

Teaching Statement

Lucy Britt

My main pedagogical goals are for my students to 1) develop their critical thinking, analytical writing, and verbal communication skills and 2) learn that political theory is not dusty and inaccessible but rather a vital practice of examining contemporary politics and reevaluating one's own political positions. As an instructor, I am dedicated to employing strategies that equip students with the ability to thoughtfully debate, critically analyze, and 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 the online classroom, I use breakout rooms and the chat function to replicate these activities. 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 paper about teaching and learning, currently under review.

Students have responded positively; in a midterm course evaluation, a majority of students listed activities and simulations as their favorite part of the class. Students of color and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who might feel intimidated to speak up in large-group discussions are given a structured opportunity to participate through active learning exercises. 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." Moreover, 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, I design assignments to cultivate critical thinking and self-evaluation rather than simple summary. For example, in my service-learning class, "critical service reflection checkpoints" throughout the semester offer in-class opportunities for students to write about and discuss their own positions as service-learner volunteers in the community. Students read and discuss critiques of volunteerism, share experiences completing service hours, and connect the problems and challenges faced by our partner nonprofit organizations to the theories about racial justice from our class. Evaluations indicate that the higher-order thinking that I require from students 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; this has become more necessary than ever as students face unequal challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. 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.” I also use PollEverywhere, an app and texting service, to check student knowledge. These polls evaluate understanding of the day’s material at the end of the lesson, giving me instant feedback on pace and student comprehension.

Applying Course Material to the “Real World”

I recognize that students will not fully 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.

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 in my feminist theory class analyzed the mutability of gender through the topic of sex testing for intersex athletes. In my race and politics class, students create hands-on projects on a topic of their choosing, ranging from oral history podcasts about the intergenerational transfer of attitudes about voting among Black North Carolinians to GIS mapping projects documenting racial gerrymandering.

In 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 utilize 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. My syllabi include subjects and authors often excluded from the Western canon, like trans feminists and thinkers 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 unintimidating to speak in class, even when topics were controversial.”

Teaching Experience and Interests

I have extensive teaching experience in political theory, race and politics, and U.S. politics – both in-person and online (asynchronous and synchronous), co-teaching, and designing and implementing a

new service-learning class. For three semesters, I served as a teaching assistant for Modern Political Thought, leading three 20-person recitation sections per week. I also taught Modern Political Thought as an online summer course. I have taught Feminist Political Thought twice as instructor. I have also taught Introduction to Government in the United States, a broad overview of U.S. political institutions and behavior. I am currently co-teaching Race and the Right to Vote in the United States, a service-learning race and politics course that I developed with my co-teacher with the support of a university grant.

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 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 populations. 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 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, parties and elections, state and local politics, introductory political theory, ancient and medieval political theory, modern political theory, contemporary political theory, American political theory, Black political theory, Indigenous 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.