Teaching Philosophy

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My approach to teaching political science to students starts with an identification of a problem I see in the discipline in general. The gap between what political scientists do and what political scientists teach to students, certainly at the undergraduate-level, is becoming a chasm. Political scientists today often occupy their analytical energies with questions of data, measurement, rigorous formal models, and advanced statistical tools. While our discipline has evolved with (and has even been at the forefront of) advances in technology and inference, the undergraduate curricula often do not reflect these changes. The same political science we learned as undergraduates decades ago may be what we teach our students. Many old concepts endure and should be taught, but the discipline has transformed. My teaching philosophy is motivated by a desire to bridge this gap by emphasizing the *science* of "political science." This approach has the benefit of bringing my in-class instruction in closer orbit of my research as well as teaching students useful real-world knowledge and skills for jobs inside and outside academia, no matter the exact topic of the course.

I begin every class with a discussion of science and inference. I find that most students are not accustomed to thinking of political science in this way, at least initially. After all, most students who enroll in political science as a major do so because they are interested in politics or think of themselves as political. This is even applicable to non-majors who enroll in introductory courses. Thus, they are unaccustomed to thinking about the science behind "political science" and do not see the connection between the two. I address this as soon as the class begins.

For example, my introductory course on international relations, targeted for first-year students, starts with the important assumptions that underpin our means to inference. We start with an identification of the main actors we analyze (i.e. state leaders). We discuss the context of how state leaders interact in a strategic situation. This means we discuss some game theory, simple bargaining/ultimatum models, and expected utility theory. This discussion happens before we start talking about topics like war, trade, or international environmental politics. In short, I spend the first few lectures of the semester encouraging students to first think scientifically about the study of international relations before learning about the topics that comprise a study of international relations.

My upper-division international conflict course proceeds in a similar fashion. Students cannot take the upper-division conflict course without also taking the introductory course on international relations. However, I start with the same discussion, augmenting it with a discussion of scientific inference and the empirical implications of theoretical models (EITM) approach. I tailor these first few weeks to reiterate bargaining models of conflict and expand on them for an audience largely comprised of juniors and seniors. I also bring in a discussion of terms like "conflict", "war", and "militarized interstate dispute (MID)." This amounts to a full week where we define these terms and narrow the scope in which we use them (e.g. wars are operationally MIDs in which more than a 1,000 troops die in combat). I build on this toward a simple "dangerous dyads" lecture that teaches students how to understand research design, data analysis, and importantly

how to read and evaluate a regression table. This prepares the class for what is an article-heavy approach to understanding international conflict. I am a peace scientist by training and the class is replete with journal articles from our top general interest journals (e.g. *American Journal of Political Science*) and our top field journals (e.g. *International Studies Quarterly* and *Journal of Conflict Resolution*). I train students how to evaluate the results they read before we discuss the substance of the results themselves for understanding the causes of disputes and war.

The quantitative methods class I teach tailors this approach to applied political science research. This class covers the basics of measurement and descriptive statistics. It also discusses simple inferential tests, like differences in means. However, the class I teach gets the most mileage on regression itself. I extend a discussion of linear regression to include how to interpret interactions and what to do when the dependent variable we wish to explain is not drawn from a normal distribution (i.e. when the dependent variable is binary or ordinal). I even discuss how to provide important quantities of interest from a regression for a lay audience. Thus, my methods class applies my teaching philosophy to quantitative methods, teaching students how to learn about the social and political world around them. The skills they learn are immediately applicable to private sector data analysis work or applied research in graduate school.

I approach political science instruction this way because I believe it is important to reconcile how political science is practiced by professionals and how it is taught to students. I also believe that this maximizes the student's learning experience when the student enrolled in political science expects just roundtable discussions of current events. My experience is that my students generally agree with this approach after the class has concluded. I score high in my ability to stimulate creative thinking, teach important principles, and impart factual knowledge. Those evaluations even played a role in my 2014 selection as one of the top 40 professors under the age of 40 who inspire their students and my 2017 selection to be "Professor of the Game" for a Clemson football contest. Students are eager to rethink their previous understanding of politics after taking a class that teaches how to use the same rigorous inferential tools that academics use in their own research.

This experience I have at Clemson University is shared with experiences I had at previous jobs at the University of Alabama and the University of Illinois. Students have kept in touch and have tried to take other classes with me. It is always rewarding when students profess to retaining information from a class I taught a year or two prior. It is even more rewarding when they say how my approach has helped them prepare for law school, business school, and even graduate school. I believe my approach to in-class instruction, which rigorously emphasizes scientific inquiry and inference, has served my students well in their studies and their careers outside the university.