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Teaching Statement

In my teaching, I set three primary objectives: to encourage students to undertake critical analysis of political events, to guide them in strengthening oral and written communication skills, and to foster awareness of how politics has repercussions for people's lives. While I aim to impart as much information to my students as possible during my class, I also maintain a continuous assessment of their understanding of the content through student participation and discussion. Through this method, I can adapt the pace of learning to best match the class dynamic and ensure the students gain an in-depth understanding of the content.

I consider it fundamental to encourage students to think critically about the concepts and facts presented to them in class. There are two main strategies I develop in order to accomplish this goal. First, every week, I reserve a segment of lecture dedicated to discussion in small groups, followed by a whole class discussion. In this part of the class, students have to answer a few questions about the assigned readings and lectures as well as pose questions relating to them. Rather than focusing on definitions or facts, these questions must challenge information, relate it to information we discussed in previous lectures, or apply it to different political events in Latin America, the United States or other regions. Second, throughout every single lecture, I continuously encourage students to interrupt me if they have a question or a comment. I believe this is extremely relevant to not only keep students engaged and maintain a dynamic lecture, but also incite a habit of analyzing class content in a critical manner. Student evaluations have indicated that they particularly appreciate this effort.

To strengthen students' communication skills, in addition to emphasizing constant class and group discussion participation, I set high standards for writing assignments. Working in small groups is especially important to engage the least vocal students as they can feel more comfortable in this setting and thus be induced to participate in whole class discussions. To help students develop their writing skills, I provide students the opportunity to write about topics they care about, as well as to incorporate early feedback. For the term paper, students work on the selection of topics and research questions early in the semester, for which I provide individual written guidance, as well as in person consultation during office hours. Before final submission of papers, I encourage students to seek my feedback to work together with me on improving their argumentation skills and writing style. I find it extremely rewarding to see students become enthusiastic about a research project and motivated to do research, discover new information and develop an argument.

I find that political science classes have the potential to, together with imparting knowledge about different political issues, increase awareness among students of how politics has reper-

cussions for people's lives. To illustrate the role politics and government play in our lives, I encourage the discussion of topics with which students may be familiar and allow them to draw on their personal experiences. Then, we together connect these discussions to the broader underlying themes and questions of the class. In addition, I make it a personal responsibility to dispel different stereotypes held about Latin American societies, through critical analysis of both historical and contemporary events.

My approach to teaching, based on these three objectives, has gained me student evaluations that are consistently strong and higher than the department mean at UNC-Chapel Hill. Students have noted my focus on understanding rather than memorization, my constant encouragement of questions, my careful preparation for lectures, as well as my use of specific real world examples.

Teaching Experience

Over the years, I have gathered extensive teaching experience. My experience is in comparative politics, specifically as instructor and teaching assistant of "Contemporary Latin American Politics." As instructor, I developed and taught the class during the Spring 2017 semester at UNC-Chapel Hill. We focused on how Latin American governments are organized and on the major problems faced by their societies, ranging from economic development and social policy reforms to democratic consolidation and political representation.

I have also served as a teaching assistant for comparative politics at UNC Chapel-Hill, and research design at the Catholic University in Peru. Along with my teaching experience, I have also mentored undergraduate students as a Graduate Research Consultant for a Latin American Politics class. My responsibilities included facilitating the planning of and assisting students with a semester-long research project.

My teaching experience has exposed me to a variety of student backgrounds in the United States and in Peru. Together with the substantive subject matter of my research, which deals with social inequality, and fieldwork experience in Mexico, Chile and Peru, this has led me to appreciate cultural and social diversity.

Teaching Interests

I am interested in teaching both introductory and upper level courses. I am prepared to teach general introductory courses in comparative politics and public policy. I have experience teaching an introductory-level Latin American politics course, which I can teach immediately. I am also well prepared to teach upper level courses on social policy, politics of health, comparative political economy, and Latin American politics. I could also develop courses on political parties, interest groups and representation.

I would look forward to the opportunity to teach courses and work individually with students on topics related to research methods, including introductory statistics, research design, qualitative and mixed-methods, and fieldwork.

Evaluations

I have been gratified to receive very positive feedback from students. When assessing my performance as an instructor, students rated my overall effectiveness as a teacher at 4.81 out of 5, and in response to the question "Overall, I would rate this instructor as excellent," I received 4.86. I was rated above the department average in all 23 categories measured by the university. I make these evaluations available as part of my teaching portfolio. Below I provide a sample of open-response feedback provided by students on their evaluations of my course and recitation sections.

Instructor, Contemporary Latin American Politics, Spring 2017

"Zoila shows up to class prepared and ready to teach. She does a great job encouraging class participation and engaging students with the material at hand. Zoila is one of the best instructors I've had at Chapel Hill! As a side note for whoever reads this, I have had a handful of friends who have taken Poli 238 before when Zoila was a TA for the class. They have all had great things to say about her, which demonstrates a pattern of her commitment inside the classroom."

"I think the biggest strength of the professor is that she is young enough to understand the students, but educated and prepared enough to teach the course and promote critical thinking. Since she can kind of relate to the students she is open to recommendations about how lectures and assignments are designed. She has demonstrated to be enthusiastic and concerned about the students learning rather than just wanting to fail students."

"Zoila's only fault is the fact that there is only one Zoila!"

Teaching Assistant, Contemporary Latin American Politics, Fall 2016

"She was great, and I felt like I actually reviewed what we learned in class and felt more confident in my knowledge of the class material. In many other recitations I did not feel this way, so I think this is very important. She always had a great attitude and was very nice which made me feel more comfortable in participating in recitation. Overall, she was one of the best TAs I have had at UNC."

"Zoila is a fantastic TA, she was always prepared for recitation and was always willing and able to answer questions posed to her. The power-points she made were very clear and concise and made it very obvious what we needed to know for various concepts/countries. I really appreciated her willingness to meet with students outside of class and be a help to them, whether that be in clarifying topics from class or providing guidance in writing the paper. She does a great job of explaining things, emphasizing what is important and what isn't as important, I know that she will be teaching this class in the Spring and I think that she is totally prepared and will do a fantastic job."

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