

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My teaching is informed by three interconnected pedagogical goals: 1) To create an active learning environment that engages *all* students; 2) to foster a variety of skills with tangible and practical applications; and 3) to encourage learning beyond the classroom. I have taught a variety of courses, including *Comparative Politics*, *Latin American Politics*, *Political Analysis and Research Methods*, and *Introduction to American Government*, in traditional face-to-face settings as well as online and experiential learning formats. In the future, I look forward to developing and teaching courses on a broad range of topics related to **comparative politics, Latin American politics, political participation and representation, and poverty and inequality.**

### Creating an Active Learning Environment

As a teacher, I strive to foster intellectual curiosity and critical thinking in my students. To achieve these goals, I incorporate active learning, including learning-by-doing and participation, and “collaboration between students and their instructor.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this active learning approach to teaching discourages the force-feeding of information to passive learners that is later regurgitated on exams, and instead fosters knowledge creation and critical thinking skills.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, I incorporate this active learning model whenever I teach *Comparative Politics*. To illustrate, I devote a few class sessions covering definitions and measurements of democracy. I begin this unit by dividing students into teams and having them come up with their own definitions of democracy, as well as some real-world quantifiable indicators that map onto their conceptual definitions. In preparation for the next class, I have students read Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland’s “Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited”, an accessible article that discusses the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of regime measurements, as well as a textbook chapter that discusses measurement reliability and validity. Once students return to class, I offer them the chance to revise their definitions and measurements of democracy. At the end of this activity, the teams share their definitions and measurements with the whole class, and we assess each measurement by considering its reliability, validity, and replicability. Ultimately, students recognize that democracy is a contested concept, and they gain a greater appreciation for the fact that measurement decisions often involve tradeoffs between validity and reliability. Moreover, students understand the importance of clearly defining concepts and coding rules that allow them to apply the same standards and criteria to all countries.

I further recognize that all students learn differently, and to that end, I offer my students a variety of ways to participate in class. In a traditional lecture-based format, participation is traditionally only assessed by evaluating the quantity and quality of questions/comments from students who speak up in front of the entire class. However, education research has shown that women and minority students face marginalization in the classroom,<sup>3</sup> and hence may be less likely to speak up in class. In order to create an environment that allows all students to thrive, I create multiple opportunities for students to participate. For instance, I motivate students to participate by compelling them to complete reading assignments and prepare answers to discussion questions before coming to class, and devoting class time for students to share these thoughts with their peers

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<sup>1</sup> Archer, Candace C., and Melissa K. Miller. 2011. “Prioritizing Active Learning: An Exploration of Gateway Courses in Political Science.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44 (2): 429-434.

<sup>2</sup> Lantis, Jeffrey S., Lynn M. Kuzma, and John Boehrer. 2000. *The New International Studies Classroom: Active Teaching, Active Learning*. New York: Lynne Rienner.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. see Guy A. Boysen, Guy A. 2011. “Bias in the Classroom: Types, Frequencies, and Responses,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42 (2): 506-534.

in small-group settings. Moreover, my active learning, team-based approach allows me to move around the classroom and engage with many more students – including those students who are least likely to raise their hand in front of the whole class – than I could during a traditional lecture.

### **Fostering Skills with Real World Applications: Teamwork, Critical Reading, and Writing**

To achieve my second pedagogical goal – fostering skills that have a variety of practical applications – I carefully design my syllabi with both academic and non-academic goals in mind. My main learning goal in *Introduction to Political Analysis* is for students to understand and critically consume political science scholarship, including research by women and minority scholars, as well as scholars from the Global South. By the end of the semester, students are able to understand what empirical evidence is and understand how they can use evidence – by modeling political science research– to make informed political decisions. For students who wish to go on to jobs in the policy world, this understanding of how to identify, critically evaluate, and use empirical evidence will allow them to craft better policy.

