Teaching Philosophy

I believe that teaching political science entails leading students in rigorously examining and interrogating the structures and concepts that lie behind the complexity of political and social phenomena, and then helping them understand how these structures and concepts touch on their everyday experiences as well as the lives of individuals living halfway across the world. This dual challenge must be met with collaborative engagement in the classroom, a space of mutual respect, open communication and excitement.

I aim to create this environment in several ways. First, I design courses and syllabi that combine major theories and empirical studies with more nuanced portrayals of the subjects we are studying. Anand Patwardhan's documentary films or Rohinton Mistry's fiction, for instance, can serve as a vital supplement to more academic analyses of the rise of religious extremism in South Asia or the politics of the Indian Emergency regime. Such perspectives allow students to develop points of view and otherwise learn to situate their thinking in contexts with which they may be unfamiliar. This makes for deep and fulfilling discussions for students of different backgrounds and persuasions.

Second, I have always attempted to understand a class as a collection of unique voices, with particular needs, interests, and perspectives. I make a special effort in the first few class sessions to learn not just the names but also the backgrounds of my students, in order to quietly support their particular interests and assist them in their challenges. I welcome papers and assignments that relate their experiences to concepts we are learning in class: a student of mine at Berkeley once wrote an excellent paper that related the three dimensions of power to the authority of an instructor in a dance class, and another at the LSE wrote an excellent MSc thesis on different apparel production regimes arising out of her professional experience as a retail consultant. I particularly encourage students, during regular and specially scheduled office hours, to work with me on their writing so they can express their ideas and arguments clearly and forcefully. I have found that weekly response essays in the seminar context are an excellent way to understand each student's strengths and weaknesses in terms of writing and to get a less public sense of their interests and concerns.

Third, I believe that the best way that students learn is from one another. I emphasize group projects, both in terms of in-class activities and presentations. At the LSE, I have found that the best ways that students synthesize material is in conversation, both inside and outside the classroom; I do my best to support this through institutions in my classroom and through quiet encouragement beyond them. I have also set up online bulletin boards and *wikis* that allow students to post responses to readings, and respond to one another, thereby continuing conversations beyond the classroom and leaving students with resources with which to study and prepare for exams.

In both college and graduate school, I've been privileged to have exceptional instructors and mentors who have pushed me to grapple with difficult ideas, concepts and histories in a manner in keeping with the ideals of liberal arts education. In my teaching, I hope to live up to these examples and help my students fashion their own nuanced lenses, informed by academic theories and lived experiences, with which they can perceive, understand and act responsibly in a complex world in a complicated time.

I am very interested in teaching introductory and advanced, including graduate-level, courses in comparative politics. These would include the following: Comparative Politics, South Asian politics, the Political Economy of Development, the Rise and Fall of the State, and the Politics of Inequality and Redistribution. I could additionally teach more specialized courses on qualitative methodology and research design, with an emphasis on the practicalities of archival and interview-based field research in developing countries.