Sam Houskeeper

Teaching Statement

I am passionate about teaching and have made my pedagogical training a key priority alongside research. I especially value inclusive teaching, and continue to study and implement new techniques.

Teaching Experience and Training:

As a Ph.D. student at Columbia University, I have served as a teaching assistant (TA) or instructor in six courses. I have experience teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level in both substantive and methodological courses. As a Cordier Fellow, I served as the section instructor for the MA course: Essential Foundations of International Politics. This role meant teaching two-hour sections with full autonomy in lesson planning and student evaluation, as well as collaboration on lecture planning and syllabus design for the overall course.

I have also completed extensive pedagogical training at Columbia, including both the Foundational and Advanced tracks of the Teaching Development Program at the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). This training involved participating in microteaching sessions and faculty and peer teaching observations, as well as taking pedagogy seminars in topics such as inclusive teaching, syllabus design, and effective feedback. During the 2022-23 academic year, I was awarded the distinction of being the Political Science Department's Lead Teaching Fellow. In this role, I acted as liaison between the CTL and the department; I also led teaching workshops for the department's graduate students on the topics of inclusive teaching and effective feedback.

All of my teaching evaluations, including formal course evaluations and the report from a CTL observer of my teaching are available on my website (redacted sections denote student evaluation of the professor rather than myself). I take these evaluations seriously and continue to learn from them.

Teaching Philosophy:

My teaching philosophy centers on creating inclusive learning environments, in which all students can understand and collaborate in their progress towards well-defined learning objectives, regardless of their background. Learning is inclusive when it is meaningful, relevant, and accessible to students (Hockings 2010).

First, I aim to design meaningful course content by building from clear and well-defined learning objectives. Students should know the specific concepts or skills that they will learn in the course and understand how assignments and assessments will get them there. This clarity provides clear expectations for students and helps to reduce the "hidden curriculum", i.e. the body of information that students need to succeed but are often not explicitly taught. It also provides a roadmap for students to engage with material more thoughtfully and purposively. For example, I distribute a short syllabus to my sections to clarify the structure and goals of the sections in connection with those of the course. I also regularly check in on students' understanding of course content and structure with Classroom Assessment Techniques such as polls and reflective writing (Cross 1988). These measures have led to a major improvement in student performance in my courses. As a professor, I will also utilize the Backwards Design Framework; this technique means starting with defined learning objectives and reverse engineering a course plan (Wiggins and McTighe 2005). Components of the course are "scaffolded" upon one another to build

constructively towards learning outcomes. The syllabi that I have designed and provided on my website follow this method. For example, my syllabus for The International Politics of Climate Change includes student presentations and in-class workshopping that provide a scaffold towards progress on final research papers.

Second, my teaching style emphasizes the relevance of course content to students by using the Active Learning Process. Active learning occurs when students critically engage with course material rather than passively receiving it (Freeman et al. 2014). I create active learning environments by splitting class time between lecture, full-group discussion, break-out group discussion, and individual reflective writing. I also guide students in collaboratively applying course material to their world. In a methodology course, for example, I include in-class demonstrations of statistical concepts (Gelman and Nolan 2002). In a substantive course, on the other hand, I have students work through theoretical concepts with case studies of current events.

Finally, courses are accessible when their meaning and relevance hold for students from a variety of backgrounds, especially under-privileged ones. I increase course accessibility with clear communication and ample office hours, so as to increase student access to course material, and by learning student names and interests, so as to better tailor scaffolded course components to diverse student backgrounds. As a professor I will have the opportunity to also expand accessibility through course design. For example, I plan to implement a course-wide policy of blind grading so as to reduce bias. In my model syllabi, I take care to increase author diversity in the lists of assigned reading. I also incorporate diverse perspectives, such as by teaching Marxism as an IR paradigm in my syllabus for Introduction to International Relations. While the Neo-Marxist IR research program (including Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory) has been largely discredited and ignored by recent literature, I find that many international students have received extensive training in it and wish to discuss it in class. Rather than ignoring this paradigm, I include it alongside contemporary paradigms so that its faults and limitations can be addressed head-on and the course can bridge a gap between perspectives on IR that differ across borders.

I also recognize that a key teaching responsibility of faculty outside of the classroom is mentorship of graduate students in their roles as TAs and as researchers. Graduate students learn crucial research skills through informal mentorship, and I hope to invest time and energy into my relationships with TAs in order to prepare them for future roles as educators and to improve learning outcomes in my own courses.

Teaching Interests:

I am able to teach a range of subjects, from those directly stemming from my research (e.g., the international politics of climate change or of the environment), to related topics (e.g., trade or international political economy), to general subjects (e.g., international relations). I can also teach methodology courses, such as regression, causal inference, and research design. Two model syllabi are available on my website: one for an undergraduate lecture on a broad subject (Introduction to International Relations) and one for a graduate seminar on a very specific subject (The Global Politics of Climate Change).

Works Cited:

Cross, K. Patricia and Thomas A. Angelo, *Classroom Assessment Techniques. A Handbook for Faculty*. The National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning, 1988.

Freeman, Scott, Sarah L. Eddy, Miles McDonough, and Mary Pat Wenderoth. "Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 23 (2014): 8410-8415.

Gelman, Andrew and Deborah A. Nolan, *Teaching Statistics: A Bag of Tricks.* Oxford University Press, 1st Edition, 2002.

Hockings, Christine. *Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: A Synthesis of Research*. York: Higher Education Academy, 2010.

Wiggins, Grant and Jay McTighe, *Understanding By Design.* Alexandria: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2nd Edition, 2005.