

Teaching Statement

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Teaching Philosophy and Principles

I believe that a good educator in political science should realize the gap between one's own scholarly training and the students' actual needs and expectations. As PhD students, we are trained in graduate school to identify conceptual problems, develop theoretical frameworks, and apply rigorous inferential methods to test our theory. Undergraduate students, on the other hand, are unfamiliar with the norms and paradigms in the political science discipline. Instead, they take political science classes for a variety of practical reasons beyond academic inquiry: to better understand contemporary news and events, to make informed political decisions in their own lives, or to prepare for a career related to politics or public service. Thus, educators in political science should strike a balance between two objectives — teaching students classical theories and important concepts on the one hand, and developing their practical skills for real-world application on the other hand.

With this self-awareness, my teaching philosophy is guided by a desire to use my political science expertise to facilitate the students' real-world goals and pursuits. When I am preparing my teaching material, I always keep asking myself: how can those theories and concepts in political science help them get a better sense of *contemporary* political events in a world of increasing chaos and uncertainty? How can the empirical methods used in political science improve their problem-solving skills in the real world? In short, my teaching will incorporate theory and methods with applications oriented toward the students' actual needs, rather than a simple recitation of the contents I have learned in graduate school.

I also believe that one cannot be a good teacher without being a caring and responsible person at first. I value my students greatly and treat them as equal individuals who are capable of independent, critical thinking. I am aware that unequal power relations exist between the teacher and the student, so I always give sufficient voice to students and encourage them to question and challenge existing theories and concepts, while avoiding imposing my personal views and judgments on them. Last but not least, I strongly believe that political science should be a means to empower, rather than oppress, disadvantaged social groups. From syllabus design to classroom discussion, I always try my very best to include the perspectives from underrepresented racial and gender minorities. It is my hope that my students can reflect on how their own positionality and privilege would shape their views on certain political issues.

Teaching Experience and Student Feedback

In the past, I have had the opportunity to teach or serve as a TA for a variety of subjects, ranging from comparative politics (3 courses), topic courses on China (1 course), quantitative methods (2 courses), and game theory (1 course). My teaching has been highly evaluated by my students for both my pedagogical approach and my friendly and patient attitude towards them.

a. Introduction to Comparative Politics

In three consecutive semesters from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019, I served as the teaching assistant for “Politics Around the World,” an introductory comparative politics class for first-year political science majors. This course started with an overview of key theories and concepts in comparative

politics, followed by an in-depth comparative study of political systems in the UK, Germany, China, Russia, and South Africa. I taught three discussion sections every week, where I covered weekly reading materials, explained difficult concepts that showed up in lectures, and answered the students' questions. Additionally, in order to ensure that students could link theoretical concepts with real-world topics, every week I asked two students to make 5-minute "news presentations," where they were asked to describe and analyze an ongoing political event in the world using the concepts they had learned in class. With this activity, I hope to push my students to think critically about contemporary world politics and organize their arguments in a clear, concise manner.

b. Topic Course on Chinese Politics

In Fall 2020, I was the teaching assistant to Professor Reed Lei for his Chinese Politics class for upper-class political science majors. This course covered key Chinese political institutions, central and local policymaking processes in China, and the historical development of the Chinese regime. I was responsible for teaching three discussion sections, drafting and grading midterm and final exams, and holding weekly office hours. With the professor's approval, I dedicated my discussion sections entirely to reading and discussing *recent* scholarly articles on Chinese politics within five years. My reason was that the Chinese regime in the era of Xi Jinping has evolved enormously, and many traditional theories and concepts, developed by China scholars decades ago, might not reflect China's political realities. By exposing my students to recent, cutting-edge research and high-quality news reports on China, I expected them to develop a holistic, up-to-date view on Chinese politics. Built upon this experience, I will design and teach a Chinese politics class independently for the upcoming Spring 2023 semester.

c. Data Analysis with R Programming

Besides my expertise in comparative and Chinese politics, I also have strong experience in teaching political methodology. In Spring 2020 and 2021, I served as a teaching assistant for Understanding Political Numbers, an introductory statistics class for second-year political science majors. I was responsible for running three R training sessions to teach students how to perform data analysis with R programming. My training session covered a variety of key topics, such as data cleaning and transformation, classical regression analysis, basic causal inference, and data visualization. At the end of the course, students were required to independently analyze a dataset of their own choice and demonstrate their statistical inference skills using R.

d. Political Game Theory

Last but not least, I also feel comfortable teaching game theory and formal modeling. In Fall 2021, I worked with Professor Andrew Kydd as a TA for his Analysis of International Relations class. This course was designed to introduce basic game theory concepts to undergraduate students, followed by an overview of simple formal models used in international relations. During weekly discussion sections, I guided students to revisit each game theory question step by step, helping them understand not only the mathematical details but also the real-world implications of those formal models. My teaching efforts have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from students.

