

Teaching Philosophy

During my time at the University of Kentucky, I have taught eight courses for the political science department that range across the discipline, from classes on American government, to Model United Nations, to how to conduct effective research. The classes I have taught range from lower-level introductory classes with large numbers of students to 400-level courses where I have worked closely with a small group of students. I have also taught and designed classes to work in different formats, from large in-person lectures, hybrid classes that meet both in-person and online, and online-only courses with little face-to-face interaction. I have been successful across topics, class size, and class format, being named one of the University of Kentucky's College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding Teaching Assistants in 2022. Across the different topic areas and skill levels of these classes, I have discovered a joy in teaching that has directly translated to my teaching philosophy. Specifically, what I find most rewarding about teaching is watching students both acquire new skills or improve already existing ones over the course of a semester. This has led to a teaching philosophy that emphasizes skills-based learning and uses a variety of teaching methods to accomplish this.

Skills-based learning focuses on teaching students specific skills that they can carry over to their future careers. The three skills I emphasize in my classes are general writing and research, communication, and teamwork. These three skills will be important for any of the students' future career plans. One of the ways to improve students' writing skills is to incorporate writing assignments into the course, something I have done in almost every class I have taught. I will briefly highlight how I have accomplished this in three different classes. First, when teaching introduction to international relations, I have students write a policy memo in which they use the content they have learned in class to propose a solution to a current problem in international politics. This teaches students how to effectively advocate for or against a specific policy in writing. This

assignment also forces them to connect abstract concepts they learn in the classroom and apply and connect them to real-world events. Second, when teaching model UN, I have students write a country background report on the country they are representing, with the report focusing on the history, politics, geography, economy, and culture of that country. Besides getting the students familiar with the country they are representing; the report teaches students how to conduct extensive research and how to effectively translate that research into a concise, readable report. Finally, in the peace studies capstone class, where students learn how to effectively conduct academic-like research, students write a full research paper that even includes an empirical evaluation of their theory and hypotheses. Students learn how serious academics take their research and how to write like an academic researcher.

Similar to what I do for students' writing skills, I aim to do for their communication skills as well, incorporating activities, simulations, and assignments into the course to give them greater opportunities to practice those skills. I will highlight examples from two classes to demonstrate how I focus on improving communication skills in the classroom. First, I heavily focus on communication skills when teaching the model UN class. One activity I have students complete in class is writing and presenting an eight-to-ten-minute speech that describes a problem that the student's model UN country is facing and the presents three solutions to solve that problem. Besides giving students practice in making public speeches, part of this activity also requires students to turn in an outline of their speech before they present it which helps them learn how to best organize and structure a speech in order to make it more effective. Second, during the peace studies capstone class, students must present their research projects to the class and wider political science department at the end of the semester. This teaches students how to discuss their own research, as well as how to respond to questions concerning their research. This communication skill is especially

important for the students in this class, as most of them want to go on to law school or graduate school where they will be presenting their research or other work frequently.

Finally, I emphasize teamwork in my classes as well. Like becoming a good writer or public speaker, being able to work effectively as part of a larger team is an important skill for students entering the job market. I will briefly highlight an example, beyond traditional group work, of how I encourage students to work as part of a larger team. In my Model UN class, students are separated into teams, each representing a different country, during the first week of class. From that point on until the Model UN conference later in the semester, the students are in constant communication with those on their teams and they help each other organize the team, plan how they are going to accomplish their team goals, and eventually execute those plans at the large Model UN conference. This focus on their teams for most of the semester allowed students to get to know each other better and feel more comfortable working with each other, which really paid off when students participated in the Model UN conference as they were already comfortable delegating tasks to one another and combining their separate parts of a larger project or resolution into a unified whole.

Besides the specific assignments and class activities mentioned above, my general teaching methods are also geared towards acquiring or sharpening students' writing, communication, and teamwork skills. To accomplish this, I use a variety of teaching methods, which has the added benefit of appealing to a diverse group of learners. One method I use is group activities. Group activities allow students to learn from one another and learn how to be part of a larger team. For example, in the peace studies capstone, I have students write an Op-Ed in groups of three about a current event related to peace studies. This type of group work sharpens all three of the skills I emphasize. Students get to practice their writing skills, specifically how to write an Op-Ed, which is different from academic writing, and improve their knowledge about current events. Second, this group assignment also improves students' communication skills by making them communicate clear

expectations about what needs to be accomplished and who is responsible for what within the assignment. Finally, the team Op-Ed assignment also gives students additional practice in how to complete a project as part of a larger team.

I also use a discussion-based method with my more advanced classes, like the peace studies capstone class. This helps improve students' writing skills as we often talk about how different authors structured their articles and how they can emulate that in their own research. These class discussions also help improve students' communication skills by giving them practice publicly commenting and critiquing these articles. These efforts have paid off, as I have seen students' writing, communication, and teamwork skills grow tremendously over the course of the semester. An example of this was during the Model UN conference, when one of my students won the award for Best Delegation for their work representing Egypt on the Peacebuilding Commission. This conference required the student to write UN resolutions in the proper format and engage in diplomacy and negotiation in order to get resolutions passed, highlighting the three skills I emphasize in the classroom.

My teaching philosophy has evolved as I have gained experience and a better understanding of what students need to take away from my classes in order to be successful after they graduate. I emphasize skills that translate beyond the classroom and political science and encourage students to become better global citizens through a better understanding of our world and what shapes it through a variety of different teaching methods. While I have become a much better teacher over the last few years, I know there is still much to learn and ways in which I can grow as an instructor. I hope to continue to refine my skills and methods to better serve students and the larger community in which we interact.