



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

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Teaching Philosophy Statement

My teaching philosophy centers on the importance of learning good communication skills in the classroom. Whether in a small upper division course or a large lecture course, I try to facilitate class discussion giving students an opportunity to express themselves and share ideas. Through research papers and exams our students learn to effectively communicate their ideas in writing, but it is equally important for our students to learn to effectively communicate verbally. Verbal communication skills help students learn to express their own ideas and become a part of the educational community. The importance of verbal communication of ideas can be ignored in the classroom without an instructor who actively engages in creating an open and tolerant environment where ideas can be shared and multiple points of view can coexist. Discussion helps overcome issues of disciplinary jargon, makes the educational experience more dynamic and engaging, and elicits students to apply concepts in class to world around them.

To facilitate class discussion, I try to keep an open and welcoming environment in all of my classes. I encourage students to ask questions during lecture and insist that no question is stupid. To break the ice, I start out slowly on the first day by asking the class to provide examples of the phenomenon being discussed. In my introduction to comparative politics class, I begin my lectures with the state and ask student what are examples of failed states, nation-states, multinational states, and stateless nations. In my European Union politics classes, I begin class by asking the students to start naming the member states of the European Union. Having the students begin talking from the first day in a low risk environment of providing examples is critical to creating an environment where healthy discussion can occur.

Once initial conversation of providing examples has been established, I proceed towards facilitating class discussion of more complex topics. I always try to budget in time every lecture for dialogue to continue the process of engaging my student in the material. I prepare slides for each lecture with discussion questions meant to jump start class discussion and encourage students to engage in the debate. I also use participation as part of the student's final grade (usually ten to fifteen percent of the course grade) which further incentivizes student to contribute to the classroom debate. For students who are too shy to speak in class I reassure them to start small and expand as they grow in confidence assuring them that the dialogue is meant to be open and multifaceted with no definitely "right" answer. If I have been successful at producing the right environment, then dialogue over the course of the term will happen naturally, making discussion questions unnecessary to start debate.

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To further create a hospitable environment for discussion, I try to refer back to students comments during discussion and directly connect them to the lecture. This helps increase student confidence, while also allowing theory laden lectures to be connected to the real world discussion providing clarity for the students and highlighting why theory matters to the real world interactions and experiences they will face. This helps students become more actively engaged with the material and reminds them why the material matters in the first place.

I strive to be the kind of teacher and mentor who does not walk into the classroom to give a lecture that seldom if ever needs a response. I do not want to lose sight of who my students are and why we are there, in the hope of creating something better. When I ask the class questions, I can challenge their preconceptions and help them to answer “why” they think the way in which they do. When students answer my questions to the class they can surprise me and challenge my preconceptions and show me new ways to see the world. Helping to refine my conceptions of the world and improve the quality of the way in which I present arguments and theories.

The classroom is an opportunity to engage our students and facilitate personal growth and communication skills. As someone who has spent my dissertation years striving to understand how judicial dialogue across borders has transformed national judicial systems, I find it rewarding to help students learn to communicate with increased confidence and rigor in the classroom.