

My immediate aims in teaching are to help students develop their learning skills (critical reading, writing, and thinking) to increase their independence as learners and human beings; to do so through learning the substance of political science and philosophy; and to help students appreciate the importance of political science and political theory – if not come to enjoy it, as well. These three objectives support my ultimate purpose in teaching, which is to encourage and facilitate students' continuing inquiries about what the world is like and how to live in such a world.

I ask students to rethink their understanding of the world and how they choose to live, which they structure primarily on the basis of inherited beliefs and opinions. I understand this is a huge demand on their sense of self at one of the most fraught developmental periods of their lives, so to be successful in the classroom, I have to combine resolute provocation with acute sensitivity. Asking students to think like scientists or philosophers is not just difficult in the conventional sense of intellectual demand, but difficult in the sense of demanding a lot from their humanity.

I make this feasible by using two general methods: Socratic discussion to expose their preconceived notions about the world, and highly detailed, personalized feedback on critical reading and writing assignments. Before we work through the challenging ideas we find both in political science and political theory classes, I ask them to think about how they would answer the same questions our authors try to answer. Sometimes we do this as an entire class, sometimes in small groups, and sometimes privately in written participation assignments. The questions are relentless and ask them to expose the very deepest parts of them, so a combination of methods gives them at least one avenue where they can feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and beliefs.

Once we know what we believe, we can begin to analyze those beliefs and work on transforming opinions into knowledge. This is where students need to learn how to evaluate others' arguments and use those arguments to challenge their own thinking. In my theory classes, they begin by learning to read critically, which I demonstrate in class by explicating important passages, and gradually inviting them to try it themselves. In my empirical or methods classes, students work on scaffolded assignments that begin with understanding fundamental concepts or developing basic skills and culminate in a project that synthesizes their newly-acquired knowledge. Thinking like a philosopher or scientist is foreign to most students, but once they have the foundational concepts and tools, they can critically examine the world around them in new ways.

I provide highly-personalized feedback on every assignment, formal and informal, based on the personal experiences and interests they share with me, and my evaluation of their skills at every stage. I make sure I know who each of my students are and where I need to meet them. Pushing students is hard on them, and while many students find my classes to be an exciting

challenge, other students – sometimes the most promising among them – are shocked and discouraged by the material’s difficulty and amount of constructive criticism they receive. I reach out personally to my struggling students, and we work together to figure out how they can succeed. I encourage them by demonstrating my personal investment in their education, and enable them to see why this work is important for their own lives beyond their grade point average. I listen closely to my students, and pay attention to signs of confusion and disagreement they cannot express.

Students are often surprised and thrilled by my pared-down approach that can sometimes look like a traditional lecture-seminar, but which uniquely puts students rather than self-aggrandizement at the center of my classes. If a class, or even a particular student, has trouble processing the questions or understanding the answers we explore in class, I find new ways of presenting it to them – or even better, new ways of drawing those answers out of them by making the first connections to something they already understand and care about. Whatever direction my classes go in, I always give students the luxuries of time and space to think about themselves, free from the distractions and assumptions of their daily lives.