Teaching Statement
Amelia Hoover Green
August 2011

Successful political science education provides students with new understandings of the political world, and of their own potential as political actors. It equips students to think critically and knowledgeably about institutions that create social rules and determine social benefits. Successful teaching requires not only expert knowledge of political science, but careful attention to pedagogy, from the content and sequence of course syllabi to the mechanics of individual class sessions.

I have learned from a number of great teachers across several disciplines. In my experience, they share a few key features: they approach teaching as a craft in itself, rather than as incidental to their subject knowledge; they construct carefully sequenced, coherent and challenging syllabi; they offer students multiple "ways in" to the material; and they create cooperative, inclusive classroom interactions. I work hard to emulate these practices, and my excellent teaching evaluations reflect that (see attached evaluations).

Development occurs in the space between what a student can do for himself and what the student can do only with assistance (the space is the "zone of proximal development" or ZPD).[1] In college and university teaching, I take this to mean that courses should challenge students, and should require that students draw their own conclusions. In this framework, my job is to assign (only) as much reading as students can reasonably complete between class periods, demand that students read carefully and completely, and facilitate discussions that lead students to their own insights. My job is *not* to conduct a "trial by fire" via assigning insurmountable workloads, or to deliver via lecture an ostensibly complete body of knowledge.

My approach to political science content is broadly problem-based.[2] When the material allows it, I prefer to begin from a specific question or set of questions, and to highlight the relationships between course content and students' own concerns. Problem-based political science education should, as the name suggests, provide a factual and theoretical basis for discussing problems in politics and policy. For example, in teaching topics in human rights, I might begin with questions like "Can activism by individuals improve states' respect for human rights?" or "How and why did advocacy groups label violence in Darfur a genocide?" In comparative politics courses, I might ask "Does the American political system work better than other systems?" Even the most apolitical requirement-filler often will stumble upon strong opinions about these questions, and work to support them.

Inclusive teaching is central to social justice in higher education.[3] My goal is to engage every student, and to facilitate equitable discussions among students with very different learning and communication styles. I use a variety of methods to facilitate equitable participation and am constantly searching for more. Favorites include assigning discussion roles via random lottery ("Ask Clarifying Questions," "Synthesize Other Comments," "Play Devil's Advocate," and so on), mandating that each student make the same number of interventions during a discussion, prioritizing online discussions, and/or requesting that each student prepare a two-sentence question or comment to share at the beginning of class. I frequently strategize with students who find it difficult to speak in class on an individual basis. These are not gimmicks; rather they are methods for ensuring that both the privileged know-it-all and the shy, first-generation college student can learn by participating.

---

[1] Vygotsky, Lev. 1978. *Mind and Society*. Harvard University Press.

[2] Problem-based learning (PBL) strategies were introduced in medical education, but are adaptable to other post-secondary settings. Compared to traditional methods (Socratic, lecture, undirected discussion), PBL leads to significantly improved general learning skills and produces similar gains in substance knowledge. See, e.g., Dochy, Filip, et al. 2003. "Effects of problem-based learning: a meta-analysis." *Learning and instruction* 13:5; Hmelo-Silver, Cindy. 2004. "Problem-based learning: What and how do students learn?" *Educational psychology review* 16:3.

[3] Inclusive teaching means affirmatively seeking participation from every member of a class, including students with differing intellectual styles and abilities, students with differing communication styles, and students whose cultural perspectives differ. An excellent resource is http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/.