

Teaching Statement

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My overarching pedagogical goals are for my students to 1) develop their critical thinking, analytical writing, and verbal communication skills and 2) learn that political science is not dusty and inaccessible but rather a discipline that enables students to examine contemporary politics and reevaluate their 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 both in and well beyond my classroom. I am committed to an inclusive classroom that fosters respectful disagreement and honors a diversity of experiences through engagement with course content that centers voices from marginalized groups. Using experiential education strategies such as service-learning and active learning, I enable students to explore the political world around them.

Developing Critical and Analytical Skills

To develop students' verbal and writing skills and to dismantle barriers to participation that can disproportionately affect students of color and first-generation students, I emphasize active and participatory learning. Lectures are short and interactive, with pauses for questions to check student understanding or to ask students to evaluate the material. Every class meeting includes an active learning element like small group discussions, think-pair-share exercises, simulations, games, and individual reflection writing. I developed several American Government simulations, 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. Two of these simulations are the subject of research published in *PS: Political Science and Politics* and a Routledge edited volume.

Students have responded positively to this active learning approach; in a recent midterm course evaluation, a majority of students listed activities and simulations as their favorite part of the class. I see active learning as a tool for equity: students from marginalized backgrounds who might feel intimidated to speak up in large-group discussions are given a structured opportunity to participate through active learning. 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. I feel like my opinions and theories are heard and contribute to my peers and learning environment."

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 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 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 high levels of learning.

Additionally, I pursue collaboration and reciprocity between students and myself in order to give students agency over their own learning. Rules for respectful classroom discourse are generated not by me but by students themselves, in a “Classroom Contract” exercise at the beginning of the semester. Additionally, 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 to check student knowledge through digital polls, giving me instant feedback on how well students are learning and retaining information.

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 use backward course design in my syllabi, lesson plans, and assessments to connect abstract frameworks and theories to contemporary political issues. Through experiential and service-learning, I connect course materials to local communities and real-world structures of power.

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 attitudes about voting among different generations of Black North Carolinians to GIS mapping projects documenting racial gerrymandering.

I am committed to experiential learning. In my service-learning class, “Race and the Right to Vote,” students pair their classroom materials on race and the franchise with time spent volunteering to register voters or work with local racial justice nonprofits. I bring students into real political contexts by assigning students to visit a local government meeting, bringing in guest speakers to discuss careers in political communication, taking the class on walking tours of their local communities to learn about the racial and economic context, and inviting panels of elected officials to class to discuss the impact of electoral institutions.

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 ask my students to critically examine 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. 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 to speak in class, even when topics were controversial.”

Teaching Experience and Interests

I have extensive teaching experience in political theory, race and politics, U.S. politics, and research methods – both in-person and online (asynchronous and synchronous), team teaching, and designing and implementing service-learning classes. As the instructor of record, I have taught Race and the Right to Vote in the United States as both a service-learning class and a traditional course, introductory American Government, Political Science Research Methods, Modern Political Thought, Feminist Political Thought, The Politics of Memorials, and History of the Future.

My teaching experience goes beyond teaching undergraduate courses. I have sought out opportunities for additional pedagogical training, from the UNC Center for Faculty Excellence’s Future Faculty Fellowship Program to Gettysburg’s Faculty Fellowship in Community-Based Learning and Research. I also led 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 instructors visit each other’s classrooms to trade peer feedback on teaching. I also have experience facilitating undergraduate research, supervising (and coauthoring with) student research assistants and facilitating student research. Some of the research that I oversee for student final projects include interview methods and ethics, podcast design, qualitative media analysis, survey methodology, and normative political theory writing. I currently advise a number of students as a faculty advisor, including international and first-generation students. 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 to better support our students.

In the future, 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, race and voting rights, parties and elections, state and local politics, research methods, the politics of memorials, 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, whiteness, and the politics of place and space.