

Teaching Philosophy

I had the opportunity to teach in a variety of contexts -- from intellectually engaging audiences in graduate programs at the University of Florida and Charles University (Czech Republic) to instances where students had limited previous exposure to content focused on non-American topics. More recently, as an instructor in the Undergraduate College at National Louis University I serve a student body in which English is second language. Given this wide range of academic interests, intellectual abilities, and past opportunities, I can confidently articulate that I do not have a blueprint of said techniques that would make my teaching successful. I have developed instead a few principles I strive to implement in all environments. First, understanding the culture of the workplace is imperative to make sure one meets the needs of the student body and institutional expectations when designing new courses. Second, and equally important, bringing the material to life through assignments that allow students to grab a front seat in the learning process is critical to generate an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity. Last, but not least, presenting oneself as a learning facilitator, whose main task is to make sure all the right incentives are in place to engage a rewarding journey. Taking advantage of the opportunities offered through class discussions, on campus events, and the academic community at large falls, in the end, on students' shoulders, whereas my role is that of a gentle moderator.

Over the past decade, I have developed an extensive teaching portfolio, offering a wide range of courses on campus and abroad that can be grouped into several distinct tracks: Introductory and advanced courses in Comparative Politics and International Relations with a regional focus on Europe and required courses in Political Methodology.

To further illustrate my teaching approach, in lower level classes, such as *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, *Introduction to International Relations*, or the interdisciplinary *Europe from a Social Science perspective*, I insist on having a textbook as the main reading material, mostly to give students an accessible common ground regarding core concepts addressed during the semester. I combine lectures with group discussions and I narrowly define the scope of the assignments with plenty of guidelines and feedback opportunities. I use films that address topics relevant to class discussions and I ask students to draw connections between these various sources of information. I found that presenting a concept in different formats benefits students the most. For instance, when discussing the communist regimes, I use excerpts from films such as 'Lives of Others', 'Goodbye, Lenin', 'Czech Dream' or literary texts and memoirs that give students access to original testimonies on these regimes.

In upper level classes, such as *East European Politics*, *Political Institutions in the European Union*, *The European Union Foreign Policy*, or *Politics under Authoritarian Regimes*, I value methods that enhance students' research and analytical skills. The reading load is heavier and in-class discussions emphasize individual rather than group contribution. Students have more freedom in choosing topics for research projects, which constitute an essential component of the final grade. Research papers develop progressively throughout the entire semester with ample peer and instructor feedback offered at each step. I believe students learn best when connections are made between theories and concepts covered in class and political realities. To help students make these connections I organize hands-on activities, such as mock elections, state-building exercises, and simulations. With funding received from various on-campus centers and international institutions, I organized annual mini-research symposia at East Carolina University, where best student projects were presented. These end-of-semester activities have been very well

received based on students' feedback. Most importantly, it encouraged some of my brightest students to pursue graduate school.

Covering the political methodology track, I taught *Research Methods* (undergraduate level), *Data Analysis* (PhD level), and *Applied Statistics* (graduate level). Research Methods focused on identifying and refining research questions, formulating hypotheses, and assessing theories. The graduate level courses focused on honing graduate students' statistical skills, while using a variety of statistical packages, SPSS, STATA and RStudio. These courses have been amongst the most challenging and most rewarding given the projects I enjoyed each semester.

My mentoring goes beyond classroom assignments and interactions. My students have asked me to serve as mentor to the *Political Science Student Association* at East Carolina University (2017-2019). In this capacity, I worked hard to generate an event calendar that spoke to students' interests, bringing speakers in to address various career avenues for students majoring or minoring in Political Science. In addition, we organized trips to Washington DC and Raleigh, North Carolina for students interested in political science related careers. I have also provided feedback on fundraising activities and speaker series events for this association.

I have actively pursued teaching grants during my Teaching Assistantship position at East Carolina University. I won teaching grants from several institutions in the US and Europe, such as the Center for Leadership Development (East Carolina University in 2016, 2017), the Honors College (East Carolina University in 2018), and the International Visegrad Grant (International Visegrad Fund in Bratislava, Slovakia in 2017-2020). These grants funded speaker series events that I spearheaded with visitors from the US State Department, the Global Arena Research Institute (Prague, Czech Republic), and the Hungarian Europe Society (Brussels, Belgium). In addition, as Director of the Studies Abroad Program at East Carolina University, I mentored students from under-represented populations who won prestigious federal fellowships. My study abroad program, *Prague in Context*, took over 20 students to Prague over two summers and generated 3 Benjamin Gilman International Scholarships from the US Department of State. I gained tremendous insights into the challenges faculty face when developing such beyond classroom programs and I look forward to applying this knowledge to new academic environments.

In sum, I believe that appealing to a wide range of learning styles and preferences facilitates the acquisition of new concepts and makes the learning process effective. I have learned over time that no matter how well thought of a lesson plan can be, there is always some uncertainty surrounding its successful application.