

Logan S. Casey
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

As a scholar, I am committed to conducting social science in service of broader public interest: specifically, I use both my research and teaching to produce strategies and practicable tools for real world application. In teaching, I focus on helping students (1) connect politics and political science to their daily lives, and (2) build concrete skills (particularly writing) for success outside the classroom. I apply my scholarly training to my teaching practices, and I create an accessible, inclusive, and challenging classroom. I also maintain a personal commitment to mentoring students, particularly given my background as a member of the LGBTQ community.

Whether teaching an introductory course or an advanced seminar, one of my primary goals as an instructor reflects the adage that “the personal is political.” I design course readings, assignments, and activities to help students connect their personal lives and experiences to politics, political science, and the study of power more generally. A frequent assignment I use asks students to reflect on a personal experience they had related to and drawing on course material. For example, in Persuasive Politics, I ask students to write about a time in which they changed their minds on a political issue and why. This begins a semester-long effort to teach students how to see and understand themselves in relationship to the course material.

In every course, I also focus heavily on skill building so that students can more effectively understand and affect the worlds in which they live. I teach students to view writing as one of these important life skills. To do so, I connect writing assignments to real world applications whenever possible. For example, in my Introduction to American Politics course, students write a brief paper on an issue of their choosing and submit this statement to their elected official. This task develops the ability to clearly express and defend an opinion, as well as the concrete skill of seeking out how to communicate that opinion to relevant political actors. Additionally, I emphasize the practice of revision as a central part of the writing process, expecting students to incorporate feedback and to use existing campus resources, such as a writing center. This helps students develop a more sustainable and successful relationship to writing in the long term. In short, the abilities to think critically and clearly express one’s ideas are vital skills in almost any classroom or profession, as well as in daily life. I emphasize writing as a central avenue for developing these abilities.

I also emphasize skills in addition to writing. When teaching Persuasive Politics, for example, the primary emphasis is on concrete skills such as effective communication to and persuasion of a target audience. In place of a final exam, students spend the semester developing and ultimately presenting a group campaign to persuade their class peers on an issue of the group’s choosing. I work with students throughout the semester to develop their arguments and overall approach. Their final grade is based in part on the success of their persuasive efforts, and also on written reflection about their chosen strategies. This develops skills like public speaking, visual presentation of complex information, and communication in politicized environments. These are especially important for students who plan to go on to law, business, or activism – as many political science students do.

When students can connect politics to their daily lives and develop writing and other concrete skills as part of the learning process, they are more likely to be engaged in their own education and to take the class lessons beyond the semester. As part of education is preparing students for their lives outside the classroom, these outcomes are central to my teaching.

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I also apply my training as a political scientist to improve students' learning experiences. For example, political science shows that people are more active and knowledgeable on issues that are important to them. Therefore, at the beginning of every semester, I ask students to identify the issues most important to them. I use this information to tailor class exercises and increase student engagement in discussion. Similarly, given psychological research on patterns of attention and memory, I vary the type of instruction every 10-15 minutes, drawing from a range of styles including lecture, guided discussion, group activities, written reflections, and more. These variations within the same class session produce smaller blocks of time that are more likely to maintain attention and engagement over a longer class period. When appropriate, I also point out these strategies to students so they can see course material in action.

Finally, I emphasize the development of an accessible and inclusive classroom environment, where students feel both challenged and supported in their personal and intellectual growth. I do this in multiple ways. For access and inclusion, I begin each semester with a straightforward discussion with students about standards for dialogue and interaction in the classroom, particularly in moments of disagreement. I encourage students who need accommodation to meet with me directly so that we can jointly ensure access and opportunity for success. I intentionally represent authors of different backgrounds in course materials, and I also use a variety of assignments and assessments to accommodate diverse styles of learning and participation. For example, to illustrate how polling results can depend on question wording, I have students respond to polling questions by collecting in different parts of the room (rather than raising hands) and moving as their answers change to differently framed question about the same issue. This method both communicates the substantive point about survey design and polling data, and also responds to visual and kinesthetic learning styles.

For supporting growth, I engage students in the process of learning as a community: for example, students are expected to learn each other's names and call each other by name in class (rather than "I agree with her"), and to lead class discussion once per semester. Both these practices push students to engage with one another (rather than just with me). This empowers students to see one another (and themselves) as valid sources of knowledge, which increases students' investment in participation and their own learning process. This fosters and supports student growth. Given my background, I am familiar with many of the personal challenges faced by LGBTQ students, and so I am also committed to mentoring students for success in a college setting and beyond. Some of my mentees went on to medical school, law school, and to work in state and federal government offices; I remain in touch with many of them today. Relationships such as these reflect the core of my teaching approach: connecting to students on personal levels, and helping them build the skills to succeed in their own lives.

Political science provides a critical lens for understanding structures of power in the world around us. Teaching is an opportunity to impart this lens: by helping students develop concrete skills and connect their personal lives to these power structures, we empower students to more successfully navigate and affect these structures. These are tangible contributions that our research, teaching, and discipline as a whole can make to students and to the public at large.