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Teaching Philosophy

As an instructor, my goal is to create interactive and challenging classes where students can develop critical thinking skills and become more engaged with and understanding of politics around the world. I seek to create an environment in which students from all backgrounds feel comfortable and encouraged to contribute to the class discussion and to develop their analytical capabilities. Through the course of the semester, students in my classes develop the tools to create their own logically-consistent arguments, and hone their written and verbal communication skills. Keeping these goals in mind, my teaching philosophy is comprised of three key points: developing critical analytical skills, fostering an understanding of approaches to social science, and creating an environment in which all students can develop written and verbal communication skills. I have experience employing this philosophy in a variety of comparative politics classes at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced undergraduate levels, and am prepared to work with MA and PhD students.

In my classes, I use a variety of active learning techniques to encourage students to develop critical analytical skills. Course materials are drawn from a variety of sources, including news articles, opinion pieces, and primary documents. Students are able to analyze the various readings and connect them to lecture or other course materials through small and large group discussions and reaction papers. I also develop projects to encourage student ownership of their work and to get students excited about analysis. For example, in European Politics, students create and maintain a blog throughout the semester in which they analyze components of the political system of a European country of their choice. Each week, students are able to build on their work, becoming the class “expert” of the case through sharing their findings with their fellow classmates. In addition, this project allows for students to develop comparative skills; at the end of the semester, students work in groups to produce a podcast episode comparing and contrasting their countries’ approaches to a public policy of their choice. I have collaborated with digital learning teams at the institutions where I have taught to develop this project. I use these types of activities to ensure that every student is involved and invested in their project as they develop their own arguments through independent research.

In addition, I teach students social science concepts and the language used by political scientists. Learning about measurement and causal inference helps students to analyze political outcomes in a new way, beyond their own anecdotal evidence. For example, in Introduction to Comparative Politics, we discuss different ways to measure the concepts that we are studying and how different measurements provide varying ways of looking at and interpreting the concept, emphasizing the importance of careful conceptualization and operationalization. In addition, I expose students to relevant and current studies from the

academic literature. We work together in class to identify the theories and hypotheses, and discuss the method used to test these hypotheses. I teach students techniques for reading academic articles to help make difficult material more accessible. This approach allows undergraduates to be exposed to scholarly work in a comfortable and collaborative setting, and contributes to their understanding of the field of political science.

Finally, the development of strong communication skills is emphasized throughout the semester. The ability to articulate an argument, both oral and written, is a skill that students take with them after they leave the class, and into their lives after college. I encourage students to ask questions, and work hard to create a classroom environment in which all students feel comfortable to share their thoughts. I work with students who are nervous about speaking in class to develop techniques for class participation. I use both small and large group discussions, finding that students that are generally tentative about full class participation are more confident after talking through argument with a smaller group. Writing skills are honed through both shorter reaction papers and longer writing assignments. For research papers, I have students turn in several components prior for turning in the completed paper. I provide feedback on their topics, introductions, and outlines to ensure that they are conducting thoughtful analysis and that they are structuring their paper in an organized and effective way. This approach helps students produce stronger research papers, and they can apply the paper writing skills developed in my class to other courses as well.

Teaching Interests

I am interested in teaching courses within the fields of comparative politics and international relations, as well as undergraduate political science research methods. Within comparative politics, I have taught Introduction to Comparative Politics, Comparative Ethnic Politics, Identity & Nationalism in Europe, Politics of East-Central Europe, European Politics, and Politics of the European Union. I am also interested in developing additional comparative courses, including Comparative Democratization, Party Politics, Turkish Politics, and Russian Politics. Within international relations, I am prepared to teach Introduction to International Relations, as well as courses on international organizations and conflict.

Overview of Teaching Experience

I have extensive teaching experience, both in-person and on-line. While the courses I have taught all fall within the comparative subfield, I served as a teaching assistant for political theory and international relations courses. I have also completed pedagogical trainings and workshops, including the semester-long Teaching in Political Science course at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

I have taught at four different institutions, which range from large research-oriented universities to small liberal arts colleges. Regardless of the type of school I am teaching at, I approach all of my courses the same, focusing on the learning outcomes of students. Over-time, I have been able to improve on my teaching skills, learning from my experiences. The courses I have taught can be grouped into three different categories, which I will discuss in turn.

Introduction to Comparative Politics is a required course for political science students

at my current university, and I have taught all sections of the course since the Fall 2020 semester. I have also previously taught this course at Dartmouth College, Middlebury College, and UNC-Chapel Hill. This course includes an introduction to social science, and covers concepts and theories related to topics like modern statehood, nationalism, regime types, regime transitions, and institutions. I assign a variety of materials, ranging from journal articles and book excerpts, to podcast episodes and news articles. During the course of the semester, each student focuses on a different “partly-free country” for in-class activities as well as their papers.

With my research interests focused on ethnicity, I incorporate related topics in all of my courses. However, I teach two that specifically focus on identity within politics: Comparative Ethnic Politics, and Identity & Nationalism in Europe. I designed Comparative Ethnic Politics as a senior seminar, and taught it at both Middlebury and Dartmouth. In this class, we delve into the political science literature on a variety of topics related to ethnic politics. The readings cover a variety of regions, time periods, and research methods. In addition to leading discussion and writing weekly response papers, students conduct their own research on questions of their choosing. I meet with students periodically throughout the semester to check-in on their progress, and students peer-review each others work, practicing both giving and receiving constructive feedback. I designed Identity & Nationalism in Europe as a “craft of research” course at Southwestern University. In this class, we explore the construction and mobilization of different identities in Europe, including ethnic. As a craft of research course, students learn about different comparative research methods, and apply what they have learned to their own research papers, employing many of the same teaching tools as Comparative Ethnic Politics.

I have taught several courses that focus on European politics more broadly, including Politics of East-Central Europe (SU/DC/MC/UNC), European Politics(SU/DC/MC/UNC), and Politics of the European Union (SU). In Politics of East-Central Europe, we discuss the creation of independent states in the region, the politics of the communist era, and the transition to democracy. Throughout each of these periods, ethnic nationalism is a key focus. I also integrate current events to provide a comparison to past political outcomes when appropriate. European Politics provides a comparison of political systems in Europe’s democracies. By the end of the semester, students are expected to have the ability to understand and discuss how political institutions affect policy outcomes and political representation, and the skills needed to analyze and discuss contemporary issues in European politics. In Politics of the European Union, we discuss the formation, evolution, and structure of the European Union, maintaining throughout a focus on how different member states interact with the union. Each student researches a different EU member state throughout the course, and to wrap-up the semester, we hold a mock meeting of the European Council.