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PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Pedagogical Objectives and Approach

One of the greatest paradoxes in life is this: the more we learn, the more we realize there is to know. No matter how much we have already learned, the infinite unknown beckons us to expand our conceptions of the world and seek out our own truth. My own love of learning propels my ambition to teach. In this way, I challenge students to capitalize on every opportunity to learn and reflect on their own interests beyond the context of the classroom. I encourage them to anticipate adversity and cultivate a strong sense of personal responsibility in order to know the pride that results from setting clear goals, being challenged beyond comfort, and truly *earning* the outcome they receive.

My primary objective is to foster recognition of the larger world of knowledge surrounding every learner. To achieve this abstract goal, each of my classes and assignments is geared towards helping students 1) develop practical, transferrable skills such as reading comprehension, critical thinking, analytical research, and persuasive writing; 2) cooperate and communicate with one another to share knowledge and expertise; 3) recognize where course material fits into scholarly dialogue; 4) analyze the strengths and weaknesses within any argument; 5) identify the applicability of course material to personal interests and real-world events; and 6) differentiate between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations/value/behavior/etc.

Learning is a collaborative endeavor. The onus for learning cannot be levered on either teachers or students alone; both need to share responsibility and celebrate in success. There is no one right way to learn—or teach. With this in mind, I, as a teacher, hold myself responsible for conveying my dual passion for teaching and learning in a way that motivates students to also take learning seriously. I strive to be thoroughly prepared and professional, as well as available and approachable to answer student questions and concerns. I accommodate different learning styles through the use of varied class formats. I attempt to equip students with resources to advance the skills they will need to achieve both their in-class and outside objectives. And I provide extensive, constructive feedback on a variety of assessments.

Students are responsible for thoughtfully approaching assignments, reflecting on their own abilities and aspirations, communicating questions in a mature and timely manner, respecting one another, and engaging in the learning process through adequate preparation and active class participation. To underscore the importance of personal responsibility, I work to shift the emphasis off grades and onto *experiences*. While holding students to a very high standard, I stress that life is about doing our best under the given circumstances and that we often learn as

much—if not more—from our mistakes as from our accomplishments. Therefore, I emphasize that learning and performing should be for our own self-fulfillment, not forced. I am a firm believer that working hard is the only way to achieve true “success”.

I utilize multiple techniques to motivate student preparation and promote student engagement. First, I design syllabi with motivating questions for students to ponder as they complete assigned readings. These questions help students recognize important information, make connections to broader course themes, and prepare for exams. Second, I convey clear expectations and regular reminders of course requirements through regular email reminders and a course website (in Blackboard or elsewhere), where I post several optional materials for students interested in knowing more. Third, I lead interactive lectures (often with PowerPoint®) that incorporate relevant media clips and academic games. I test students’ receptivity to new information through iClicker questions, class discussion, written responses, worksheets, etc. Fourth, I prepare discussion- and group-oriented activities, such as reading worksheets, test reviews, and policy briefs. Fifth, I dedicate at least one full day per semester for instructive presentations on improving research, writing, and time management skills. And sixth, I create entertaining activities to make learning active, fun, and memorable.¹ All these projects clarify the material while actively engaging students in the learning process. They also help create an enjoyable learning environment, as evidenced by both the quantitative and qualitative feedback I get from students, as well as the fact that I commonly have students take multiple courses with me.

Teaching Biography

After several years as an Instructor at the University of Colorado Boulder and Colorado State University, I joined Clemson University as an Assistant Professor of Political Science. Between my various appointments, I have developed and taught seven different courses: Introduction to Political Science, Introduction to Comparative Politics, International Law, European Politics, European Integration (sometimes titled, European Union Politics), Current World Problems, and Professional Development in Political Science. I have also supervised an independent study and advised an undergraduate honors thesis. These efforts involve teaching a variety of age levels, majors, substantive content, and class size, which has greatly enriched my teaching abilities by necessitating different teaching formats and assessment techniques. In the near future, I look forward to teaching courses on political behavior and psychology that span the American and Comparative Politics subfields. I am also well-prepared to teach courses on minority/racial politics and research methods.

My passion for teaching and learning is evidenced by consistently ranking above average in instructor-effectiveness on course evaluations. I also won two university-wide awards while at the University of Colorado Boulder. More importantly, I pursue every opportunity to enhance my teaching abilities, mentor others, and engage in pedagogical scholarship. I earned a *Certificate in College Teaching* from the University of Colorado, which required me to complete over 40 hours of training, two videotape consultations, and a faculty evaluation. From 2011-

¹ In addition to Jeopardy-esque midterm reviews, I employ a mix of simulation exercises (e.g., on exchange rate mechanics), reading scavenger hunts, structured class debates, self-placement tests (e.g., preference for presidential or parliamentary democracy), and multimedia presentations. In my International Law class, I also script plays for students to perform in order to translate complex legal jargon into modern everyday slang.

2012, I was a Lead Representative for CU Boulder’s Graduate Teacher Program, for which I led multiple workshops (both in my department and for the university at large) and assisted graduate students in improving their teaching. Finally, I was Principal Investigator of a multi-disciplinary project entitled, “Investigating the Use of Current Events in the Classroom,” that surveyed over 500 CU Boulder faculty to better understand whether, why, and how university teachers incorporate current events in their teaching. These endeavors exemplify the central role that teaching plays in my academic career.

Assessment of Student Learning and Instructor Performance

I see learning as a never-ending process so I evaluate student performance on the basis of improvement over the entire term and in multiple formats. Students’ overall course grade depends on several facets of performance, each designed to give students repeated opportunities to confirm progress.

Intro-level courses require students to demonstrate a clear grasp of basic concepts and theories, which I evaluate primarily through exams consisting of multiple choice, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and essay questions. Integrating different question formats gives students multiple ways to convey the knowledge they have acquired through lecture and assigned texts. Student competency is measured by correctly identifying terms and arguments, then analyzing the limitations and consequences of theoretical assumptions to decide for themselves which theories best account for certain outcomes—and why. For upper-division courses, however, learning must be more than regurgitating facts. “Knowledge” is demonstrated by application and extension of foundational course material on two accounts: 1) exams requiring students to critically evaluate scholars’ opinions and defend their own, and 2) independent research projects (individual term papers, group policy briefs, etc.) that expand students’ research skills while tailoring the course to subjects of personal interest.

My process-based view of learning also informs my approach toward teaching. I am convinced that regular assessment of the *course and instructor* is vital for fulfilling learners’ needs. To this end, I constantly update my teaching techniques based on student evaluations. In addition to the university’s standard end-of-semester questionnaires, I conduct a first-day questionnaire that pre-tests students’ knowledge of and interest in the course material. I then deploy a more extensive survey after the first exam in each course. These two additional forms of feedback allow me to gauge and incorporate student opinions/concerns in a timely manner. It also helps students assess where their *own* views fall in comparison to the class as a whole because I report the results back to them in a PowerPoint® presentation comprised of charts and statistics.²

² This entire exercise has a larger purpose: to give students an example of social science research methods and analysis in action.