

Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Experience

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy revolves around the idea of the classroom as the site of an intellectual community. This involves five main components: (1) open yet respectful discussion, (2) exposure to diverse perspectives and sources of information, (3) a focus on learning how to evaluate different types of arguments and evidence (4) an emphasis on the connections between theory and lived experience, and (5) shared ownership of the classroom experience. The goal of the “community” portion of the intellectual community is to create a space in which all students feel that they have a stake in their learning and that their voices are welcome. The goal of the “intellectual” portion of the intellectual community is to help students to develop important skills that will be useful inside the classroom and beyond it.

As an instructor, it is my job to cultivate this environment, setting clear expectations for the ways in which students engage the course material and the ideas of their peers, establishing open channels of communication between the students and myself, and implementing demanding yet fair standards. In cultivating such an environment, I strive to be attuned to the different needs of students, especially those who are new to university education – and the challenges posed by both lecture- and discussion-based courses – and those who are new to the social sciences. That said, I do not understand the role of the instructor as simply imparting knowledge onto passive students. My goal, instead, is to facilitate active learning and draw out insights that students may have about course topics on the basis of their own creativity and diverse personal and academic experiences. To this end, I emphasize peer-to-peer learning, in which students take an active role in co-creating the intellectual community of the classroom. For example, I ask that students serve as the “expert of the day” and lead classroom discussion and take part in smaller tasks, such as summarizing, assessing, and presenting for the class the arguments offered in a specific reading, completing peer edits on written work, and participating in debates. These activities encourage students to view the classroom as a site of active learning and to view themselves as co-creators of knowledge, rather than as passive recipients.

Teaching Experience

I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to teach, advise, and mentor students from a variety of backgrounds in a diverse set of situations. As a teaching assistant for *Introduction to International Relations*, this involved helping students learn how to navigate large lecture courses and to manage university-level texts and assignments for the first time. I organized sections around identifying core concepts and analyzing arguments and evidence presented in the assigned readings, in the process sharing strategies for reading comprehension and preparation for class with students. In the section evaluations, students remarked that “the section catered to the needs of the particular students in class and clarified complex theories,” and repeatedly pointed to the usefulness of the focus on identifying central concepts from both the readings and the lecture, indicating that this approach was successful.

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As a teaching assistant for *Comparative Politics of Latin America*, the challenge instead was to bridge differential knowledge bases and encourage students to treat in-class discussion as a forum in which ideas could be explored rather than one in which a single “right” answer would be presented without question or debate. Many of the students in my sections were not Government majors, but had signed up for the course because of their Latin American heritage or interest in the region. While these students initially were hesitant to speak up, deferring to more outspoken Government majors, class discussion benefitted greatly from their participation, specifically their ability to draw connections between theory and their own experiences in various Latin American countries.

Additionally, I served as a co-instructor for *Reading and Writing about Latin America*, a writing-based course that forms part of Cornell’s “Prefreshman Summer Program,” a program geared toward helping disadvantaged students – including first-generation students, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds – navigate their transition into life as a college student at Cornell. In addition to leading class sessions and meeting with students one-on-one throughout the summer term, I also provided detailed feedback on written work, with the aim of helping students become stronger academic writers.

As the International Relations Minor Academic Advisor and Administrative Coordinator and as a co-facilitator of the Departmental First-Year Graduate Student Colloquium, I took on a mentoring and advising role for both undergraduate students and new graduate students in the Government Department. Additionally, while carrying out my dissertation fieldwork in Colombia, I relied on several local research assistants who were planning to pursue graduate education in the United States. Over the course of the year, I assumed a mentorship role, offering advice and reviewing materials related to graduate program admissions and grant applications, in addition to providing an inside look at the process of conducting field research.

