in between. The primary goals of this course are: to provide students a broad overview of American government, develop a cognitive skill set that will help the student think more critically about political information, and to facilitate an interest and capacity to participate in American politics. The students read from a variety of sources beyond just a textbook, work in small groups within lecture, and keep an intellectual journal that tracks their understanding of critical course concepts. My course evaluations have been consistently higher than the department average at two universities. My undergraduate students most often note my enthusiasm, subject matter knowledge, and ability to engage the class in interesting questions.

I plan my American National Government and Politics course using the backward design theory. First, I select the concepts and skills that I want students to leave class with and then design my final exam. For example, the concept of collective action is introduced in the first week and then revisited in the units on political parties, the legislature, and public policy. Next, I take the course concepts and skills and identify which units can incorporate them. An example of a skill goal is reading and properly interpreting graphs, charts, and tables. I practice interpreting graphs and charts with the students during lecture. The students have questions on their weekly assignments, midterms, and final exam that require that they interpret and use graphs to answer certain questions. I

identify these concepts and skills early on in class so students understand what they will be held responsible for in the course.

During my time at Syracuse, I created a popular, upper level undergraduate course on The Politics of Income Inequality. I have designed this course as an undergraduate seminar. The goal of the course is to examine the concept of representative government through the lens of income inequality. In this course, we are concerned with addressing two overarching questions: one, how has the rising level of income inequality influenced the practice of American democracy? And second, how has American politics contributed to (or assuaged) the rise of income inequality?

The course is centered around three to four political science books. The readings are organized to help students have debates surrounding concepts of responsive government. For example, there is one chapter in Larry Bartels' *Unequal Democracy* that examines the relationship between political party control of the federal government and changes to income inequality. The students read critiques of this chapter from Joseph Campbell and Lane Kenworthy. This set up equips students to read and participate in an adult debate about an important political issue that includes criticisms of both substance and methodology. The students sign up to lead class discussion twice during the semester. I work with the students on designing questions for class discussion.

I employ a pedagogical technique called "scaffolding" that uses political science skill sets to help students think both systematically and critically the readings. This technique is based upon the theory that the instructor should design activities that assist students in bridging their initial knowledge level with more sophisticated thinking. In order to develop critical thinking skills, I give students a "scaffolding sheet" along with the assigned reading that lists questions a political scientist would ask in reviewing a piece of research - such as what is the theoretical argument, do the hypotheses follow logically from the theory, is the model selection appropriate for testing the author's theory and controlling for other explanations, etc. We unpack these questions and show examples of good and bad theories, hypotheses, and models every week during the course of the semester.

The goal of this activity is to have students internalize these questions so that the cognitive skill of disciplined skepticism is applied anytime the student encounters political information inside or outside of class. In my experience, students have struggled with these questions at first but by the end of the semester they can produce sophisticated critiques of political research.

At the graduate level, I have designed and taught seminars in Social Welfare Policy, and Political Parties and Elections. In the Social Welfare class, we examined the conceptual evolution of the social welfare state. The students read qualitative and quantitative works about social welfare and are responsible for answering weekly questions and leading discussion. I arranged two author meets critics sessions with Jason DeParle of The New York Times and Andrea Campbell of MIT. The students are required to present a ten-minute presentation on their semester papers during the last weeks of the seminar. I group the papers by topics and assign other students the roles of chair and discussants for each mini-panel. Although the course as currently constructed leans heavily upon the American social welfare state, it could be constructed in the future to straddle American Politics and Comparative Politics as my research interests evolve.

The purpose of the Political Parties and Elections seminar is to introduce graduate students to the significant themes, research approaches, and questions addressed in recent and classic studies of political parties, elections and interest groups. My course has a focus on the role of political parties and interest groups in elections. Throughout the seminar

we are attentive to how political scientists formulate and execute research on parties and interest groups, as well as how the design of this research affects what we know about these institutions and their role in the policy process. The course evaluations for both these classes have been above the department average.

## **Educational Training and Philosophy**

I earned an M.A. in Social Science Education from the University of Michigan in 2003. During my time at U of M, I studied and experimented with new pedagogies for undergraduate instruction. In addition, I taught a course to graduating seniors in teaching pedagogy and supervised students who were interning with local high school social studies teachers. I also have a B.A. in Secondary Education from Central Michigan University. I instructed classes in Advanced Placement Government, Advanced Placement Microeconomics, and Advanced Placement Macroeconomists at Bloomfield Hills Lahser High School from 1997 - 2000.

My primary goal is to have students leave my course thinking systematically and critically about the political world around them in ways that facilitate civic participation. In order to meet this goal, I use empirically tested methods of instruction that are designed to produce deep and lasting knowledge. It is my belief that knowledge is constructed best by equipping students with skill sets that assist them in being able to recognize and use concepts in multiple environments. Therefore, I emphasize in my teaching the development of cognitive skills and strive for enduring understanding of critical concepts. Finally, I have had my students engage more with the local community through focus groups, surveys, and case studies of local inequality and responsive government.