

Effective teachers impart both information and a broader set of skills that prepares students to approach many tasks and challenges. I have four main strategies to achieve this end. First, I challenge my students to work harder, to grapple with difficult questions, and to confront the conventional wisdom on a subject. This prepares them to think critically and instills a work ethic that will serve them well no matter their chosen path. Second, I train my students in skills that are portable across fields and careers. These will help them succeed in the future, regardless of their career path. Third, I treat my students as individuals first, students second. By recognizing their diverse backgrounds and learning styles, I can work with each student to get the most from his or her education. Finally, I bring my enthusiasm for the subject matter into the classroom, while at the same time showing students how it is relevant to their lives. This motivates students and engages them with the course material.

I challenge my students to work hard throughout the semester, and I stress that learning, not grades, is the end goal. After over 20 years of education, my proudest grade is the B that I earned in high school physics – not the many A grades I received in other classes. I spent hours struggling with problem sets at home and in my teacher’s office hours, trying to grasp concepts. This experience profoundly affects my own attitude toward teaching. I try to push my students to improve throughout the semester through several strategies. In class, I encourage students to challenge their assumptions and to consider theories and analyze events, beyond the immediately obvious answer. In ‘The Arab-Israeli Conflict’ (which I have taught for several semesters), we critique models of irrational terrorism and black-and-white narratives of historical events like the experience of Palestinian refugees in 1948. At the same time, I work with my students so they can meet these expectations. I offer multiple assignments and encourage my students to meet with me before and after each paper to identify ways to improve their work. I also make explicit that my grading reflects the trend over the course of a semester, giving students an added incentive to do this extra work.

Second, I believe that the most valuable skills as a political scientist, and in almost any other field, are the ability to connect theory and evidence, to think critically, and develop and communicate a clear, logical argument. Although I recognize that most of my students will not become political scientists, these skills will serve them well no matter their chosen career. Before the first major written assignment of the semester, I spend at least one full lesson discussing how to construct a well-written argument that flows throughout the paper, to connect theory and evidence, and to refute alternative explanations. We do this primarily through critiquing examples, and I also supply students with several summary sheets and references to online sources to which they can refer as they draft and revise their own work. After each assignment, I provide each student with a page of typed comments identifying strengths and weaknesses of their paper in three areas: content, structure, and mechanics. This extensive feedback helps students improve over the course of the semester, and most final papers answer the question clearly and concisely, drawing upon historical evidence to support a thesis.

I try always to see my students as individuals. At the most basic level, this means that each student has a different learning style. Thus, I incorporate many strategies in teaching. This includes traditional lectures, handouts that help students walk through the parts of complex articles and models, small group activities, role-playing and simulations, films and fiction, individual presentations, and debates. I provide online resource guides for students who want to

use the library more efficiently or to access useful news or government websites. I conduct a mid-term course evaluation, asking students to identify effective activities and areas of weakness. This feedback combines with my own ongoing assessment to allow me to adjust lesson plans to best meet my students' needs. My students come from diverse backgrounds, as well. I try to always keep the cost of required materials as low as possible and to make them available through alternate sources such as library reserves and my own collection if necessary. Some students face additional barriers to their education. In particular, many have disabilities, come from non-traditional backgrounds or speak English as a second language, and have emotional and/or medical problems; whenever possible, I help these students identify campus support resources and other ways to ameliorate the pressures, including brief extensions when appropriate. Several students have told me that policies as simple as an extension or a few sessions of one-on-one tutoring to catch up on missed coursework after severe depression or a family crisis has made the difference between passing or failing their courses in a semester.

I also try to show my students how political science is relevant to their lives, making them more interested in the subject matter, as well. This often includes discussion of the day's headlines or encouraging students to make connections beyond the obvious. For instance, when I teach the Arab-Israeli conflict, I include lessons on terrorism and 9/11, US policy in Iraq, and democratization. At other times, we use real-world examples, such as illustrating deterrence as a parent disciplining a child. Finally, I believe that enthusiastic teaching engages students in the material and helps them absorb more of the course content. I love what I do. The best teachers I have ever had bring a deep passion to their work, and I try always to show my students my enthusiasm for the subjects I teach. In a perfect world, this would inspire them all to become political scientists. In the real world, I hope that it pushes them to work hard in the course, to learn all they can, to grapple with complex issues, and to develop skills that will serve them throughout their lives.