

## TEACHING STATEMENT

### **Joshua Tschantret**

My teaching philosophy is informed by my various personal experiences in higher education, including three years as a teaching assistant at the University of Iowa, serving as both a part-time instructor and international student in China, and my undergraduate experience in both a comprehensive research university and a two-year community college. Based on my role as a teaching assistant in particular, I believe that it is my responsibility as an instructor to impart students with the ability to think critically about complex and important political events and with analytical skills that will prepare them for their future careers. I therefore strive for three primary learning objectives for my students:

1. Developing substantive knowledge of course subject matter;
2. Understanding major theories and applying them to contemporary cases; and
3. Developing the analytical skills necessary to study the subject matter in a social scientific manner in ways that will travel to other career contexts.

Many students initially come to the classroom with only the haziest outlines of the topics to be covered in their courses. My first objective is therefore to introduce students to the history of the course subject, with particular emphasis on pivotal cases. For some courses, this may include assigning humanistic narratives that not only relay factual information but also involve students in the subject matter by conveying how events were experienced by individuals who lived through them. However, the learning process entails more than the simple transmission of information. It also entails comprehending different theoretical frameworks and using them to critically analyze information. By the end of the semester, I intend that students become independent thinkers able to leverage the course material to think critically beyond the lecture hall.

The road to meeting these three objectives begins well before students attend their first lecture. My goal is to explicitly design courses that will help students ascertain the appropriate knowledge and skills. This is best illustrated through two syllabi, one on terrorism and one on genocide, that I have created. A running theme in both courses is an exploration of two historically significant cases from each category: the September 11 terrorist attacks and the Holocaust, respectively. I selected several books on these events for students to read throughout the semester, which were chosen for their accessibility, empirical and theoretical richness, and human interest. The idea is to ground the abstract theories and concepts learned in class in concrete cases to help students appreciate the material and remind them of its broader applicability. Rather than assign midterm and final exams, I prefer to create straightforward exams on each book to incentivize close reading and to thereby push students to become invested in these cases. Between these books, I selected theoretical and nomothetic empirical studies to demonstrate how case-specific lessons can generalize to contemporary contexts.

Early in the semester, students select a case (e.g. a terrorist organization or contemporary genocide) that they will develop expertise on throughout the semester through short writing assignments. My

lectures are planned to be interactive, such that students are encouraged to contribute their case-specific knowledge to the discussion. By explaining how their cases shed light on weekly themes and hearing how their cases compare and contrast with their peers' cases, students can implicitly learn the generalizability of concepts and theories encountered in class. This strategy is also based on the observations that student learning is facilitated when they have the opportunity to collaborate, engage, and discuss concepts with one another. As a teaching assistant for American Foreign Policy, I also implemented various simulations in the classroom, an exercise that I found helps students understand important concepts through active engagement.

The primary assessments in my courses, however, are written assignments. Short-term assignments organized around a consistent theme, such as preselected cases, provide opportunities for students to improve their analytical skills and acclimate them to directed writing tasks many will confront in their future careers. Additionally, my courses include research papers that will allow students to explore and think critically about topics they find intellectually stimulating. Taken together, these assignments introduce students to both policy-oriented writing and academic research.

Lastly, I strive to engage with students individually and reach out to students facing difficulties. Students come to the classroom with various backgrounds and career aspirations, so I encourage them to meet with me individually to best tailor the course to their needs. I also try to maintain a significant degree of flexibility to account for differences in student learning style and objectives. For larger courses, I provide accessible online resources for how to write effectively and read theory in political science. In general, helping students understand challenging subject matter is one of most rewarding parts of teaching. As one student wrote on the teaching evaluations for a political analysis course, which included game theory that many students found challenging, I "was extremely helpful when needed" and "explained things that went to the wayside during lecture." My aspiration is to continue guiding students through subject matter they may find challenging, both inside and outside the classroom.

Given my background, I am qualified to teach various International Relations courses at the undergraduate level, including Introduction to International Relations, International Security, Foreign Policy, International Institutions, Terrorism and Political Violence, and Civil War. Since my research and teaching crosses subfield divisions, I also welcome the opportunity to teach courses in comparative politics and research methods, such as Chinese politics, Genocide, Introduction to Research Methods, and Political Analysis. I am also excited for the opportunity to teach graduate courses, and I would be particularly interested in teaching graduate-level seminars on International Relations, Civil War, International Conflict, and Foreign Policy.