

## STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Like a squall on a smooth sea, effective teaching disturbs the tranquility of preconceptions and heightens the crests of intellectual curiosity. Throughout my academic journey, I have had the opportunity to see this principle in action. I have watched row after row of seemingly apathetic, sleepy-eyed students awaken and engage in class discussion, their eyes brightening with a spirit of inquiry. When I was asked to teach my first class, I knew that I wanted to take my students' by storm and stir the adventure of learning. I also knew that I had to develop my own methods for doing so, since my first class was a fraction of the size of the classes I had been accustomed to as an undergraduate student and as a graduate teaching assistant.

The first class I taught, "Introduction to International Relations," contained ten students. With this class and the ones that followed, I grew to appreciate the unique opportunities available to the instructor of a smaller sized class. With fewer students, I am able to foster individual relationships with each of my students. These relationships are promoted by my "open-door" policy and by my ongoing offer to review drafts and recommend revisions to their papers. When students recognize that these offers are sincere, they begin to lower their defenses and engage openly in dialogue, asking questions both inside and outside of the classroom. Cultivating these relationships leads to a class atmosphere that is lively and constructive, and improves the learning experience for all students. The teacher-student relationship is a vital undercurrent to effective teaching.

In addition to my desire to relate to students and produce inquisitive minds, I also want to expand individuals to know how to search for a solution, present a solution, and, at times, to be able to step up and *be* the solution. This goal can be jump-started by teaching students how to conduct rigorous and sound research, by teaching them how to convey an argument with brevity and clarity, and by empowering them to be politically aware and involved.

### Investigation

With modern advances in technology, students are able to access innumerable sources, yet I have found that many still do not know where to go to find scholarly information. I therefore often incorporate a small exercise into my courses to show both the shortcomings and the utility of sites like Wikipedia. Dividing the students into groups, I give each group a pre-selected Wiki webpage which I know to contain multiple factual errors and incomplete references. Each group is given half an hour to verify the "facts" contained in each article and to find the original sources of the information. At the close of the activity, each group reports its findings, and we discuss the validity of the site as a whole as well as the secondary references they were able to locate. This activity sets the stage for a course-long discussion on electronic sources and online research. In addition to this activity, several times throughout the course of a semester, I assign pairs of scholarly articles to supplement the textbook material, achieving the joint objective of providing students with numerous examples of scholarly sources and of demonstrating that there is always more than one way to interpret, argue, or analyze a given event. This endeavor pushes students past the confines of a textbook into the dynamic waters of scholarly debate.

### Communication

The ability to articulate one's position both orally and with the written word is a critical skill across disciplines and professions. Through practice students solidify and apply their conceptual knowledge (as opposed to storing facts in short term memory for multiple-choice exams). In my "Introduction to International Relations" course, I assign four papers for the term, three of which I call "event analyses" and one of which is a final research paper. In the analyses, students write a one-two page paper in which the student dissects a current international event and discusses it through various theoretical lenses. These short papers (which teach students the skill of brevity) are precursors to the required, culminating ten-page research paper. The research paper requires each student to take a side on a current debate in international relations and thoroughly to argue for and to support the position taken. The intentional aim of this paper is to show the complexity of larger issues, as well as to allow students to go more in-depth on a topic of choice.

The topics for the papers derive from in-class debates. Each week, select groups of students are required to take a position on one of the large issues of international relations such as nuclear nonproliferation, globalization, international aid, human rights, or international government. Prior to class, students are given readings supporting different sides of these issues and when they come to class, they are expected to articulate and defend their positions in front of their peers. With this exercise, I encourage intellectual pluralism and teach the value of tolerance for other perspectives. These debates help students to formulate and articulate opinions. They also increase classroom engagement. As a Liberal Arts educator, however, an engaged student is not my end goal. Ultimately, I want to produce engaged *citizens*.

### Participation

Participation is the *sine qua non* of an enduring democracy, and yet many young adults are disillusioned from the start. I have found that debates are one way to counterbalance the ubiquity of student apathy, hostility, and cynicism regarding politics. Issues do not always—in fact, they very rarely—have only two sides, and once students understand and appreciate the complexity of certain issues, they are less likely to cast blame on certain actors and employ the "us versus them" mentality. My aim is to teach students how to research issues and filter fact from fiction and how to combine fact with their values and belief system, formulating an opinion that matters. I want to equip individuals with the skills necessary to participate meaningfully in the democratic process. I also want to empower each student with a sense of efficacy. In my international relations class, this hope is advanced by highlighting the progress made by actors across the spectrum, from government officials, to non-governmental organizations, to "ordinary" individuals.

I have chosen to become a professor because I have discovered not only how energizing the pursuit of knowledge can be, but also how exhilarating it is to bring others alongside for the journey. My pedagogical strategies are designed to enrich this journey and to produce individuals who are independent and critical thinkers, who can express themselves clearly and with confidence, and who feel empowered to participate in the political process. By doing so, I am one "ordinary individual" who hopes to make a vibrant difference in the lives of others.