

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is centered on individualized instruction with uniform standards and the ultimate development of critical analysis and independent thinking. The needs of students will vary; thus, I am committed to providing additional individual assistance and applying different approaches in the classroom so that every student can understand the material. In larger seminars, I use power point presentations as well as videos and class discussion to highlight specific points. I also use multiple types of instruments to evaluate students in each course, including a writing component and an examination component. I prefer to administer mixed-model examinations that include some multiple choice, identifications, and essay questions, thus allowing all types of students to exercise their strengths while improving their weaknesses. In larger seminar courses, I do rely on multiple choice examinations; however, I always include some writing component so that students will be given the opportunity to improve their writing and analysis skills. In smaller, upper-level courses, I include an additional presentation component so that students gain some experience in oral communication. Multiple teaching and evaluation methods are the basis of my individualized instruction approach.

While teaching to the needs of all students is critical to fostering student success, uniform standards are critical to fostering maturity and accountability. Thus, I detail strict “no exceptions” policies in my course syllabi. No student, without a university-approved excuse, is able to shirk their class responsibilities. A second component to providing uniform standards is in grading. For each and every assignment or examination I create grading rubrics so that all students can be certain that their work has been graded using uniform standards. Thus, my students always know exactly why they received the grade that they did. They also know, in advance of preparing an assignment, exactly what

they need to do to achieve the grade to which they aspire. This is crucial to developing trust and a sense of fairness and accountability with students.

Finally, and most important to my students in the future, I am committed to the development of critical analysis and independent thinking as a way of approaching political questions. I will challenge the opinions of my students, play devil's advocate, and often question students in an effort to encourage them to weave their ideas and opinions into more coherent themes and hypotheses. I also encourage students in courses that include a paper component to write on topics of their choice, thus encouraging independent thinking and analysis. I do not shy away from controversial topics and will often start upper-level lectures with broadly-based questions or blanket statements to invite students to disagree with me.

Students receiving a liberal arts education, and specifically an education in political science, should exit undergraduate life with three important qualifications for graduate work or the job market: excellent written and oral communication skills; a deeply-rooted sense of responsibility and accountability; and an ability to critically assess their ideas as well as the ideas of others. My individualized teaching approach, with uniform standards and an emphasis on critical analysis and independent thinking accomplishes these goals.