

Teaching Statement

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September 4, 2018

During my time at Harvard University I have highly enjoyed teaching students and I am looking forward to building on this experience and designing courses in comparative politics, political economy, and quantitative methods. My goal is to help students think independently, analytically, and creatively about how to solve specific problems and engage with central questions in modern society. These skills will be crucial for students to succeed in their classes and beyond, regardless of which particular career path they choose.

Whether teaching at the undergraduate or graduate level, there are four key principles that guide my general approach to teaching: (i) making teaching participatory, (ii) focusing on the important analytical tools of our discipline, (iii) offering individualized help and (iv) taking advantage of the synergies between research and teaching.

I believe teaching should be highly *participatory*. I have found that discussion groups, student presentations, and peer feedback keep students engaged, foster interest and enthusiasm for the topic at hand, and create a collaborative learning environment. In the undergraduate courses for which I have been a teaching fellow, we offered the student hands-on experience via in-class experiments and simulations of international negotiations. Not only do students enjoy the experience, but they also gain a uniquely intuitive understanding of the subject material.

In addition to the specific contents of any given class, I think it is crucial to teach students the important *analytical tools* of our discipline. I aim to design lecture materials, activities and assignments that enforce three key components of the political science toolkit: data analysis, critical evaluation of arguments, and the ability to quickly read up on a subject and form well-grounded opinions.

Individualized help is especially important in ensuring that students from a variety of backgrounds experience success. In the classes I have TF-ed, I am keenly attentive to each individual student's needs and concerns, and take care to offer students a variety of avenues for further assistance, be it via email, group office hours, individual meetings, or sections. I have been encouraged by the positive feedback I've received in teaching evaluations to continue to make my teaching accessible to everyone.

I believe *teaching and research* can benefit each other tremendously. To explain complex ideas in a simple and intuitive way requires a particular in-depth understanding of a topic that helps contextualize research ideas and generate new research questions. At the same time, my research and fieldwork have provided me with knowledge of various concepts and contexts which allows me to augment my teaching with illustrative examples.

I consider mentoring a key part of a teacher's responsibility and have particularly enjoyed doing so in the past. During my seven months fieldwork in the Democratic Republic of the Congo I had the chance to work with many talented and motivated young researchers. I found it very fulfilling to

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learn from them about the field and in return train them in research methodology and implementation. I am affiliated with the Congolese research organization Marakuja whose goal it is to promote collaboration between Congolese and international researchers. Through Marakuja I have continued to stay in contact with many Congolese researchers and provide support via training, grant applications, and reference letters. Many of the researchers have been able to turn their original short-time employment with Marakuja into permanent positions at the organization, international organizations, and the Congolese government. I have also enjoyed mentoring undergraduate students at Harvard as a non-resident tutor at one of the undergraduate houses (Winthrop) and as an advisor of twelve senior thesis writers.

I look forward to mentoring researchers in the developing world and advising undergraduate and graduate students as an Assistant Professor. Specifically, I would like to create a small research cluster where graduate students can design and implement research projects. As a student, I have found participation in such groups to be a great way of gaining experience, make connections with other students and faculty, and to receive helpful feedback.

Potential courses

Given my teaching experience and my broad and active research agenda, I will be able to teach a number of substantive and methodological classes at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

Comparative politics. My graduate-level training and my own research have prepared me to teach core courses on comparative politics and specialized courses on African politics, Latin America, institutions, and European politics. I look forward to engaging with students on these topics and teaching them the tools of comparative analysis. I am eager to teach a course that offers an introduction to the comparative politics and political economy of Africa. Drawing primarily on political science and economics, but also history, sociology, and anthropology, its major themes would include the formation and legacies of pre-colonial states, clientelism and electoral politics, and the political economy of service provision. Such a course could be adapted to the undergraduate or graduate level.

Quantitative methods. I am similarly enthusiastic about teaching various methods courses. I believe understanding causal inferences and research design is immensely important for undergraduates and graduate students alike. I would be especially excited to combine my substantive and methodological interests in an empirical political economy course for undergraduates or graduate students emphasizing the use of cutting-edge quantitative research designs. Some of my best learning experiences have been when professors such as Raj Chetty, Melissa Dell, or Larry Katz have combined explaining research methods and their assumptions with a discussion of important empirical literatures. Furthermore, hands-on experience is critical when learning empirical methods. My classes would accordingly feature problem sets with real world data and replication exercises.

Formal methods. During graduate school, I have taken five game theory courses in the Harvard and MIT economics departments, and TF-ed for Kenneth Shepsle's class, which introduces undergraduates to rational choice. I would love to build on these experiences and teach a similar undergraduate class focusing on the idea that politics may be described and understood in terms of rational, goal-seeking behavior by individuals in various institutional contexts. Similarly, I would be excited to teach a more advanced graduate level course styled after Daron Acemoglu's "Political Economy of Institutions and Development." It would combine theoretical models with current substantive debates by first discussing empirical puzzles and then showing how different formal models can reveal different mechanisms and generate distinct testable predictions.

Courses taught and selected student comments:

EMR 13: Analyzing Politics. Spring 2017. Undergraduate course. Teaching fellow for Kenneth Shepsle. Overall student evaluation score: 4.3/5.

“Soeren was the best. He is very knowledgeable about the field and is very accessible outside of the classroom. My favorite moments in the course were the discussions we had during section, as Soeren really generates enthusiasm and encourages participation from the class.”

“Soeren was an excellent Section Leader. He is very knowledgeable about the material and orchestrated section discussions very well, promoting conversation but also answering any questions we had about the material. His feedback on assignments were always substantive and well-founded, and whenever I had any questions or wanted to meet over office hours, he was always eager and available. He was easily accessible over email. He did a great job.”

“He was energetic and clear. He was a really good section leader who was knowledgeable in the course.”

Econ 1400: The Future of Globalization: Issues, Actors, and Decisions. Fall 2016. Undergraduate course. Teaching fellow for Robert Lawrence and Larry Summers. Overall student evaluation score: 3.1/5.

“Soeren was definitely the best TF I had this semester. He was always happy to answer my questions at office hours and offered detailed and helpful feedback on my assignments. He encouraged participation in section and made it a priority to cover the material that was most important, which I appreciated because it made section seem to move more quickly and made section less dry, as sections can often be. He is also just an extremely nice and down-to-earth person, so he was a very approachable TF. Future ECON 1400 students should try to get him as their TF for sure!”

“Soeren was great! He gave very clear explanations of concepts and provided more motivation for subject matter with which he was more intimately familiar.”

“Awesome section leader and a great facilitator.”

RFI: Rethinking Financial Inclusion: Smart Design for Policy and Practice. Fall 2016. Executive education course. Teaching fellow for Asim Khwaja. Overall student evaluation score: 4/5 (only 2 responses).

“He was very attentive to our comments, he tried to manage our diverging views on the topic and kept us focused on the methodology and the problem.”

EMR 13: Analyzing Politics. Spring 2016. Undergraduate course. Teaching fellow for Kenneth Shepsle. Overall student evaluation score: 3.8/5.

“He is a good teacher and facilitated good discussions during class.”

“Great guy and easily accessible!”

“Really accessible outside of class (met outside of his office hours as well). Gave good feedback on papers and exams as well. Maybe to generate more conversation during section, have questions posed before the section so the students can prepare answers and conversation would flow more easily.”