Teaching Philosophy

My approach to undergraduate teaching is guided by three overarching goals, as described below.

*Contemporary Relevance*

One of the greatest challenges that I have encountered in teaching undergraduate political science courses is a lack of perceived relevance to contemporary life. For example, when teaching American Government, most of the students are taking the course to satisfy a curriculum requirement, rather than out of individual interest; students often come into class with a presumption that the material will be boring, or unrelated to their educational trajectory. However, rather than begrudge students for a lack of interest, I take this as an opportunity to discover new ways of encouraging their intellectual curiosity.

In designing courses and assignments, I strive to present political science concepts and perennial normative questions with as much connection to actual life in a democratic society as possible. My goal is not only to improve student performance and retention of course materials, but to make students more aware of their own potential agency within the larger political system, both at the national and global level. I strongly encourage students to follow current world news and events, and attempt to integrate contemporary political discourse into class discussion whenever possible. I gain a great sense of personal satisfaction when students remark that my courses have given them a new appreciation of government and politics or have motivated them to pursue a major in political science or international affairs.

*Fairness and Clarity of Expectations*

In my experience both as an educator and a student, one of the greatest impediments to learning is an educational environment with a perceived lack of fairness or transparency regarding grades and course requirements. To this end, I work to ensure that my expectations for student performance are presented as clearly as possible at the outset of the semester. Additionally, I provide students with extensive feedback and grading rubrics designed to improve performance on subsequent assignments. Fairness regarding student performance and course policies is a fundamental component of respectful and fruitful student-teacher relations and represents a core element of my pedagogical approach.
Similarly, I have found problems related to clarity of expectations and student responsibilities to be highly detrimental to student performance in online learning environments. To prevent this, I work very diligently to design online courses that are organized in a clean and straightforward manner; my goal is to create online learning environments in which students are never unsure as to what they need to be doing at any point during the semester. I strongly believe that good organization is essential for student success in online learning environments, and I have proudly received consistently positive evaluations from students in this regard.

Continuous Improvement

As a professional educator, I believe it is absolutely necessary to consistently explore new tools and strategies for developing best educational practices. In fact, my interest in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is motivated by a desire to continually evaluate and improve my teaching by staying apprised of recent developments in the study of pedagogy and to contribute to this growing field of research.

In regard to pedagogy, I most commonly use lectures, as I believe that well prepared lectures can be a highly effective means of communicating complex materials and keeping students engaged. However, in my major and upper-division courses, I utilize a wider variety of teaching techniques and activities, including discussion groups, student presentations, and peer learning to better help students develop their critical thinking and analytical skills.

Despite perennial issues of low response rates, I find that the qualitative feedback from students in their course evaluations provides concrete ways to improve my teaching. However, rather than rely solely on end of the semester evaluations, I often incorporate informal mid-semester evaluations within my courses. These evaluations allow me to better understand how the course is going from the student perspective, and to have sufficient time to see the benefits of any changes or improvements.

In addition to continuously seeking to improve my classroom performance, I also strive to advance and apply my knowledge of educational technology and distance learning. In 2011, I completed a Quality Matters (QM) training session with KSU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) which emphasized how to maximize student learning through best practices of online course development. Additionally, in 2012, I completed the College of Humanities and Social Sciences’
“Build a Web Course” workshop. My interest in educational technology has become something of a creative activity as well, as I have contributed presentations on innovative course design strategies in D2L Brightspace to the “Build a Web Course” workshop, and submitted short articles to *Talon Tips*, the newsletter of KSU’s Distance Learning Center.

I take my teaching performance very seriously, and am proud to have been recognized for teaching excellence by multiple academic units. In 2004, I received the Associate Instructor of the Year award from the Department of Political Science at Indiana University. In 2009, I received similar recognition from Indiana University’s School of Continuing Studies by being one of three recipients of their Teaching Excellence Award. Further evidence of my teaching performance can be seen through my teaching evaluations, which have been uploaded to KSU’s human resources web portal.

**Undergraduate Mentoring**

While at Kennesaw State University, I have not had any formal responsibilities for student advising or mentoring, as these duties are assigned to permanent faculty members. Nonetheless, I place a high priority on developing and maintaining mentoring relationships with undergraduate students, especially those within the international affairs and political science majors. I regularly prepare letters of reference for my former students applying to graduate school, law school, and various internship programs. I consider it an essential part of my job as an educator to be available and approachable for students seeking advice on how to best reach their educational goals.