

## Teaching Philosophy

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As a college instructor, my most important responsibilities are to engage the students' interests, to help students master each course's learning outcomes, and, most importantly, to foster each student's development as an original and critical thinker.

I believe the key to accomplishing these three goals is to organize all my classes around "the big questions" of politics: Who gets what and how? How does our democracy function? How would we like it to function? Why has our political system functioned in different ways over time? For instance, when I am covering a subject that students tend to find esoteric (e.g., the bureaucracy, federal courts), I organize my presentation and the class discussion around larger concepts like political power and the public good. I find that when I am most successful at connecting course material to larger theoretical questions, my students are highly engaged with my courses, ask great questions, and write inspired essays.

In terms of realizing learning outcomes, the payoff to emphasizing general theoretical questions is twofold. First, by making a constant effort to clarify the central theoretical themes of the course, I communicate a set of priorities that my students might otherwise overlook. Second, focusing on big questions encourages students to synthesize concepts throughout the course. A good course is more than the sum of its parts. Yet students tend to perceive a course as a series of hurdles to be sequentially surmounted. The most disciplined and ambitious students are often most committed to this divide and conquer approach to education. My job as an instructor is to help students develop a detailed understanding of how the different components of the course are related.

By organizing my courses around big theoretical questions, I also create a framework that fosters opportunities for students to learn from one another. I strive to create a learning environment in which the diversity of interests and experiences of class participants leads to a vibrant exchange of ideas. As an instructor, I believe I have an obligation not only to create an intellectual framework that enables students to exchange ideas but I also have an obligation to ensure that all the different voices in my classroom are heard. In practice, I have found that this is best accomplished by occasionally breaking my classes up into smaller discussion groups, and I have also found that when I give each of the groups a unique discussion prompt and ask them to report back to the larger class, small group discussions are an effective method for improving students' mastery of course concepts.

Finally, I take very seriously my obligation as an instructor to ensure that educational success is realizable for all students in the college. To that end, I believe it is important to instill in my students the confidence that they can master the course requirements and to communicate a clear path to how they can accomplish that. Furthermore, whenever possible I strive to provide multiple avenues (lectures, reading, small group discussion) for students to develop their understanding of critical course concepts. For example, when I lecture, I always provide an accompanying online handout. I am dedicated to making my classes as accessible as possible to students of different backgrounds and with different learning styles.