

Teaching Statement

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Rather than expecting students to memorize all the major ideas from John Rawls or become professional political theorists, I want my students to 1) develop their critical thinking, analytical writing, and verbal communication skills and 2) learn that political philosophy is not dusty and inaccessible but rather a vital practice of examining contemporary politics and reevaluating one's own political positions. As an instructor of undergraduate courses, I am dedicated to employing pedagogical strategies that equip students with the ability to thoughtfully debate, critically analyze, and normatively theorize about contentious political issues and normative questions of justice both in and well beyond my classroom.

Developing Critical and Analytical Skills

To develop students' verbal and writing skills, I emphasize active and participatory learning. All lectures are interactive, with pauses for questions to check student understanding or to ask students to evaluate the material. In every class meeting, I incorporate a small group discussion, think-pair-share exercise, simulation or game, or individual reflection writing in order to encourage participation from students who are less comfortable in large group discussions. I developed several simulations for my American politics class, dividing students up into chambers of Congress, interest groups, or Supreme Courts in order to apply general course themes to specific topics like lobbying or civil liberties. One simulation, on civil liberties and the relationship between federal institutions, is the subject of a coauthored working paper. Students have responded positively to these simulations; in a midterm course evaluation, a majority of students listed activities and simulations as their favorite part of the class. One student wrote: "Atmosphere of discussion and critical analysis of readings is very helpful in understanding the authors. Very involved classroom atmosphere, much preferred to that of a lecture hall."

Student evaluations indicate that my participatory teaching style was effective: a majority of all students across all semesters indicated that they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement "The instructor was one of the best I have had at Carolina, fully deserving of a teaching award."

In addition to active learning in the classroom, I design assignments also cultivate critical thinking and self-evaluation rather than simple summary. Discussion questions and short response papers evaluate students' analysis of texts and ideas; longer final papers give students a chance to engage in the type of normative theory-building they have been reading and critiquing all semester. In my feminist theory class, students design their own final paper topics, putting learning in their hands and allowing them to pursue their interests and passions. For example, a Sports Science major analyzed the mutability of gender through the topic of sex testing for intersex athletes. In my American politics class, students choose a recent congressional election to analyze using frameworks from our course. Evaluations indicate that the higher-order thinking that I require from students in their written work enables student learning. One student wrote, "The level of difficulty regarding class content, vocabulary, readings and theories is very high but it's making me a better learner." Across all semesters, students indicated that they learned "a great deal" from my classes, with a median rating of four out of five or higher.

Additionally, acknowledging that teaching should be collaborative and assessment should be reciprocal, I ask students to fill out a mid-semester course evaluation so that I can respond to feedback before the semester is over. Students have responded positively to my willingness to adjust the pace or provide extra resources. One student wrote, “After midterm evaluations the way the class operated changed and it really helped me to understand the things we were discussing in lecture and also helped me to better prepare myself for recitation [sic].” I also use PollEverywhere, an app and texting service, to check student knowledge. These “exit tickets” evaluate understanding of the day’s material at the end of the lesson, allowing informal and instant feedback on the pace and effectiveness of each lesson.

Applying Course Material to the “Real World”

I recognize that students will not engage with readings, discussion, or assignments unless they feel that they are relevant to their lives or the “real world” of politics. Therefore, I design syllabi, lesson plans, and assessments to connect abstract frameworks and theories to contemporary political issues.

In my feminist theory class, short “pop feminism papers” require students to connect theories to a piece of contemporary pop culture such as a music video or opinion piece. For example, one student analyzed the 2017 Wonder Woman film through Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and another read #MeToo backlash against singer R. Kelly through the writings of Audre Lorde. In my introductory American politics class, paper assignments ask students to evaluate the desirability of the Electoral College or analyze a local Congressional election through course frameworks. One student wrote, “Lucy also connected real-world events and current issues in the sociopolitical scene to the works, which enabled me to understand these dense, complicated theories better.”

