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Teaching Statement

The social sciences are uniquely equipped to train students with diverse and marketable skills. Educators in political science have the opportunity to empower their students by increasing their ability to write, think critically, and apply scientific methods to analyze complex issues. Teaching must be more than a transfer of knowledge. Education must empower students. In order to be effective at teaching, educators must recurrently reflect on their approaches in the classroom.

This leads to the first concept I find critical to succeeding as an educator—adaptability. The needs of each individual student are different and each generation of students faces a new set of challenges. I construct my classes in a way that that allows me to teach the individual. My assignments (e.g. article reviews, research designs, etc.) all stem from the individual student's interests in the course material. This creates a shared narrative of learning where the student can take agency over the benefits they gain from participating in the course.

Much like performing research in political science, teaching any class in this discipline requires an instructor that is effective at numerous tasks. Political science is one of the most important areas of study in an age where people so rarely question their assumptions. In order to be effective, instructors must help students develop strong critical thinking skills and initiative within the students they teach for them to effectively apply the lessons of any course. Political science draws upon historical analysis, an accurate depiction of the current state of the world, and the ability to propose explanations for the why the world is one state as opposed to another. To be an effective instructor in this discipline, one must develop an inclusive strategy to creating an environment where students take an active role in what they learn and how they learn it.

I have had the fortune of teaching several classes as an instructor of record during my time as a graduate student and junior faculty member. During my graduate career at the University of South Carolina, I taught seven different classes in International Relations and Comparative Politics. Due to this experience, I am comfortable teaching courses related to International Relations, Foreign Policy, International Political Economy, International Law, International Organization(s), National Security, and Comparative Politics of Development. My experience at Virginia Commonwealth University has given me additional expertise in

conducting online courses. During my time at VCU, I taught teaching Research Methods (Online) and a capstone Senior Seminar in Political Science. As a graduate student, I completed every methods course not conflicting with a requirement for the degree and completed training at multiple institutions (both internal and external) specializing in advanced research methodologies (e.g. Inter-Consortium for Political and Social Research Summer Program, Empirical Implications of Theoretical Models Summer Institute, USC Center for Digital Humanities Text Analysis Workshop). As result, I feel comfortable teaching research methods at both the undergraduate and graduate level. All of my courses adopt a common approach that values adaptability and student empowerment.

I break down each lecture into one critical takeaway or lesson. Each class, I incorporate media and a variety of material types to make sure that each student can arrive at the ultimate takeaway in a manner that suits their preferred method of learning. When dealing with students earlier on in their academic career, I spend a great deal of time focusing on basic critical thinking skills by having them analyze and distinguish between materials that vary in strength. Each student is encouraged to develop their own system for determining the value of any material and provide a justified ranking of the materials. As I lecture, I take breaks to reinforce the underlying nature of why I chose to assign a particular reading or discuss a particular event. Throughout the course of the semester, I have students participate in simulations/games demonstrating the underlying complexity of the issue or problem discussed. For instance, when lecturing on trade and conflict, I have students participate in a simulated trade war that requires them to adopt a strategy and record their results. As they play the game, I have them document their results in a spreadsheet. At the beginning of the next class, I use the data to elucidate patterns in their decision-making and how varying the assumptions of the game leads to different results. I find that this fosters a much more lively and enjoyable class as students are not forced to simply consume a verbal summary of the course materials.

It is also important to show students the joys and inevitable perils of scientific research—to have students learn social science by producing social science research. This encourages students to develop their own identity or voice in the discipline and shows them how the approaches contained in readings/materials can directly benefit the issues/problems important to them. Every course I teach requires students to engage in the research process. In introductory classes, students build research proposals or briefs that describe an area of inquiry they have an interest in. These proposals force students to think of a question, a potential answer to that question, and lay out a basic plan for testing whether their possible answer holds value. When dealing with more advanced classes, I have students develop a research design that isolates a specific question of interest, a theoretical argument, and a detailed plan for testing their theory. Many of these projects have served as writing samples for my students attempting to attend to graduate school or gain employment after graduation. Additionally, students are often very interested in finishing these projects resulting in publications in undergraduate journals and direct research experience.

My overall approach relies on flexibility and empathy to serve the needs of each student. As college campuses grow more diverse, instructors must be willing to constantly to rethink their approaches in the classroom and recognize that the challenges students face may be

radically different from their own experiences. My experience as a first generation student in academia made me realize that every student can develop an effective approach to learning if only given the time and support. As such, taking a holistic approach to grading is amenable to situations where students need more time to develop the fundamental skills required to succeed in a course. Let me stress that I love teaching at all levels. Each opportunity to interact with students is a chance to change lives the way my education changed mine.