

# TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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Having taught international relations and political science at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, I know the range of benefits and challenges that the classroom holds. My efforts in stimulating student learning are based upon this understanding of the academic environment. Pedagogically, I hold the philosophy that education is best when it is centered upon critical inquiry and substantial instructor-student interaction. My teaching is motivated by three primary goals: equipping students to think critically both within the field of study and in other areas, empowering students to develop their voice, and encouraging students to go from theory to practice and seek to improve their communities.

As with my research, my teaching philosophy includes a creative, mixed methods approach. In seminar settings, I tend to use a group-discussion style to engage students through multiple questions to elicit student opinions. I do so through opening the material with key historical inferences then using questions to challenge the implications of theoretical analysis of these inferences. The process is progressive by going from basic, informational questions to more challenging questions without set answers. My goal is to allow the students to critically engage the material. Rather than finding the right response, I promote the goal of looking for the most prescient questions and critically replying to them. I seek to move beyond straight memorization to analysis and formation of new perspectives for discussion. I believe the development of the analytical capacity of each student should be the goal of learning.

Beyond the objectives of group discussion, I also try to introduce new concepts with unique teaching devices. I find that when a student learns through a novel exercise, whether that is a simulation or multimedia, the material being studied will be lasting. Students in my class are used to group debates, illustrative games, and responding to video or images. When making a larger group presentation, I try to augment the basic information being studied with my experiences and background. In this way, even formal presentations become more of a dialogue where I can present objective information along with relevant interpretations, then offer the opportunity for the group to challenge those conclusions. I consider the interactive component of learning to be beneficial to both the student and the teacher. These dialogues often even allow me to learn as much as my students.

My teaching philosophy and approach are best epitomized by my typical last class for the course Introduction to International Relations. I take my students to memorial steps on Tufts University campus. The 'field trip' has gained some notoriety as a unique way to end the class. More importantly, it offers a way to empower my students. I keep the location of our excursion secret until we show up at the steps and preface the trip by saying that I want them to take away more than a story of American history or even a jingoistic interpretation of the memorials. The steps begin with a marker to the Class of 1923 which created the original set then commemorates those from the "Tufts community who sought to preserve the Union". From the onset, I call upon one student to read each inscription then allow the group to explain what it finds unique or compelling. We move from the Civil War to the 'Splendid Little' Spanish-American War then World War I with all class names of those lost mentioned. Interestingly, a later Tufts University Class (1968) sponsors a memorial to both World War II and the Korean War combined. After investigating as a group these epitaphs, the students assume class will end early as we approach the last physically manifest

memorial to “those lost in a conflict in Southeast Asia”—lacking class names or further information such as motivational ideals. Walking up the vertical memorial has a visceral effect and the last few steps reveal an area where a future story of international relations might exist. At this point I ask my students whether there should be a memorial there and, if so, what dedication it should include. Every time I conduct this exercise that answer is different but no less insightful.

The pleasures of teaching do not come without significant challenges. With experience teaching a variety of introductory courses, I recognize the need to find ways to make the study of international relations salient to students from other disciplines. For example, I had a student from the biology department who was able to expand upon existing analytical abilities to improve critical thinking and writing skills. This student was able to see how biology and the study of the environment is not immune from ‘politics’ or international affairs; by focusing on the importance of environmental knowledge in the climate change debate, the student was able to bridge disciplines.

I am committed to seeing my students expand their intellectual and professional capacities. I have maintained ongoing contact with former students even to the point where several have invited me to give lectures at various forums such as the U.S. Naval War College, People’s University in China, and the Tufts Annual China Symposium. I take mentorship outside the classroom seriously. At Boston College and during various Tufts University courses, I have helped students apply for relevant internships and positions. For example, I maintained a shareable excel document that listed fellowships, internships, and other programs for students. The document drew the attention of students outside the course, thereby creating an overflow of students during office hours. Despite the challenge of assisting that great number of students, I relished the opportunity to share my professional advice. With my support, several students have received internships at the United Nations, U.S. Department of State, and nongovernmental organizations along with acceptance into major Ph.D. programs.

I also seek to develop student interest in the subject material, as understanding major international affairs is an important aspect of being an active, engaged citizen. Generating this interest depends upon my efforts to make the information and concepts more significant and accessible. One way I am able to do so is to stimulate curiosity and make the learning process exciting. In going beyond the basic material to further the intellectual activity of my students, I am able to make the students the center of the learning process by imparting knowledge and skills that will support their academic development and practical goals.