I further ensure that students can effectively work in small teams, speak in public, and use computer programs such as PowerPoint and Microsoft Excel. Having worked in the business world before, I know the importance of these basic computer skills, and I have also seen firsthand how few students can efficiently navigate programs like Excel. To that end, I have students in *Introduction to Political Analysis* and *Latin American Politics* work on a number of data projects in class. Students work in small groups so they can learn from each other and download public opinion survey data to manipulate in Excel. Ultimately, students come out of my classes with the ability to work with others, communicate effectively, and work on data management projects, all of which will give them an advantage on the job market that they might not otherwise have had.

When teaching research methods, I also leverage my expertise in survey experiment methodology to teach students the research process. To give students hands on experience with survey methods, I would design an assignment wherein students identify a research question that can be answered using survey data, develop their own survey instruments and experimental manipulations, program their questions into Qualtrics or Survey Monkey, distribute the survey to other undergraduate students, and then analyze the data in SPSS or Stata after the survey has been completed. In this way, students gain experience in every stage of the research process, from research design to collecting and analyzing their own data.

Finally, I strive to foster effective writing through my teaching, as writing is a critical skill that students need to develop. In senior seminars, for instance, I would incorporate a number of longer writing assignments into my syllabi with multiple opportunities for feedback and revision. I would also ensure that some of these opportunities for feedback involve peer review, during which students give each other feedback and then incorporate their colleagues' comments into their own written work. Peer review is an important aspect of the writing process as it allows students to see what their colleagues excel at, as well as opportunities for improvement in their classmates' written work. Ultimately, these opportunities for constant feedback, including peer review, help students identify their own strengths and shortcomings so that they can improve their writing.

### **Learning Beyond the Class Room: Research, Internships, and Study Abroad**

Consistent with my pedagogical goals of creating an active learning environment and fostering skills with a variety of real-world applications, I have engaged in the University of Kentucky's political science internship program, online teaching, and expanded opportunities for dialogue about what students can do with their political science degrees. In my role as teaching assistant for UK's political science internship program, which places students to work with leaders in locations like the Kentucky State Capitol and in Washington, DC, I administered three online

sections of *Internships in Government*, in which I created and moderated weekly discussion boards related to students' internship experiences. Working on this program has taught me the ins and outs of internship management, including conducting interviews with undergraduate applicants, communicating with intern hosts, and arranging and moderating a seminar on jobs for political science majors as part of a professional development course that I helped design. Through my extensive fieldwork, I have also established a number of connections in Buenos Aires with leading think tanks, NGOs, and polling organizations, and I would be interested in helping political science students secure internships in Argentina. Moreover, my experience helping to develop the political science internship program at the University of Kentucky from the ground-up makes me well-positioned to help a department developing and/or strengthen its own internship program.

Additionally, I would be enthusiastic to arrange and lead a summer study abroad program in Argentina. As with internships, I would be able to leverage my contacts in Argentina to set up lectures and events with the *Universidad Torcuato di Tella* in Buenos Aires, as well as political and cultural activities, such as visiting the National Congress, Casa Rosada, art and history museums, and the Kirchner Cultural Center. Together, these study abroad opportunities are another example of how I foster learning beyond the classroom.

My research experience at the University of Kentucky has also prepared me to mentor undergraduate students and supervise a variety of independent study programs. In my work for Dr. Tiffany Barnes, I oversaw a number of undergraduate data collections projects. For instance, I supervised students collecting data on environmental treaties, legislator backgrounds, and Kentucky ballots and district-level election results. Students working on these projects have gone on to use this data to develop research papers that they presented at the UK Undergraduate Research Symposium as well as the Kentucky Political Science Association annual meeting. After having played a role in these projects with students at UK, I am excited to continue mentoring students and involving them in my own research in the future.

When students take part in experiential learning activities outside the classroom, they are more satisfied with their college experience and earn better grades, and these benefits accrue the most to marginalized students.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, my own experience as a first-generation college student makes me passionate about helping these students have a successful and fulfilling college experience. In my commitment to teaching, I recognize that teaching and learning do not stop at the classroom door, and look forward to collaborating with students on research, mentoring them for success in internships and careers, and even using my own international research experience to develop study abroad opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> Wasley, Paula. 2006. "Underrepresented Students Benefit Most from 'Engagement'." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Underrepresented-Students/9065>.