



Teaching Statement

My goal in teaching is to help students develop as independent, reflexive and responsible thinkers. My classes are designed to equip students with comprehension of political concepts and skills to apply these concepts in understanding the world as active participants. I developed my teaching approach as a teaching assistant at Trinity College Dublin and the University of Belgrade, and through mentoring and industry experiences. I find that my approach does not only foster continuous engagement and constructive communication during classes, but a set of transferable skills that stay with students in their further education or careers.

I approach teaching as a core part of academic life, complementary to research. My teaching philosophy revolves around three key principles: empowering students towards independent thinking; developing students' reflexivity through critical thinking and self-awareness; and fostering responsible empirical application through careful use of concepts to understand and impact the world around them. I built my teaching approaches by enhancing my classroom experience with proven pedagogical tools, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Empowering students in the learning process is the first step in achieving all other teaching goals. Insights from psychology (i.e., the PERMA model) have shown that students engage more deeply when they feel like stakeholders in the class. I present the classroom as a space of open intellectual exchange where learning outcomes depend on shared efforts. I foster shared ownership of the class through approachability and by affirming students' voice in class organisation. At the University of Belgrade, I taught weekly tutorials in sociology for circa 300 computer science and management students. In the first week I noticed a weak engagement across tutorial groups which prompted me to conduct a quick survey about expectations and concerns in the module. Accounting for expectations of my students, I redesigned the reading list to include more sociological readings about information society, the Internet and social networks. As a result the module had 30% more students than in the previous three years. I used this experience at Trinity College Dublin, where I upgraded the approach. I invited students to express their interests and propose readings for the tutorial at the start. I signalled my approachability—especially to students who struggled with the material—by framing mistakes and conceptual fallacies as natural parts of the learning process that we address openly and supportively. This approach proved useful in teaching both substantive and methods modules.

I see critical thinking as a key skill students need to develop to evaluate arguments and evidence. Critical thinking is an important step in building self-awareness and understanding the perspectives of others. I rely on learning from experience and hands-on approach to activate critical thinking. For my tutorial about non-democratic regimes I designed a 15-minute in-class game of free, but unfair elections. After a short overview of key concepts, students would be given different roles (incumbent, challenger party, media, police, citizen) and an appropriate amount of *Monopoly* money. The goal of the game for the incumbent and the challenger was to win the elections. Unfair conditions were presented through a possibility of an incumbent to corrupt the police to exclude the challenger from the game for 2 minutes for every 5 minutes of the game or to pay the media to be silent about the challenger party when talking to citizens. Reflecting on choices made in the game then became the starting point from which students could understand the arguments about complex constraints of voting decisions in non-democratic regimes. In the evaluations students praised this approach as "thought-provoking" and as "easier to understand."

My final goal as an educator is to equip students to responsibly apply their analytical skills. Giving students the opportunity to apply their analytical skills is valuable as it provides them with a fresh perspective on

issues they might otherwise take for granted. In class I would use easily accessible and widely known examples from the media and popular culture for analytical exercises. Much to my students' surprise, concepts explaining religious insurgency helped them understand the emergence of ISIS and the plot of *Dune: Part Two*. Responsibility in the use of political science concepts entails building students' awareness of the consequences of particular analytical choices. In classes I relied on open-ended case studies and exercises to depict different consequences. For the class about civil conflicts I designed an exercise in which students needed to develop five policies for post-conflict development in Syria. The class was divided in two groups, with handouts reminding one group about gender differences in conflict victimisation, but not the other. Through a debate, students themselves concluded how their initial analytical choices shaped the policies they focused on, demonstrating awareness of their responsibility in the process.

At Trinity College Dublin, I served as head teaching assistant for Comparative Politics A and B modules over four consecutive years. During this time I took part in design, teaching, administration and assessment in these modules. I also taught one-on-one tutorials for students with learning difficulties in Qualitative Methods and Research Methods B (statistics). This experience prepares me to teach comparative politics and methods modules at both undergraduate and graduate levels. I am also well-positioned to teach contemporary British politics given my dissertation work on UKIP's entry into Parliament and post-Brexit immigration politics. My previous research in gender studies also equips me with a strong grasp of gender-focused topics. Based on my current research, I am particularly eager to offer modules on political behaviour and immigration. I also have substantial experience in administrative duties and coordination. I was the first point of contact for 100–150 students and coordinated the work of other teaching assistants.

I view mentoring as a more focused extension of my teaching principles. My main goal as a mentor is to create space and support for mentees to test different approaches to issues at hand and eventually find their own way. I ground my mentoring approach in open feedback and clear expectations in the process. At Trinity College Dublin, I organised and led a book review workshop series for MSc students. Usually, I would select four or five candidates from a pool of applicants based on expressed interest and dedication. I would then organise regular monthly meetings with students to discuss the books and provide guidance on academic writing. Upon reading the books, I would provide two or three rounds of feedback before submission. For more than six of my mentees, this process resulted in their first publication, which they later used in doctoral or professional applications. I implemented my mentoring approach in teaching qualitative methods and statistics to students with learning difficulties. Working with these students, I combined direct instruction to clarify methods with guided exercises tailored to their individual learning styles. An important aspect of mentoring in this context is acknowledging learning difficulties and channelling students' creativity in overcoming them. For example, I helped one student develop a systematic schema for reading academic papers, which improved their focus and comprehension.

I have a keen interest in promoting equal opportunities in education for first-generation and underrepresented students. I participated in the Trinity Access Programme to promote college education for high school students from under resourced communities. The aim of my tutorials was to encourage students to ask questions. In one tutorial, I explained the principle of group formation by dividing the class into blue and red groups and organizing an exchange game. After the first five minutes, students realised they were mostly trading with students from their own group. The game prompted many students to question why groups emerge so quickly, when they had previously assumed groups form only over time.

At Trinity College Dublin, I also participated in efforts to create collegiality and community among PhD students. On several occasions, I participated as a discussant in the departmental Friday Seminar, providing feedback to other PhD students on their ongoing work. I contributed to a positive MSc student experience by organizing a session of the Monday Seminar about the anti-authoritarian student movement in Serbia. Several years running, I participated in both PhD and MSc student inductions.