

ELIZABETH L. FAUSETT
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My fundamental goal in working with students is to cultivate individuals who pursue knowledge and understanding while continuing to question the world around them. With this end in mind, I follow three interrelated objectives in the classroom: 1) to promote student interest and excitement in politics and international relations, 2) to encourage a recognition of the interactions of course concepts with everyday life by bridging the gap between theory and the “real world” and 3) to challenge students to think critically and engage the logical implications and ambiguities they encounter in each.

To promote student interest and to capture the attention of students, my courses draw from a mix of the academic and the outside worlds that merge policy, current events and the literature of political science. For example in my International Organizations class, I often use a news story or a political cartoon as an introduction into the topic of the day and then have students work in groups to connect and critique the readings from the point-of-view (and counter point) of the reporter/artist. Beyond incorporating traditional and nontraditional textbooks and primary sources, I also bring my own research into the classroom – not only so that students can actively participate in the knowledge generation and critique process but also so that they gain first-hand experience in the applicability of course material to both academia and the real world. In addition to presenting the class with a more dynamic environment that generates interest, this allows me to create a more inclusive learning atmosphere that appeals to verbal, visual, practical and combined learning styles.

To achieve my second objective, I work hard to remind students that politics is personal. Daily classroom discussions integrate current events and require students to evaluate situations from multiple angles and engage theory and its consequences - political, social, cultural and personal. In addition, I try to integrate simulations into my courses that force students to appropriate the roles and restrictions of actors in the political system (whether it is of actual individuals or theoretical constructs) where they face theory in action. In this vein, I have used the “Isle of Ted” simulation successfully to generate critical thinking regarding realist and institutionalist principles in global governance. My first two goals are particularly highly interrelated – by getting students excited about political science and interacting with it in a manner beyond books and lectures, I work to instill an “ownership” of the course in students.

My third objective, to foster critical thinking, is designed to provide students with the ability to understand information presented via academic literature, the media, authority and public policy as well as the substantive knowledge to engage and/or challenge it. Too often, I have encountered (in the classroom and daily life) a willingness to accept any and all “information” as factual, irrespective of source, motivation or bias. In my use of academic materials and popular culture, I teach students to take neither “truth” nor humor for granted. Every picture, every paragraph is an argument (a dialogue between a particular perspective and an environment) that both simplifies reality and distorts it. Complete knowledge comes from both understanding what is there *and* what is missing. Students are challenged via class projects and exams to explore situations, be they hypothetical, historical and current, from a variety of (often contradictory) perspectives in order to develop the skills to both assemble and dismantle logical arguments. My emphasis on written assignments and classroom discussion provides two distinctly different tools to measure the effectiveness of this strategy.

As a graduate student, I have had the opportunity to develop (and refine) my teaching philosophy through teaching repeatedly in upper division undergraduate classes. In my classroom, content knowledge of the course material is important but I seek to balance this with an active attempt to cultivate the skills necessary for students to effectively navigate and evaluate the wealth of information with which students are increasingly presented. I love to bring my energy and passion about political science into the classroom and I hope by doing so, I impart that excitement and dedication to learning to my students.