

## Teaching Statement

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### Teaching Philosophy

Why do I teach? I teach in order to expand the minds of students. I teach to open new horizons. I teach to encourage students to think critically about the world around them. While any course can accomplish these goals, I believe courses in international relations and comparative politics are ideal conduits. My experiences as a military nurse are the motivation behind my desire to teach courses in international relations and comparative politics. Moreover, my experiences in the military have made me very passionate about the study and practice of international relations. To most people international meetings, human rights abuses, military mobilization, and dispute escalation are simply things heard in news clips on TV. But to military members, these words have palpable consequences for what their life will look like tomorrow as well as in the distant future. My experiences before entering academia not only make me passionate about the subject matter and an enthusiastic teacher, they also influence the objectives I have for the students: to think more globally, acquire critical thinking skills, and be prepared for the professional environment.

International relations is about studying how actors operate within the international system and understanding that all actors in the system are influenced in some way by others. The interconnectivity of countries and international actors can be a difficult concept to grasp, particularly if you are unfamiliar with actors outside of your home country. To accomplish my first objective of getting students to think more globally, I use current events in many of my courses to help students gain greater familiarity of what is occurring around the world. In class, we discuss the current events and how the different concepts covered in class, such as theories of international relations, drug violence, or causes of conflict, can explain the event we are examining or explain why policy makers chose their course of actions. Discussing current events not only increase the student's knowledge of global affairs, it also helps make course material more tangible by connecting the abstract theories to real life events. In addition, I utilize simulations to further encourage students to view the world in new ways and evaluate events from different perspectives. Students in my *Introduction to International Relations* are grouped in countries. Each country has its own military and economic capabilities as well as unique internal characteristics. Acting as the political leaders of their assigned countries, students engage in international relations, signing trade agreements, building military alliances, and even collectively combatting rebellions and pirates. This exercise allows students to more fully comprehend the complexity of both the study and the practice of international relations as well as see the world and events from a different reference point.

My second objective is for students to develop critical thinking skills. Being able to look at a problem, see multiple courses to take in order to solve the problem, and ultimately make a decision based on the information presented will help the students be successful

in the classroom and in their future endeavors. The study of international relations and comparative politics is excellent subject matter for students to practice and hone these skills. In my *Latin American Politics and Government* course, students must conduct an in-depth case study of one country in the region. For the project, the student must identify the most pressing issue the country faces and develop three different possible solutions to problem. The student must then select the policy they believe will have the most success at addressing the issue. The project serves multiple purposes. First, it improves research skills since students must find appropriate and relevant information to form their policy recommendations. Second, it helps students sharpen their critical thinking skills since they must make a decision on the best course of action for a problem that lacks a “right” answer. Third, it further refines the student’s ability to communicate effectively.

My third objective is to prepare students for the professional environment. To help achieve this objective, students deliver presentations to their classmates. In my U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy course, students work in groups to create policy recommendations to address a current issue the U.S. faces and write a policy brief. The students then present their policy brief to their classmates. The presentation is a collaborative effort; one in which the group as a whole must determine how the work will be divided, completed, and organized into a persuasive argument to present to the class. This is not unlike many work environments where often the tasks are accomplished by groups of employees. While the group accomplishes the overall project each individual member is required to deliver a portion of the presentation. Speaking in front of people can be a frightening endeavor for many people but is often an unavoidable task in the professional world. By requiring all students to present to the class, students gain experience being in front of people in a less threatening environment. This project helps students hone their written and oral communication skills as well as help them manage group projects; abilities needed in the workplace.

Expanding viewpoints, encouraging students to think critically about the world, and assisting them down the path towards the professional world are the reasons why I teach. The true joy of teaching, however, is the fact that my students often enlarge my viewpoint, make me question the world around me, and help me develop into a better teacher. My experiences as a military nurse led me to teach, but the students are what keep me coming back.

### **Teaching Experience**

I have gained experience teaching in various settings through my time at the University of Kentucky and Radford University. I have taught courses in a traditional classroom setting, online, and as part of an education abroad program. At Radford University, I teach a variety of courses in International Relations and Comparative Politics to support the department of political science and university goals and needs. While at the University of Kentucky, I designed “Sex and Warfare Across the Globe.” This course explores the effect war has on men and women, with a special focus on the different roles women play, such as victims, war-fighters, and peacemakers in different conflict settings. I will be modifying this course to teach it as a senior seminar at Radford University Spring 2017 semester. I have also co-led an education abroad program titled, “Pura Vida:

Politics of the Good Life” to Heredia, Costa Rica while at the University of Kentucky. I taught a political analysis course, highlighting conducting research in the field. At Radford University, I am the program director for an education program, “Viva La Revolución?: The Legacy of the Cuban Revolution,” scheduled for Summer 2017 to Cuba.

### **Courses to Teach**

In addition to the courses I have already taught, I am interesting in teaching a wide variety of courses in International Relations and Comparative Politics. I would like to teach Introduction to Comparative Politics, Comparative Institutions, Middle East Politics, and International Conflict.

### **Nature and Extent of Mentoring**

My teaching is not confined to the classroom. I feel strongly that mentorship and engaging with students outside the classroom is a vital part of student learning. I began mentoring undergraduates while at the University of Kentucky. I was able to connect one of my *Introduction to Political Analysis* students with a Political Science professor conducting research in an area the student had an interest. The student became one of the professor’s research assistants and will begin his doctoral program in the fall. In addition, I wrote a letter of recommendation for the student to be admitted to an undergraduate research program at the University of Kentucky. Another undergraduate student I have mentored never took one of my courses, but was introduced to me by one of the faculty members. I met with the student a few times a semester to discuss his research and plans for graduate school. It was not uncommon for him to stop by my office before going to graduate school campus visits to discuss what to expect and the questions he should ask the department. At Radford University, in addition to the formalized advising of individual students and being the faculty advisor for the Political Science Society, I have begun mentoring multiple students. Some students come to me seeking advise on career options while others are trying to further improve their research abilities. For instance, I am currently working with a student that plans to go on to graduate school and wants to strengthen his research skills. The student has begun assisting me with on one of my research projects. While I enjoy teaching and interacting with students during the normal class period, I find great satisfaction engaging with students in the less formal setting and helping students find the right path for them to attain their aspirations.