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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

The study of political science and international relations is critical for students seeking to better understand the global challenges we face and the nature of the political systems that can constrain or enhance our ability to overcome them. As a teacher, a former Captain in the US Army Infantry, and an elected local official, I strive to equip my students with a strong foundational and theoretical understanding of political science, and an in-depth awareness of how course concepts translate to the real world. Whether through having students hold an in-class “Iowa Caucus” to explain why random survey sampling might be an inappropriate technique for predicting caucus results, or by running carefully crafted international crisis simulations designed to allow students to see the world from a diplomat’s perspective, I strive to integrate experiential learning into the classroom experience whenever possible. In the 2019 – 2020 school year, I was the recipient of Northeastern University’s college-wide Outstanding Teaching Award.

Student Centered Approach

My teaching style blends lecture with open discussion to create a student-centered approach to learning. Students are encouraged to ask questions and engage in discussion at any time. I pause frequently to draw out concept maps and arrow diagrams on the white board to enhance understanding of course concepts and their relationships to each other. Depending on the background and interests of the students, I devote some early class time to demonstrating a variety of advanced methodological and data visualization tools, including the computational social science techniques I use in my own research. Spending time on the fundamentals of empirical research helps foster student critical thinking about course material and empowers students to trust their own analysis and to challenge conventional approaches. By sharing some of my own research tools, including how I trained an AI algorithm to automatically categorize international treaties, and then pivoting to introduce students to basics of text analysis in Nvivo or the fundamentals of ArcGIS Online mapping, I have seen this spark a deeper interest in developing these in-demand data analytics and visualization skills.

I structure my course assignments so that students may use one of these techniques to work in greater detail on one significant, in-depth project of their choice. I encourage students to choose topics of importance and relevance to them beyond the confines of our classroom and show them how their undergraduate Senior Capstone project can become a graduate school writing sample, a conference paper, or even a published peer-reviewed article. When students understand that what they write for a class can ultimately result in an original contribution to existing knowledge, they are often much more inspired to push the boundaries of their previous work.

I strive to include voices from underrepresented communities, not only because they are – but because their perspective is critically important for improving scholarship and our understanding of the world. From discussing how the diplomatic efforts of Hayo’wetha and the Great Peacemaker convinced the five Haudenosaunee (aka Iroquois) tribes of Upstate New York to successfully escape their cycle of violence through political confederation more than half a millennium before their European counterparts; to W.E.B. Du Bois’s critical analysis of World War I and “civilization”; to contemporary efforts to move beyond Eurocentric biases and establish truly global international relations theories and scholarship, I bring these often overlooked examples to the forefront of our discussion. Expanding and diversifying the works and examples

taught in this way not only improves the scholarship of our students, but also helps instill the notion that knowledge is produced globally and must resonate with the lived experiences of people from many different backgrounds to be truly universally valid. Engaging with multiple perspectives helps students see their world differently, and thus better understand its pluralistic nature.

My responsibilities as a teacher include creating the best possible learning conditions for students. Clear expectations are set, and a respectful, supportive, and inclusive environment is maintained at all times. Early in each semester, time is dedicated for discussing and collectively agreeing upon a set of guiding rules for behavior during our classroom discussions and activities. My grading policies are structured to allow for students who may not perform their best during exams or who have anxiety-related concerns about public speaking in class, but who are otherwise clearly motivated and engaged with the material, to earn points back in other ways. During one of the introductory class periods, I share with students the story of how I co-sponsored and saw passed two articles aimed at reducing barriers to entry and creating a more inclusive environment for women and non-binary people in my local town politics by updating our official elected town positions from masculine terms to gender inclusive titles. I share this story to signal my strong commitment to ensuring that we have a safe and inclusive space for everyone and to provide a natural opening to discuss preferred pronoun usage in the classroom.

Real World Applications

After establishing the conceptual groundwork, I focus on integrating contemporary examples and carefully crafted simulations to help my students experience and analyze how course concepts operate in the real world. When appropriate, I use examples from my military and public service to further enhance student learning. Sharing my experience as Executive Officer to the United Nations Command Honor Guard in Korea often captivates my students, particularly when integrated holistically into concepts of international mediation, brinkmanship, alliances, and deterrence. When teaching about public policy or environmental security issues, I use the example of the first piece of legislation that I co-sponsored and saw passed, a non-binding resolution to get my town of Walpole to 100% renewable energy by 2050, to teach about the importance of policy entrepreneurs, windows of opportunity, the effects of entrenched beliefs, and the power of aspirational normative shifts. Further, I have designed and administered eight in-class Model UN-type simulations at Northeastern University and one at Harvard University based on current international crises as an additional experiential method of learning. From complex, week-long in-class simulations on climate change, migration, and environmental security; to single class-period simulations on peace treaty negotiations, caucus events, or UN Security Council meetings; or even semester-long simulations through the online Statecraft program, I encourage students to fully immerse themselves in their roles and try to see the world through the eyes and sovereign interests of their assigned state or non-state actor, while shaping scenarios to reinforce the key themes of the course.

My students are encouraged to take the concepts they learn to actively engage with and shape the world around them. At the end of each semester, I like to share some inspirational stories about ongoing policy-change campaigns related to the topics we covered, with special emphasis on the contributions of young people who are making the world a better place. I attempt to call them to action and remind them that neither critical policy changes nor important research gets pulled out of thin air. Both are crafted through a long process of thinking critically, conducting significant in-depth analysis on a single topic, respectfully engaging with a wide variety of different perspectives, an openness to feedback, trying out new approaches, making revisions, and gaining real-world experience – all the same types of skills that we developed in class.