

Teaching Statement

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I. Teaching philosophy and experience

As a teaching assistant at George Washington University I received high scoring evaluations for Master's and Undergraduate courses in international relations and international security. Further, the Department of Political Science contracted me to develop and teach Math Camp to incoming PhD students for four consecutive years (until I graduated). Outside of academia, I developed and instructed courses for U.S. servicemen and women about the politics of violence before they deployed to war zones and areas effected by terrorism, as well as civilian policy-makers in the US, Australia and Iraq. In all these settings, I wanted students to think critically about the information presented, synthesize theories into arguments, and successfully communicate their own analysis.

My passion for teaching has driven me to mentor four undergraduate political science students at GWU. I helped these students develop class papers into viable research projects and advised them on graduate school. One of my mentees is now a political science PhD student at Penn. I also volunteered as a mentor for two incoming PhD students at GWU in my senior years as a PhD student. Finally, I assisted three undergraduates and one master's students secure internships in Washington DC.

Below I give examples of my approach to teaching. For substantive courses, my strategy is to: (1) lay a conceptual foundation in the first few weeks, then use those as foundational concepts through the entire course; (2) connect weekly readings on specific topics back to core concepts and strategic problems; and (3) use practical examples and policy simulations to help students better understand strategic challenges. In methodological courses, I motivate new concepts with examples of research challenges. I then make sure to caution students about the assumptions and limitations of the methods that they are using, and demonstrate the advantages of different approaches for specific topics.

Critical Reasoning Skills: As a TA in introduction to international relations, I encouraged undergraduate students to think critically about their readings in three ways. First, I use the first session explaining logic and argumentation. Second, I structured weekly reading reviews around a core question and then asked students to explain how each author differed on these questions. The goal was for students to understand argumentation and identify logical gaps in arguments. Third, every three weeks, I constructed policy simulations that helped students work through the strategic reasoning found in formalized arguments about world politics. Students were prompted with a policy problem and asked to make policy recommendations. I then assigned different positions in the literature to different groups and forced them to argue from that point of view. In one example, I asked students to advise me on the US commitment to European free trade and military alliances (NATO). Through the discussion, students were able to work through the logic of core international relations arguments about identity, reputation and resolve, realism and liberalism, and trade. The course comments demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach.

Synthesize Theories into Arguments and Implications: Based on my performance in undergraduate classrooms, I was assigned to TA the Capstone Course in International Relations for incoming Masters students at the Elliot School of International Affairs. The course was a policy-focused introduction to International Relations theory. A core part of the course was emphasizing how theory was necessary in good policy-making and policy-analysis, which I accomplished in three steps. First, I spent much of the first TA session explaining theories, actors and variables to students to lay a conceptual foundation and a common vocabulary for the rest of the course. A central insight that we carried through the course was that policies, like theories, rely on assumptions about cause and effect relationships. Second, each week I encouraged students to follow through the theoretical implications of their readings to policy outcomes. In this way, students could understand that different theoretical positions were the processes of different assumptions and reasoning processes and the differences led to radically different implications. Finally, I

developed intelligence assessment simulations where students were asked to evaluate threats to the United States and recommend priorities. The exercise helped students link theoretical expectations to different policy priorities.

For methodological courses, I use extensive examples to help students understand and apply concepts. For example, my lesson on optimization problems is motivated by a strategic problem autocrats face in choosing how much repression to administer under the assumption that benefits are a convex function. I make sure that my examples cover American, comparative and international politics, as well as economics and sociology to reach students from different disciplines.

Communicate effectively: I set strong expectations for terse, clear writing and professional class discussion and presentations. I encourage students to develop group communication and collaboration skills by encouraging study groups, reading groups and similar projects. I believe these smaller groups and repeat interactions encourage introverted students participate and learn.

As a government contractor, I developed and instructed my own courses. This teaching environment is different because the emphasis is on outcomes and procedures and not particular readings and theories. However, the experience taught me how to clearly communicate difficult concepts and structure courses. For example, two lectures I developed focused on why negotiations fail. I centered the discussion on informational and commitment problems but was able to clearly communicate these difficult concepts through a broad range of practical examples including the Eurozone negotiations in the 1990s and the Camp David Accords. I showed that bargaining logics apply very broadly and helped students identify where failure was imminent to assist them negotiate on behalf of the US Government.

