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Teaching Statement

Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher, my goal has always been to sow the seed of curiosity. Curiosity is the first stepping stone of learning. One of the major challenges of teaching comparative politics is that, as any social science, it is a stream of conflicting theories, approaches and methodologies. My belief is that this could be overwhelming for students, hence my teaching philosophy is to serve as a guide in the process of discovering comparative politics.

I did not start my teaching career as a graduate student, however, but as an advanced undergraduate student in the *Institute of Political Science* at *Catholic University of Chile*. As a teaching assistant, I would direct weekly discussion sessions of the entire sequence on history of political thought. It was during those years that I discovered many things. First, I wanted to continue doing what I was doing, which was teaching and researching (since I was also a RA). Second, that my teaching parameter of approaching “big” questions was to present the material in such a way that they felt intrigued and curious about it. I believe these are two of the main ingredients to form individuals who can think critically and navigate the major debates in comparative politics.

As a teaching assistant at Rutgers, I have been lucky enough to teach in one of the most diverse schools in the country. As an engaging teacher, I always take “pedagogical advantage” of this situation by bringing into the class many examples from different parts of the world. It is almost always the case that I have a student from my example country. Teaching in diverse environments has trained me very well in how to approach controversial issues and in how to present the material in a way that it is interesting for all students regardless of their different cultural backgrounds.

Currently I am the head teaching assistant of the *American Government* course, taught by Prof. Ross Baker. In this course, we teach major developments in American politics, such as the origins of federalism, major trends in public opinion, the incentives political parties have during election times and other broad topics. Besides cultural diversity, this particular class always has students majoring in many different areas. These environments are twice as challenging. However, I like to present dry topics in such a way that they feel directly “affected” by them. For example, in one lecture we were analyzing the costs of political participation. Rather than motivating the problem from a dry or theoretical perspective, I chose to compare it with social media. In that way it was easier to think what were the costs and benefits of each form of participation.

I have not been a teaching assistant at the undergraduate level only but also at the graduate level. In the Fall of 2015 I served as the TA of the *Introduction to Statistics* course that Prof. Beth Leech taught. There I gave a talk on how to present statistical models in an appealing and intuitive way. I engaged my colleagues in way such that they could not only see how statistical results should look like but how to actually produce them using a statistical package.

At Rutgers, teaching assistants are not allowed to teach semester-length courses. However, in the winter of 2015 I had the great opportunity to teach the *Math Camp and Introduction to Computing* course that run all day for an entire week. This course is intended for first-year graduate students and it gives all necessary elements to perform well in our methods sequence courses. I designed the course so we could spend two days working on calculus, two days on matrix algebra and one full day on computing. In general, this is a complex subject matter to teach and to learn. It requires superb organizational and teaching skills. I decided then to adopt a “no child left behind” policy. This is actually very important to me as a teacher, not only in this kind of situations but in any class I have participated as a teacher or TA. Shy students with unanswered questions perceive no benefit if the instructor is *only* “engaging”. I think it is fundamental to create an atmosphere of constructive learning, an environment of tolerance and where the belief that *we* (i.e, students and the instructor altogether) are finding the possible answers *together*. That is why I think it is fundamental to reward all sort of possible questions. It is by asking lots of questions that we learn and stimulate learning and curiosity. Almost every lecture I have ever given makes out of students’ questions a topic of discussion and debate. Rephrasing and re-framing students’ questions allows me to accomplish these goals while sticking to the syllabus.

Finally, one important aspect of being part of an active academic community is the need for mentoring and the possibility to give it, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels. That is why every year I serve as a graduate student mentor. There I have the opportunity to help incoming students with their transition into graduate school. Issues range from time management to computational working flows, to more substantive topics. At the undergraduate level I always provide advice to interested undergraduate students wanting to pursue a career and/or a PhD/MA in political science. As an undergraduate, I still remember how important mentoring for me was to my decision to apply for graduate school.

Teaching Interests I would like to teach courses in comparative politics, political economy of development, Latin American politics and applied methods courses. However, within this range, I can be quite flexible. Below I describe a potential list of courses:

- Substantive Courses:
 - Introduction to Comparative Politics (UG/G).
 - Political Regimes and Regime Change (UG/G) .
 - Political Economy of Development (UG/G).
 - Economic History and Political Economy (UG/G).
 - Changes in Latin America (UG/G).
- Methods courses:
 - Applied Quantitative Methods in Political Science (UG/G).
 - Research Design / Epistemology in Political Science (UG/G).
 - Introduction to Quantitative Methods in Political Science (UG/G).

Sample Student Evaluations

- *“The TA is very responsive when spoken to and is quick to answer questions via email. The TA’s willingness to learn with us is also helpful in learning the material and allows us to have nice discussions in class”.*
- *“My TA showed he knew his subject material because he was able to answer hard and complicated questions efficiently despite it being obvious that English was not his first language”.*
- *“Hector showed me how to make connections with government terms. He made the big picture seem simpler for me”.*
- *“Over the break, I came to the conclusion that I want to major in political science. American Government was the first course I ever took related to political science, and I loved it”.*
- *“I am very grateful for your help and will definitely reach out to you to ask questions about Comparative Politics if that’s what I eventually plan on doing. I feel like I’m very new to this whole field of study - mainly because I haven’t been in the US for a very long time, and because of the way the government works so differently here than in Pakistan, where I’m from”.*
- *“The instructor had a very clear interest in the subject matter of the course. I liked how the instructor gave us specific points and tips to prepare for midterms and the final. I also liked that the instructor emailed his notes to the students who attended recitation in order to look over the notes more closely”.*
- *“The teaching assistant really helped me to think about all the “why” aspects of the material. Like for example, “Why is this important?” or “Why does this relate to the material?””.*
- *“The best TA in teaching the course material. Each recitation session is well compact with main concepts crucial for understanding the course material”.*
- *“As an international student who takes the course for requirement, the TA have greatly increase my interest in politics, increase my awareness of politics”.*

Teaching References

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encl: Curriculum vitae, teaching statement, cover letter, writing samples.