

# Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Successful teaching is not a discrete event that takes place in a room with desks and white boards. Rather, successful teaching is the result of a continuous series of interactions with students, some inside the classroom, but many outside the classroom. Because of the fact that each student is unique, I believe that my responsibility as a teacher is to take my students, regardless of where they are at our first interaction, and offer them an opportunity to excel according to their experiences, goals, motivations, and capabilities, and not my belief of what the “typical” or “ideal” student wants to hear or see. This means that I try to view each interaction with a student as part of a multi-step building process designed to help the student develop individually. This process requires patience, creativity, and diligence.

Because of this philosophy, I believe that a teacher must do more than just lecture and leave or hold an office hour and close up shop. It is important to me to not neglect seemingly small things such arriving at class several minutes early so that I can spend time getting to know my students. I also encourage students to not only come by my office, but to participate in my research projects, reading groups, and other activities. One example of these other activities that help engage students is a movie lunch. This involves inviting students to come together with faculty, eat pizza, watch a documentary of relevance to current events, and then discuss its implications. In the course of these interactions, I have seen students develop in ways that would have otherwise been missed.

I also enjoy incorporating unique approaches to stimulate learning inside the classroom. One such example is the Intelligence Assessment Assignment. In this assignment, I present students with a fictional set of circumstances facing the United States in a foreign policy area. These circumstances are conveyed through fictional country summaries, news reports, and intelligence briefs. I then ask my students to take class concepts, analyze the situation, present a number of options for the President to consider on this issue, and make an argument for the best option. And I ask them to do it over the weekend. Their initial hesitancy to engage in weekend work gives way to excitement as they ask follow-up questions of me and engage with each other in an attempt to produce their very best analysis on an issue that could have easily come from the newspaper that day. The student response has been overwhelmingly positive. I believe that this is because the exercise helps students gain some “hands-on” experience and challenges them differently than a traditional paper assignment.

At the beginning of each semester, I tell my students that our classroom is a collaborative venture. While I expect them to study, work hard, and learn from their mistakes, they should expect me to do the same. That said, I have had plenty of opportunities to learn from my mistakes. Debates have not always gone smoothly, my responses to questions have not always been as helpful as they should have been, and there have been plenty of interactions where I walk away wondering what I did wrong. However, part of my teaching philosophy is that, if students see me working hard to be a better teacher, both inside and outside the classroom, they will work hard to be better learners, and together we will learn and grow, which is the fundamental purpose of the university experience.