Teaching Philosophy

In graduate school, I have developed as both a researcher and a teacher, two professional capacities that mutually reinforce one another. At Duke, I served as a teaching assistant, accumulating over 75 hours of independent classroom instruction, and completed Duke's Certificate in College Teaching, which included over 40 hours of structured pedagogy training, as well as peer feedback and supervision (A5, V5). I am guided by the belief that education should spark intellectual curiosity and equip students with the skills to thrive both inside and beyond the classroom. This value shapes how I design courses (A1), lead lectures (A2), assess students (A3), and provide mentorship (A4).

Design Exercises with Real World Examples

I design my coursework to maximize student engagement by connecting academic concepts to real-world cases through historical case studies, current event discussions, and interactive simulations (A1,V2). In my 15-student discussion sections for *Introduction to International Relations* and *American Foreign Policy*, I led weekly discussions using case studies to illustrate core concepts (V2), often drawing on my expertise of the Middle East. For example, in October 2024, we discussed how "rationalist explanations of war," particularly the commitment problem, helps explain Israel's offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon and its broader foreign policy toward Iran and its proxies. Similarly, as a TA in *Comparative Political Behavior*, I designed in-class exercises to help students engage with the assigned readings. During a class on the effects of gender attitudes on vote choice, students designed their own conjoint survey experiment. They created attributes of hypothetical candidates for student body president, which I then coded into Qualtrics, fielded to the class, analyzed, and presented back to them (K4). This exercise deepened students' understanding of gender and voting behavior, demystified the research process (V1, K2), and provided hands-on training in a research method used in academia and industry (V4, K4).

Teaching Politics in a Polarized Environment

A major difficulty in teaching political science with real-world examples is that the subject matter is, well… political (A2, V4). How can we examine salient topics without being dragged into two-dimensional debates of today's polarized atmosphere? (K3) Points of discussion must be salient enough to engage students; however, issues can't be so charged that they preclude diverse engagement (V2). As an educator, I have developed approaches to facilitate a balanced, healthy dialogue.

One approach is to establish a norm that discussions are structured around assigned readings and focused on a relatively narrow question (V2). For example, when teaching International Relations in early 2024 during the onset of the Israel–Gaza conflict, the instructor and I chose not to avoid the topic entirely. Instead, American support for Israel was introduced as a case study on how special interest groups shape U.S. foreign policy. This focused discussion avoided debate about the broader conflict. Another strategy I have the use of low stakes running examples (V1, K2). When teaching Comparative Political Behavior, I often drew on the bitter but ultimately innocuous Duke–UNC rivalry. School identity provided a useful entry point for discussing potentially charged questions: Where does identity come from? Is it fluid or multifaceted? How does conflict fuel identity, and how does identity fuel conflict? I also incorporated this example into simulations, using Duke versus UNC as in-groups and out-groups

in behavioral games (K2, K4). In these exercises, students allocated resources to others with randomly assigned identities, helping them understand concepts such as parochial altruism.

Ultimately, navigating the classroom is a dynamic process that depends on the views and personalities of students, which vary from class to class and year to year. The better you know your students, the better you can navigate this environment.

Being an Approachable, Relatable Mentor
My younger self serves as my greatest motivation to excel as an educator and advisor (A4). My alma mater is a large public university which, at the time, lacked a political science department offering training in quantitative methods or faculty aligned with my research interests. Ten years later, I can still feel the visceral frustration of struggling through my senior thesis without formal training or mentorship. I still remember learning how to read academic articles, navigate formulas and regression tables, and write a literature review. I believe that having navigated these challenges without any mentorship relatively recently makes me more relatable to my students (V1). By emphasizing that I have been in their shoes, I cultivate an approachable classroom environment in which students feel comfortable asking questions and making mistakes. In teaching evaluations my students have noted that I am "compassionate, funny, knowledgeable, and kind… [have] been there to assist and help out every step of the way."