Together, these experiences have encouraged me to think critically about the classroom space and my teaching philosophy. In planning for the first-year writing seminar I will teach at Cornell University in Spring 2019, a course called *Power and Politics: Human Rights Activism*, I have sought to implement this teaching philosophy. Students will be asked to read foundational and recent works on human rights, critically analyze arguments presented in academic and non-academic texts, and develop a research paper on the topic of their choice over the course of the semester. The course begins with a discussion of the meaning of human rights and of the international human rights system. It then introduces students to core works on and critiques of human rights movements. Mini-case study weeks on the Dirty War in Argentina, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the use of torture in the United States and abroad follow. In each of these mini-case studies, students will read academic and non-academic accounts of rights violations, including selections from journalistic accounts, memoirs of perpetrators, official reports, and novels. These diverse sources will encourage students to compare styles of argument and evidence, which will in turn help students to become more self-aware writers and more attentive consumers of information. The course progresses with weeks on transitional justice, the future of human rights, and contemporary human rights movements. At the end of the semester, students will be asked to present their research papers, which will have been developed in stages following the scaffolding approach to writing, before the class. In all, the course will help students to develop a wide range of skills, from critically analyzing texts to producing their own

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written work to presenting that work orally. These skills will be beneficial to them throughout their academic careers and as they move into whatever comes next, whether that involves further study in the social sciences or not.

Importantly, I continue to work to hone my teaching skills, incorporating student feedback, learning from the experiences of colleagues, and attending workshops and training sessions, including partaking in courses offered at the Knight Writing Institute at Cornell University. I look forward to further improving my ability to help prepare students to assess arguments, evaluate evidence, and engage with ideas both inside and beyond the classroom.

Description of Courses Taught

GOVT 1817: Introduction to International Relations

This course offers an introduction to the study of international relations. It considers examples from history and addresses contemporary issues, while introducing and evaluating the political theories that have been used by scholars to explain those events. The principal goal of the course is to develop a general set of analytical approaches that can be used to gain insight into the nature of world politics – past, present and future.

This lecture course was taught by Professor Jonathan Kirshner at Cornell University in the fall of 2014. I ran two weekly discussion sections of 14 students each.

GOVT 3293: Comparative Politics of Latin America.

This course is designed as an introduction to political, economic, and social issues in 20th-century Latin America. Topics are organized chronologically, beginning with the process of industrialization and incorporation of the popular sectors in the 1930s and 1940s, and ending with the recent rise of the left to power in the region. Among the main issues covered are populism and corporatism, dependency theory and import-substitution industrialization, revolutions, the breakdown of democracy, military rule, democratic transitions, debt crisis and market reforms, social movements, and migration. Throughout the semester, we will draw on examples from the entire region, but the course will focus on six main countries, namely Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. Knowledge of Spanish or Portuguese is not required.

This lecture course was taught by Professor Gustavo Flores-Macías at Cornell University in the spring of 2015. I ran weekly discussion sections for a total of 11 students.

ENGL 1131: Reading and Writing about Latin America.

This course starts off with a question that students and instructors will attempt to answer throughout the semester: what makes Latin America a unique region in the world? A wide variety of readings will examine Latin America from different angles. These readings range from journalistic pieces to scholarly articles. While probing the past and present reality of Latin America, students will learn how to write and read critically. Throughout the summer, students will have the opportunity to revise and re-write their essays in a number of in class-writing workshops.

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This summer course was part of a program designed by Cornell University's Knight Writing Institute that pairs graduate instructors with faculty teaching mentors and forms part of Cornell's "Prefreshman Summer Program," which is geared toward helping disadvantaged students develop the skills they need to transition smoothly into university life. Professor Brett Troyan led the teaching team for this course at Cornell University during the summer of 2018. Seven students took the course.

GOVT 1101: Power and Politics: Theory and Practice of Human Rights

This course examines efforts on the part of social movements, non-governmental organizations, and international institutions like the United Nations to promote human rights. The course begins with an investigation into the meaning of human rights and the construction of local, regional, and international human rights organizations. The second part of the course studies what these movements and organizations do to further their mission of protecting human rights. The course closes with a discussion of contemporary human rights issues and critiques of the human rights paradigm. The class serves as an introduction to academic and real-world debates on human rights and aims to empower students to engage in these debates through an emphasis on clear and persuasive writing.

I will teach this writing-focused class for first-year non-majors at Cornell in the spring of 2019. The requirements of the First Year Writing Seminars at Cornell are that half of the course should be focused on writing, with a total of six writing assignments and a relatively light reading load. I include the preliminary syllabus for this course.