

TAMAR MALLOY
STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

There is a great deal of overlap between the skills of good scholarship and good citizenship. I find teaching courses in politics compelling in part because they are so well-suited to developing those skill sets simultaneously. When students learn how to question the foundations of their political assumptions – when they start considering what justice means or how institutional arrangements affect our daily lives – they also become more engaged and thoughtful democratic participants. The foundation of my teaching philosophy and practice is to maintain a dual commitment to content and process, with the goal of empowering students from all backgrounds to value and undertake rigorous inquiry as both scholars and as citizens.

As an instructor, I plan my courses around two key questions. First: if, after the course ends, students only remember a few main ideas, what should they be and why? In answering this question I consider which key concepts constitute a mastery of the material, what skills students will need in order to engage with politics in their lives after college, and how integrating current events and historical case studies can train students in using political theory, history, and research skills to make decisions about their own values, priorities, and political engagement. For instance, in teaching Identity Politics just after the Alabama special election between Doug Jones and Roy Moore, we began the semester with a discussion of election coverage that highlighted the role of Black women voters and took that as a starting point for framing key course questions: Why does identity correspond with political beliefs and voting behavior? What historical jurisprudence and policy has shaped the identity categories we use in contemporary political debates? What can theories of identity formation and recognition tell us about what people want to get out of politics, individually and as group members? Most of all: when we reach moments of political tension, how can theory and history give us the tools to understand and negotiate political divides? Framing courses around questions like these can help students understand what they gain from investing in the material, and help them develop analytical skills that they can carry forward into their lives as citizens and community members.

Next, I ask: what skills will my students need in order to understand and deploy those core concepts, in class and beyond? When I begin planning course assignments, I do so with an eye towards developing their analytical skills over the course of the semester, and with an awareness that students may come to the course with different academic and personal backgrounds. I start the semester with low-stakes, informal assignments – in-class analyses of primary source documents, brief in-class or online writing assignments – that help me assess students' strengths and weaknesses as readers, writers, researchers, and thinkers. With that information in hand, I work backwards to help them develop higher order critical thinking skills through class discussion and written work. In past semesters, I have designed lessons so that we can do political research or close readings as a class or in small groups. I have also set aside course meetings for interactive workshops on argumentation, citation, how to design a research question and formulate a thesis, outlining arguments, and finding and evaluating sources. These workshops demonstrably improve students' comprehension and written work and help them move forward as holistically stronger students. Eliciting student feedback – which I do through a mid-semester evaluation as well as mandatory university end-of-term evaluations – also helps me meet students' needs. It has been especially useful for accommodating different learning styles, as when I have used games of charades to help kinesthetic learners understand Rousseau's views on the relationship between language and civilization, or staged mock elections to demonstrate to visual and experiential learners how different changes to U.S. voting systems could change outcomes.

In addition to these academically important goals, the ethical importance of teaching politics is clearest to me when partnered with my deeply held commitments to inclusivity and diversity. I have worked with students from many different walks of life, including racially and socioeconomically diverse groups, LGBTQ students, students with physical and learning disabilities, students who struggle with mental health, international students, first generation students, non-traditionally aged students from their 20s to 70s, students who are or have been incarcerated, and students who are working and/or caregiving while in school. In all of these cases, I have found that diversity in the classroom can enrich all of our experiences, and I aim to accommodate different backgrounds in ways that make courses stronger overall. Offering clear expectations and teaching analytical skills benefits all students; it also helps level the playing field so that students' performance is less reliant on their previous schooling, which is often more indicative of socioeconomic status than ability. Setting forth transparent course policies that emphasize growth and rigor

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and reminding students that disagreeing with assigned texts is a sign of strong scholarship encourages all students to develop their own opinions on the material; it also cultivates ideological diversity by making clear that students are graded on their effort rather than their views. Integrating contemporary cases into our discussions helps all students understand the material; it has also been effective in helping students from marginalized groups engage with the predominantly white male Western canon in introductory political theory courses or with the founding fathers in introductory American politics courses. Students who come into the classroom feeling distant from or suspicious of those canonical figures have often come to embrace their works as tools for understanding and critiquing white supremacy, the gender wage gap, the unevenness of LGBT rights across U.S. states, and the criminal justice system. Assigning readings by authors from diverse backgrounds wherever possible, making readings by people from underrepresented groups a centerpiece of courses on contemporary and feminist political thought, and using case studies that touch on issues of concern to marginalized populations has helped all students understand that including diverse voices leads to interesting and eye-opening discussion; it has also helped students with marginalized racial, national, religious, and sexual identities see that voices like theirs are wanted and valued. Similarly, being open about my own identity as a queer woman has helped students understand that learning and growth can take place across identity categories, and students with marginalized identities have said that that openness helps them to feel welcome in the classroom and to imagine possibilities for their own adult lives.

In all of these situations I have found that setting expectations, supporting growth, making material concretely relevant to contemporary life, and showing students that differences are a source of strength does a great deal to create a positive, inclusive, and productive classroom environment. Students have concurred, writing in evaluations about “an environment that promoted discussion” and instruction that “encourages student participation and challenges them in a respectful way that helps students to think more critically about course material” and directs students towards “thinking critically about general subject matters and to relat[ing] them to their everyday lives....[which] is very engaging, challenging and exciting at the same time.” I believe that creating this sort of atmosphere can fulfill the promise and potential of teaching political science by equipping an ever-broader cross-section of the population with the knowledge and tools to think critically about and engage with our political world.

Teaching and mentoring also ground and strengthen my own scholarship. I have found myself indebted on multiple occasions to students who ask seemingly simple questions that force me to reconsider my own habits of thought and study. In putting forth ostensibly simple questions – “How seriously should we take founding ideals when they come from people who have done bad things?” “Is it wrong for people to put more energy into political issues that affect their own communities?” – students open lines of inquiry that lead to rich philosophical contemplations in class and remind me of the value of approaching familiar material with fresh eyes. Additionally, the practice of articulating complex concepts for students who are new to the material is a constant and important reminder that political science can – and to be maximally meaningful, must – be applicable to the everyday problems of contemporary life.

Moving forward, I am interested in expanding my teaching portfolio to include courses that draw on my interdisciplinary experience and commitment to helping students engage with the world around them. I am prepared to teach graduate and undergraduate courses on topics in political theory and American Politics, including Introduction to Political Theory and Introduction to American Government, as well as introductory and advanced undergraduate courses on modern and contemporary political thought, American political thought, feminist political thought, critical race theory, race and ethnic politics, identity politics, U.S. social movements, public law, constitutional law, and thematic courses focused on democracy, justice, and equality. I am also prepared to teach Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies, as well as undergraduate and graduate courses in related topics, including gender and sexuality, feminist and queer theory and politics, women of color feminisms, and intersectionality.

While my approach to teaching is of course still evolving, my efforts to date have been recognized with positive student feedback and the University of North Carolina Department of Political Science’s John Patrick Hagan Award for Outstanding Teaching. I look forward to continuing to build on this foundation.