One practical way I provide guidance on writing and research is by sharing the practical tricks and insights I've learned along the way (K2). For example, in the first class of every semester, I lead a discussion on how to read an academic article. I provide my students with five guiding questions to help them extract the key elements of an academic article (K1). This template goes a long way in helping students properly digest the assigned readings. Additionally, each semester I meet with interested students over coffee to discuss their senior thesis and career interests. We often discuss how to identify a puzzling research question, what a literature review entails, what academia is like, and what job prospects may look like. I find mentorship—whether in the classroom, with RAs I've hired for my independent research, or previously as a team leader in the Political Violence Lab—to be the most rewarding part of academia. While publishing research takes years, lecturing and mentoring provide instant gratification through their immediate, visible impact.

Assessing Students in the Era of AI
Evaluation is a key part of the teaching experience (A3). While properly grading students is an essential component of every course—because students need to receive credit for their work and for completing the course—the real purpose of evaluation is to develop their critical thinking, writing skills, and understanding of politics. Students should leave my classes knowing more about historical cases, able to digest complex academic articles, and capable of applying insights from political science to both contemporary and historical examples. The goal of evaluation is to coach them through these tasks (A4), so they develop as both consumers and creators of knowledge. Evaluation is best accomplished through face-to-face engagement and detailed written feedback, not simply a numerical grade written on top of an exam (A3). Therefore, I devote considerable time to providing pointed feedback. For example, in my comparative politics course, my 20 students were required to submit three 300-word essays over the course of the

semester; in response, I provided more than 20,000 words of feedback across their assignments (A3).

Generative AI, however, provides students with shortcuts that can reduce the friction needed to develop transferable skills (K4). As a TA, I have worked with instructors of record to adapt course syllabi to reflect the reality that AI can be a helpful tool, but it cannot replace deep, substantive knowledge (K3). Sometimes this means designing assignments where AI cannot be used; other times it means explicitly incorporating AI. In practice, this often means that administering pen and paper assessments, requiring students to memorize information and structure their writing without relying on AI tools. At the same time, students are explicitly allowed to use AI when preparing for exams, where it can be helpful for organizing the literature and providing overviews.

I found these issues to extend beyond class assignment and into classroom discussion. For example, as part of Duke's Certificate in College Teaching, I participated in a "Teaching Triangles" peer supervision program while serving as a discussion section leader (K3, V5). During a semester in which I taught a discussion section for Introduction to International Relations, I prepared questions based on the assigned readings and facilitated a discussion on the effectiveness of third-party peacekeeping in civil conflict. My peer supervisor, sitting in the back of the room, later informed me that one student had been entering my discussion questions verbatim into an AI platform and then raising his hand to deliver the generated responses. This issue led me to set aside portions of discussion sections where students closed their laptops and engaged with the material without digital tools.

Teaching Interests
With expertise in political behavior during conflict and authoritarianism, I am well prepared to teach undergraduate courses in Comparative Politics and International Relations. At Duke, I served as a discussion section leader for *Introduction to International Relations* and *American Foreign Policy*, and as a teaching assistant for *Introduction to Comparative Political Behavior*. I would be eager to teach these courses as a professor as well. In addition, I have devoted considerable attention to learning and communicating quantitative methods and would welcome the opportunity to teach an undergraduate methodology course covering the fundamentals of research design and quantitative analysis, including the basics of regression and causal inference.

I would also be excited to develop upper-level undergraduate and graduate seminars in my areas of expertise. For example, I could offer a course on the *Politics of the Middle East* drawing on my firsthand experience in the region, as well as seminars on *Migration and Forced Displacement* and *Political Violence: Attitudes and Behavior*, informed by my parallel research agendas. Finally, as a first-generation graduate student, I am particularly committed to mentoring students interested in pursuing research at both the undergraduate and graduate levels—whether navigating the challenges of fieldwork, wrangling data, or managing the practical details of completing a dissertation.