

Teaching Philosophy

To me, being a teacher is about creating an environment where my students are free to explore the frontiers of their curiosity. I aim to build a learning ecosystem in class that allows my students to not only accumulate knowledge and information but also learn its application in practicality.

As a graduate student, I have taught three sections of Intro to International Relations (Global Issues) in addition to designing three classes (Intro to Comparative, International Politics and Research Methods) for hybrid teaching i.e. for in class and online instruction. As a teacher, my objective is to make the content relatable to my students. If they can relate to it, they are more likely to absorb knowledge. To achieve this overarching goal, I actively employ several strategies in my classroom. I start with the course design. What do I want out of this class for my students? How can they use the information and knowledge on offer? I want to build foundational knowledge within each of my students. Building that base is crucial so that my students have a robust set of skills like critical thinking, writing and ability to logically present arguments. To encourage development of this skill base, my courses are designed in a manner where the students can pick and choose layers most pertinent to them. This strategy allows me to connect with my students based on their interests and career goals.

For instance, if we are studying international trade regimes, I present a variety of examples followed by writing assignments that encourage my students to come up with their examples of the concepts. I follow that up with group discussions where each person presents their ideas. Within groups, I encourage my students to make dissenting notes if they do not agree with the rest of their group members, as this fosters freedom of expression across a range of opinions yet without hostility. This process helps the students naturalize the concepts and then apply them where it seems most appropriate. The application portion of teaching is critical to encourage my students' understanding of the practicality of ideas.

I expand on this experiential learning approach by regularly sharing my own experiences in class. Having worked and lived on four continents and in a host of different environments, I can illustrate to my students how the ideas we discuss in class get implemented in real life. For example, my work in the development sector with the UN, World Bank, and USAID serve as true life examples for when I discuss international organizations, bureaucracies, development, and trade. Because I can give them the inner track on how the policy world works beyond the textbook, it helps humanize the application of concepts. I intend to help them visualize and get comfortable with the practical aspect of the concepts we learn in class. That is why I rely on technology as a part of my teaching approach. Visual learning helps students with understanding certain concepts more than others. So, not only do I integrate audio-visual tools into my lectures, being a visual learner myself, I physically draw out the concepts during classes.

The whole point of this method is to disseminate knowledge in more than one way. That is why I embrace pop culture, latest technology and social media as part of teaching because my students embrace it. For me to effectively transfer knowledge, I need to employ a host of tools, so the students have options of how they wish to consume that knowledge.

My teaching approach relies heavily on the teacher-scholar model. I use my research & experience as springboards to launch in discussions of theoretical concepts. Doing so helps me share my work with students as an example of practical application and uses that to introduce them to applied research. When they are seeing first hand research work and contributing to the discussion on it, they get a front seat view of why research is essential and how it can be relevant. My focus is on making concepts resonate with my students and using my research & experience helps in this regard.

As a teacher, I realize my students are a diverse group. They come from a variety of economic, social and ethnic backgrounds. They all have unique needs and ambitions. I take that in to account when I teach and guide them as a mentor. As a person of color, I value and relate to the necessity of teaching to a diverse audience. I acknowledge that some of my students may require extra attention to help them reach their full potential and break out of their shell. My effort is to highlight and celebrate the diversity I have in my class by crafting course material to suit that. I strongly believe in exposing my students to a variety of ideas and approaches. To achieve that, I try to have a gender balanced and multi-regional reading list as part of my syllabus to give my students differing perspectives on concepts.

My classroom operates on a relationship of mutual respect between my students and me. Helping students achieve their ambition requires listening to them. That is why I make the class content and discussions pertinent to each of them. And even if someone falls behind, I individually sit with them to discuss how I can help them make progress. I want to ensure no student walks out of my class feeling they could have gotten more out of this class or that they were just a number I often tell my students the expectation of the course in real life terms, i.e., they should walk out of this class being able to hold an intelligent discussion with strangers on any subject covered in the class. Recalibrating success in those terms changes how the students view the information and knowledge presented in class.

Teaching is why I got in to academia in the first place. My career has been impacted by professors and mentors whose attention and support allowed my ideas to thrive and develop over time. So, emulating them by being a thoughtful, supportive teacher – mentor is very personal for me and I bring that approach to class. Be it teaching introductory courses or upper-level courses within comparative politics and IR; my approach is the same; create an environment where my students can explore the frontiers of their curiosity.