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Teaching Statement

In my approach to teaching, I challenge students to evaluate the way they think about the world around them. My teaching style couples active learning with discussions anchored in current events. This teaching methodology encourages critical thinking on the causes and effects of day-to-day political phenomena, producing students who can tackle challenging questions and provide thoughtful solutions. Inside and outside the classroom, I also prioritize experiential learning. I encourage students to "learn by doing" through the semester-long quantitative projects I assign in my courses and by pursuing collaborations with students in my own research.

I have honed my teaching style and skills over the span of seven semesters at UNC. During this time, I have designed two of my own courses, worked with students in small-class settings, and directed my own teaching assistants. For my work as an instructor, I was recognized by the UNC Political Science Department with the Earle Wallace Award for Graduate Student Teaching.

Teaching Philosophy

American Politics

My undergraduate classes are designed to produce informed citizens who are effective participants in the political process. To me, this means not only understanding the fundamentals of American politics but also appreciating how and why political outcomes occur. To achieve this aim, I start every class session with a review of the week's political news and pose a "big" question. For example, during my *Introduction to American Government* class in Spring of 2019, I asked my students to discuss in small groups why it was important to members of Congress that the government's then twenty-two day shutdown ended. Coming back together as a class, students shared their thoughts on the nature of representation and politicians' self-interest. Moving to a lecture, I tied this piece of political news to our examination of Mayhew's *Electoral Connection*. Commenting on my teaching style in their evaluation, one student wrote: "[Rachel] presented all of the material very clearly and really engaged the class with thoughtful questions." By placing abstract concepts in a real-world context, I find that students are more likely to approach politics analytically and leave their political leanings at the door. In my evaluations, multiple students pointed out the "politically neutral" and "sensitive" learning environment that I cultivate.

In a PhD program, students begin to learn that the world is more complicated than a simple X-Y relationship. Answering political questions can be tough and complex, requiring strong theory building and, sometimes, more advanced methodological techniques. I am eager to work closely with graduate students, equipping them with the substantive understanding and methodological skills necessary to answer important research questions about American politics.

Political Methodology

As a female methodologist, I am deeply invested in ensuring that my students—particularly those students traditionally underrepresented in STEM—feel invited, welcomed, and encouraged to pursue data science and applied statistics. I find that students sometimes struggle in their methods-driven coursework to make connections between abstract statistical concepts and real-world application. Therefore, I try to introduce methodological concepts to my students by way of accessible,

academic research and political examples. For instance, when teaching concepts associated with measurement and estimation, I walk students through notable examples of polling miffs, such as "Dewey Defeats Truman" and the 2016 Trump-Clinton election.

For three semesters I have served as the primary instructor for *Data in Politics*—a course in my department's methods sequence for undergrads. This class covers topics like causality, linear regression, and research design. The syllabus for this course and other teaching materials can be found on my website. I also teach students the programming language R as a way to actively learn about quantitative methods. Students apply their new coding skills to a semester-long group project that answers a current political question. I meet with these groups bi-weekly to help them overcome methodological hurdles and to discuss research design improvements. In lieu of a group project this semester, due to the nature of online classes, my students will complete a final assignment where they independently fit and interpret a linear regression model in R that evaluates racial disparities in voting wait times during the 2018 election. Commenting on my teaching style in quantitative courses, one student wrote: "[Rachel] makes a largely humanities audience think about math and statistics in a way that makes us care." Another student noted: "The idea of learning R was daunting to me, but Rachel made it attainable and accessible."

This spring, I will be teaching a three-day seminar on collecting and analyzing text-as-data in R for a fifth time through UNC's Odum Institute for Research in Social Science. Short courses like mine are designed as a means of continued education for professionals, faculty members, and graduate students. When teaching this short-course, I weave running examples through my lectures to ground participants' learning in tangible application. Further, in each iteration of this class, I have tailored my instruction to aide participants' own research. I believe methodology classes are most successful when treated as an open dialogue, where students' goals can help inform the content of class. I plan to carry this approach forward into my future course designs.

Hands-On, Experiential Learning

Learning about research through experiential opportunities has been instrumental to my growth as a political scientist. As an undergraduate, I was first introduced to academic research in a special topics class where students gained insight into congressional procedure by coding and analyzing amendments to House and Senate bills. Actively participating in the research process helped motivate my decision to pursue graduate school and cemented my belief in "learning by doing."

To implement this philosophy in my own teaching, I make a concerted effort to extend learning beyond the classroom. In my courses, I educate students on the numerous ways they can participate in and pursue academic research. A student from my *Data in Politics* class commented that, "there were ample opportunities for success within the classroom while also learning about how to become involved outside the class." Furthermore, as the point-person for two data-collection projects, I recruit and train undergraduate and graduate students to serve as research assistants on these projects. I spend significant time discussing research design with these RAs to give them a sense of how their work helps to implement our larger vision for each project. Currently, I manage a team of fifteen students who collect and clean campaign website text—the majority of whom are female. As a woman working in a male-dominated sub-discipline, I believe that it is important for me to encourage and support other women who show an interest in data and methods.