

## Teaching Statement

I once read a quote, attributed to Lily Tomlin that the best teachers were the ones “who give you something to take home to think about besides homework.” When I think back about the best teachers I have had, I am reminded that, even though I always had plenty of homework, the best ones always gave me something to think about. It is that component of learning that I have always liked and it is something that I seek to impart in teaching. At the same time, I am committed to a teaching philosophy that seeks to combine this attribute with active learning, critical thinking skills, relevance, and a good background in research skills.

First, I use an active learning environment to engage the learning needs of all my students. Some students respond well to lectures, while other students engage the material through discussion and presentation. I vary my instruction methods and utilize lecture, simulations, discussion, and student presentations. I find that this helps to keep students engaged and enables them to have more of a stake in their learning. In one case, for an Introduction to International Relations class, I developed a simulation to discuss the concepts of polarity, bandwagoning, balancing, and economic liberalism. Each student was given a card with a fictitious country, some level of “power”, and an indication of whether their country produced or consumed some resource. I then asked the students their thoughts on the security of different power arrangements, the logic of balancing and bandwagoning, and the pacific effects of economic liberalism. This engaged the students in the literature and got them to actively think and question the concepts in ways they might not otherwise.

Second, I am committed to having all my students think critically. This is a necessary component, not merely in academics, but in being an active and engaged citizen. We frequently discuss the merits and drawbacks of international relations theory, the applications of concepts, and the role of theory in everyday events. I actively try to break the students out of the placing theories and concepts into rigid ideological categories. For example, I would challenge their assumptions in a foreign policy class and take a contrary position. In other instances, I would ask them to take the opposite position and argue against their preferred ideological position. I do this, not because I like argument, but because I seek to create reasoned debate, and to instill in my students an ability to be a critical, not cynical, evaluator of current events. These are concepts which I feel have gone missing in many of today’s policy debates.

The third aspect of my teaching philosophy is to make the material relevant. One way I do this is to incorporate current events into my lesson plan. This is something that I feel strongly about; for me, international politics is relevant because I come from a military family whose roots strongly lay in Europe. Some of my earliest memories center around the Army and being an American military child living in West Germany. While many of my students do not have the same background, some can point to the personal effects that politics have in their lives. This allows students to see that politics is more than a series of theories and concepts. In addition, I try to relate theories of international relations in ways accessible to students; personal conflict and proximity provide very similar

antecedents to the same concept in international relation, constructivism and perceptions work for students in roughly the same way they do for states. Lastly, I like to draw from history; many concepts can be illustrated with a particularly vivid example from the past. These illustrations may not always be the most accurate portrait of the concept, but the example often provides an interesting and vivid way for students to understand the material.

Lastly, I seek to introduce my students to the research process. This is important because it reinforces the other components of my teaching philosophy and provides students with skills that are useful beyond the study of politics. I first introduce them to the basic ways of writing and thinking about politics. This includes appropriate citation styles, correct grammar, and good research skills. I also introduce them to the field; we discuss peer-reviewed journals and I encourage them to incorporate this research into their own assignments. In my Environmental Politics class, I encouraged them to develop their research paper in the same way as a journal article: research question, literature review, theory, evidence (mostly descriptive), discussion, and evaluation. Throughout, I asked my students to be critical with their theories and to anticipate criticisms to their analysis. This project allowed them to apply the concepts learned in class, critically evaluate them, and present them in an effective and rigorous manner – skills that are valued in any profession.

In sum, I am committed to quality teaching and towards preparing my students to be effective citizens and productive members of society in whatever field they so choose. I want my students to value their education and the concepts they learned in my class. And hopefully, as they leave my class they'll have plenty of interesting things to think about. Well, that and homework.