II. Teaching Evaluations

George Washington University administers in class teaching evaluations for undergraduate courses. Students grade TAs for specific attributes on a 5-point scale: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither agree nor disagree, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly agree. They then provide an overall grade on a five-point scale: (1) Very poor, (2) Poor, (3) Fair, (4) Good, (5) Excellent. Below I summarize my evaluations from undergraduate courses I TA'd. Note: TAs do not receive evaluations for Masters-level courses at the Elliot School.

Prompt	Mean
My teaching assistant was knowledgeable about the subject matter covered in the course.	4.588
My teaching assistant was able to stimulate discussion on the subject matter covered in the course.	4.299
My teaching assistant was accessible and helpful during regularly scheduled office hours.	4.111
My overall assessment of my teaching assistant is:	4.452

Below are teaching evaluation summarized for courses I designed and taught for the Army Corp of Engineers. Courses covered European Security and the threat of Global Terrorism and decision-making in conflict zones. Students were officers O3-O6, enlisted personnel of all ranks and State Department and Intelligence Officials. Subjects score on a three-point scale: (3) excellent; (2) satisfactory (3) unsatisfactory. Because the scale is not linear, I present the percentage of results for every question.

Prompt	Excellent	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Teaching Methods Rated:	85%	14%	1%
Technical Knowledge Rated:	89%	9%	1%
Content Rated:	83%	16%	1%
Duration Rated:	70%	28%	1%

III. Comments from my students.

Comments from Undergraduate teaching evaluations:

1. Discussion sections were also very engaging, and helpful for understanding readings.
2. I thought he was great.
3. He did a great job helping me clarify the information given in lecture.
4. I think the debates or situations that you use in class – where you divide the class by argument and country – were very helpful.
5. I felt my discussion section was the perfect balance between discussion and “lecture”. Scenario exercises were particularly helpful.
6. The overall environment made it comfortable to ask questions and discuss.
7. It was helpful that you told us what you were looking for in a good paper.
8. Thought discussion was a great experience, good way to discuss lectures further and answer questions from reading.
9. Michael is very knowledgeable and engaging. When we did exercises in discussions when we split into groups, I found it very helpful.
10. He’s awesome.
11. You taught extremely well and the format was incredibly well organized. It would be nice it had more room for our own discussions.
12. My discussion was very helpful and catered to student’s needs. I also appreciated his guidance in how to approach essays and exams.
13. Really tough grader.
14. I loved my discussion. Very helpful. He deserves a bonus.

Comments from Military Officers:

1. Excellent, Excellent! Loved this guy; Kept the class engaged and focused.
2. Mr. Joseph is Outstanding
3. Best classroom training I've had in a while. Mr. Joseph is Outstanding
4. The Instructor was very engaging and had a vast knowledge of the subject material
5. Instructor was awesome, very knowledgeable
6. Well presented - good instruction. Instructor was able to effectively communicate information
7. Very good look at the sociological / cultural of terrorism, then correlation of specific cases and countries.
8. Was very dynamic. The cultural relations portion should be expanded. I could see getting a whole day.
9. Class was pretty lengthy as far as time but instructor made a good effort to make information interesting.
10. Knowledgeable on terrorist subject, and interacting involvement with audience.
11. Excellent presentation that induce interesting discussion among training participants.
12. Great instructor.
13. Instructor possessed vast amount of knowledge in psychology, economics and European threat. I learned a lot although class should be a bit shorter.
14. His research was spot on. A lot of these briefs are discussing some of the same information such as ideology, recruitment, etc.

IV. Courses I am eager to teach

Substantive:

1. International Security
2. International Relations
3. Foreign policy/ American foreign policy.
4. Intelligence and Information Problems.
5. Diplomacy, and international political communication.
6. National Security in the information age.

Methods:

1. Game theory
2. Econometrics
3. Causal Inference
4. Surveys and Experiments.
5. Empirical Evaluation of Formal Models.
6. Advanced Methods for Intelligence and Foreign Policy Analysis.