Teaching Preference

As demonstrated in my teaching and research record, I am happy to teach a variety of courses in the fields of comparative politics and political methodology. Below is a sample of the courses that I will be interested in and capable of teaching:

Comparative & Chinese Politics:

- Introduction to Comparative Politics
- Comparative Political Institutions
- Comparative Political Economy
- Authoritarian Politics
- Political Violence and Repression
- Chinese Politics
- Policy and Policymaking in China

Political Methodology

- Quantitative Methods in Political Science
- Causal Inference in Political Research
- Computational Methods with Stata and R
- Introduction to Political Game Theory
- Formal Models in Comparative Politics
- Formal Models in International Relations

Appendix: Selected Student Evaluations

PS 400: Chinese Politics

Semester TAed: Fall 2020

Average student evaluation score: 4.7/5.0

- “Juan is very responsible at distributing materials and he is really knowledgeable about the class contents and any related topics. Very nice and approachable! He was very smart and knew a lot about the topic of the class. Also made himself available whenever I needed help.”
- “He went above and beyond by helping us with study guides, truly one of the best TAs I have had. Excellent in helping the student succeed in this course.”
- “He was very respectful. I wish I would’ve been able to have him in person!! He is so knowledgeable and does a very good job making difficult material easier to understand. I will miss his recitation sessions.”
- “Juan created excellent study guides and was incredibly helpful. He certainly deserves recognition for how well he adapted to the online format.”
- “Juan is beyond knowledge on the subject matter of this course but further he communicated and explained the subject matter in succinct and easy to comprehend way. He went above and beyond for his students by creating study guides, practice exams, and review sessions. Juan is an amazing TA that has demonstrated clear passion for not only his field of academic research but also the students in this class.”
- “Juan was highly educated on all the topics presented in class and I think he did a very great job running this course! All of Juan’s discussions were very helpful in clarifying lecture content and introducing new content. His presentation was easy to understand.”

PS 348: Analysis of International Relations (Political Game Theory)

Semester TAed: Fall 2021

Average student evaluation score: 4.5/5.0

- “I think our TA did a great job of working with what he had. Our TA took the time each week to walk through every problem from the problem set in depth and do extra problems if we had time. He was really helpful in explaining the mathematical equations and mathematical side of the class.”
- “My TA was very kind and a welcome educational presence in my semester.”
- “He is very approachable and never made you feel uncomfortable asking something.”
- “Knew the material very well.”

PS 120: Politics of the World

Semesters TAed: Fall 2018, Spring 2019, Fall 2019

Average student evaluation score: 4.0/5.0

- “My TA was Juan and he was incredible. He used discussion time well to recap the topics discussed in class, and broke down large concepts to help me understand. Whenever I stayed after to ask small questions he would readily and happily answer them & clear up any confusion. He would make additional learning guides for us and always had our best interest in mind. Juan did a fantastic job!!
- Juan was always very helpful and inclusive in section. He did a great job of explaining difficult concepts. He also never discouraged anyone that answered a question incorrectly, which made participation much more comfortable. I really enjoyed having him as a TA, and I learned a lot from him over the course of the semester.”
- “Give Juan an award. That man has really put in effort to create an engaging discussion section. He is exceptional at what he does and knows pretty much about every single political event in the world. He should really TA a higher level course.”
- “Very knowledgeable and good at getting students to elaborate on their thoughts without seeming harsh or unwelcoming. I really like Juan’s ability to engage people within discussion and his clarification of concepts that were hard to grasp.”
- “Juan is a really humble character. He understands this course well and when is there for any question a student may have. Juan likes to answer any questions in a very understanding terms so they student can understand the subject. If Juan needs a nice haircut for 10 dollar, tell him to hit me up, I know a person.”

PS 270: Understanding Political Numbers (R Programming)

Semesters TAed: Spring 2020, Spring 2021

Average student evaluation score: 3.8/5.0¹

- “Juan was extremely helpful and patient. He answered all of my questions about problem sets and other coding matters and helped me to succeed in this course.”
- “Was willing to listen to all questions and concerns and attempted to provide answers to all.”
- “Juan is very knowledgeable and nice. He made this semester better for me.”
- “Juan was always very open to helping out and answering questions and wanted to make sure everybody understood the material.”
- “Juan has been very accessible both offline and online (through email). He is very honest (e.g. explaining why he was late to respond to emails) and is very knowledgeable about the course material. He also delivers information in a straightforward way, which is easier to understand. He is also very understanding.”

¹The lower student evaluation score was partially due to the fact that the Spring 2020 semester was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and all courses were moved online in an abrupt manner.