By applying theories and frameworks to the “real world,” I ask students to evaluate and redefine their ideological and political positions. In my modern political theory class, I prompt students to think about what their reactions to theories mean for their own political standpoints. If a student agrees with Marx’s critique of capitalism, for example, maybe she is less of a *laissez-faire* capitalist than she had previously thought – or if a student objects to the censorship in Rousseau’s political utopia, then she might be more of a liberal than she realized. In my feminist theory class, this involves students developing and continually adapting their personal definition of feminism throughout the semester. I ask students to write down what feminism should aim to accomplish at the beginning of the semester – equality? Justice? Freedom from oppression? Helping women? Helping all genders? – and then I periodically ask students to review their personal feminisms and revise them if their positions have changed in light of theories from class. One student wrote, “Because of this course, I feel better equipped to not only engage in feminist discussion but also to analyze my own actions in the context of the systems and structures that inform them.”

Finally, in order to connect course material to the “real world,” I integrate principles of feminist pedagogy: critically examining the forces of sexism, social hierarchies, and power dynamics at work in the classroom in order to equip students to do so outside of the classroom. Additionally, my syllabi include subjects and authors often excluded from the Western canon, like trans feminists and political theorists of color. Comments from student evaluations indicate that the diversity of the reading assignments and the inclusivity of the classroom environment facilitated learning. One student wrote: “Ms Britt did a fantastic job including diverse (queer, women of color, trans) authors and perspectives in the class. She made it very welcoming and unthreatening [sic] to speak in class, even when topics were controversial.”

Teaching Experience and Interests

I have taught several political theory courses as well as an introductory American politics class. For three semesters, I served as a teaching assistant for Modern Political Thought, leading three 20-person recitation sections per semester. I developed and implemented an original syllabus, designing lesson plans to supplement the large lectures and leading normative debates on the thinkers. I also taught Modern Political Thought as an online summer course.

I have taught Feminist Political Thought, cross-listed with Women's and Gender Studies, twice as the sole instructor. This course focuses on contemporary feminist theory. It centers on culturally and politically sensitive topics, so establishing a respectful environment for discussion is crucial. I have also taught Introduction to Government in the United States, a broad overview of U.S. political institutions and behavior. Because of the vast disparity in political knowledge between students in this introductory course, I emphasize active learning techniques such as simulations, current event papers, and debates to give everyone a chance to participate in discussion.

My teaching experience goes beyond teaching undergraduate courses. While in graduate school, I sought out opportunities for teaching training and support. I participated in the Center for Faculty Excellence's Future Faculty Fellowship Program, where I received teacher training. I lead the UNC Political Science Graduate Teaching Group, a supportive community of peers who troubleshoot teaching problems and questions and share insights from teaching and learning research. There, I started a peer observation program in which graduate students visit each other's classrooms to trade peer feedback on teaching. I also collaborated with a fellow graduate student to design a new service-learning course. With the support of a university grant, we developed "Race and the Right to Vote," which incorporates course material about race and politics with hands-on community service with a local racial justice nonprofit. I have experience facilitating undergraduate research; as a Graduate Research Consultant for a class on democratic theory, I assisted students in their semester-long research papers. I tutor student athletes, many of whom are first-generation students or come from underrepresented groups. Additionally, I have participated in the LGBTQIA+ Safe Zone training, and I worked with the UNC School of Social Work to bring a Mental Health First Aid training to my department to train faculty, staff, and graduate students on basic mental health issues so we can better support our students. I designed and taught a class for the Duke Talent Identification Program, a summer academic program that offers college-level enrichment classes for middle- and high school students. The class, "History of the Future," focused on utopian political and social thought, from eschatology to urban planning, Afrofuturism, and biopolitics.

As a **faculty member**, I plan to expand my mentoring experience through advising and research collaborations with undergraduate students, to develop more creative simulations and activities, and to develop new and interdisciplinary courses, including writing-intensive classes, **first-year seminars and service-learning courses**. Classes I am prepared to teach include **introductory U.S. politics, race and politics, introductory political theory, ancient and medieval political theory, modern political theory, contemporary political theory, American political theory, African-American political theory; utopian political thought, democratic political theory, and feminist political theory**; I am also willing to develop new courses related to my research expertise, including on memory and mourning, emotion and politics, and the politics of place and space.

Topic sentences