

Teaching Philosophy

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I view teaching as an integral part of knowledge production. As an interdisciplinary scholar, I teach a range of courses in political science and law & society as an instructor and teaching assistant. With my strong international background, I am proficient in contrasting intellectual traditions, and so I selectively apply a variety of pedagogical methods. In my practice, teaching is communal building: I aim to reach commonality through diversity, and learn from students as they learn with me.

While at the University of Toronto, I have taught the introductory course to political science for over four years because I deem it a sacred mission to work with freshmen to establish fundamental skills of critical thinking in social sciences at the very beginning of college. Over the course of my teaching, I have developed a constellation of class activities for critical reading and writing. To demonstrate, I assign students to submit reading summaries prior to class. This practice not only trains their reading skills and prepares for discussion, but also allows me to a) design class discussions according to their initial reactions to the readings, and b) trace students' development and facilitate learning with more oral or written opportunities, or reinforcing both. This practice is laborious, but the results have been satisfactory. A student from Fall 2015 told me she still goes back to her POL101 reading summaries to seek definitions of key concepts in her third year, and making summaries became a habit in her other courses. Previous students in 2013 gave me the same feedback. Circulating reading summaries also creates a community in which students learn from each other. In January 2016, my students showed me a lengthy google document that combined edited summaries of all readings written by their classmates. As an invigilator, I also noticed this document was the last thing they reviewed before entering the exam. It was a voluntary and mutually beneficiary effort to effectively review for the final exam. I find this experience stimulating because I witnessed a small practice in class lead to a series of positive feedback, that eventually accompanies students through college.

My international and interdisciplinary background aptly prepared me to engage with diverse student bodies. First, moving from law to political science, and trained in world-class universities in the U.S. and Canada as an international student, I am highly conscious of the differences among various pedagogical traditions and benefit from them. For example, the Socratic Method in law school puts individual students on spot to demonstrate an in-depth debate, whereas graduate seminars in social sciences accentuate collective exploration and formation of ideas. I selectively apply both in my teaching. Second, my bilingual capacity and frequent visits to international institutions have given me ample experience to connect with students of diverse backgrounds. In my past and present teaching in North America, I have been a non-native comparativist teaching North American based social sciences curriculum, and I have also taught Asia-based cultural studies in my native tongue. My teaching in Asia, conversely, requires not only my professional proficiency in the North American scholarship but also my cultural intelligence, transforming foreign concepts into accessible knowledge to local students and international students visiting Asia. I therefore developed sets of techniques to boost participation in a heterogeneous student body. For example, shying away from public speaking is a common issue, but barriers differ. Some students lack language proficiency, some confidence, some both. Support hence varies: small group discussion creates a safe space for responsive oral communication, whereas

rehearsed presentation builds confidence. My own experience meeting varying academic expectations allows me to be sensitive and capable of applying appropriate methods to help students.

Promoting equality – gender, ethnicity, class, among other differentiations – is not a commitment of my teaching, but a principle I live by as an Asian female scholar in North America. My practice is not to offer superficial, pseudo-affirmative actions that pay attention to visible minority students in class, but instead to furnish multiple and diverse role models and to evaluate students from a range of criteria. For one, leveraging my comparativist expertise, I often use empirical phenomena from various parts of the world to demonstrate analytical concepts. For example, when explaining constitutional design of democratic governments, I have used constitutional excerpts from Turkey, Norway and North Korea, blocking the country name, and asked students to assign scores to different aspects that a constitution shall stipulate. Texts were concrete examples to demonstrate analytical elements that define a democracy, and students were so energized after the country names were revealed – a second-generation Turkish student exclaimed that she had never really thought through why and how Turkey was a democracy. Furthermore, I also use varying forms of assessment throughout my course, ranging from attendance, reading memos, individual and group presentation and peer-review sessions, to traditional annotated bibliography or research papers. Everyone learns differently. My philosophy is to prepare a toolkit for students and myself with which anyone could succeed when s/he was willing to, and to ensure that I always have enough instruments to acknowledge a student's effort. Finally, I see myself as an instrument of education by transforming my vulnerabilities to strengths in front of my students. In fact, being a competent and professional instructor as an international scholar is a demonstration of diversity to students. I have had multiple experiences where minority students – first-, second-generation immigrant, religious or gender minority – or just shy freshmen came to me and said that having me leading the session is an inspiration. This has been a humbling experience. While I respect and appreciate everyone's contribution to the class, deriving from individual diversity, my students practice as such by telling me they appreciate my diverse background as well.

As I have proceeded in my academic career from a graduate student to a faculty member, I have come to the realization that education is to help people to become themselves. Intellectual growth takes time, process, and lots of mistakes. To work with this reality, I have sought to be a facilitator initiating a balanced, self-sustaining cycle in my advising of students. That is, listening and instructing are equally important. Accepting failure is equally important to acclaiming success. This attitude allows me to be an accessible and supportive teacher. A fellow doctoral student once told me, after overhearing a casual conversation between my student and me, "I wish I had a TA like you when I was in college." I also had a student who decided to change major to political science because of my TA sessions, which required one more year of coursework. In both occasions, all I did was to listen to them, acknowledge the difficulties they encountered in college, and recognize their potential.

Success of teaching can be evaluated by two indicators. One, the energy that students have when they leave the classroom, and two, the lessons they remember after graduation. I am proud to say that I have successful experiences of both. I have witnessed students talking passionately with each other as they leave, and received warm visits from ex-students driving from Michigan to Toronto. With my past success, I look forward to teaching and learning from my future students, and am confident that we will create a unique fellowship of educated women and men.