

# Christopher Baylor

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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My goals in teaching political science are to promote interest in politics and provide students with analytical tools to understand the political world. Students should be able to interpret political events and institutions through multiple perspectives, and offer novel interpretations after being familiarized with the debates we have in class. By the end of my courses, I hope students recognize the assumptions and controversies leading different political scientists to understand politics through one approach rather than another. With a refined understanding of political science, students can approach current politics as deliberative participants, understanding the best arguments made by both ends of the political spectrum and offering a justification if they embrace one position over the best position the opposing side has to offer.

Successful teaching begins with student motivation. In more than a decade of teaching, I have found that the best way to draw students into political science is to anchor class participation to current events and elections. The 2016 election, for example, provided an abundance of entry points into deeper discussions about political science research - among many other topics, voter psychology, racial resentment, gender, media frames, and the nature of political parties. The recent controversy over immigration and sanctuary cities, likewise, brings up questions such as nationalism, constitutional law, federalism, and responsibilities to citizens from other countries. By using current events as starting points students see why the research political scientists conduct is relevant to them. I teach students new concepts by building on more familiar concepts

Since students have different learning styles, it is vital to use more than one method of instruction during a semester. Many students learn from comparison and contrast, and benefit from assigned debates. Others prefer less structured class discussion or hands-on activities. Last year, I divided students in my "Elections and the Political Process" class into four Senate campaigns, with a different student in each group role-playing the candidate, campaign manager, or press secretary. Students had to stage a campaign kick-off event, press conference, and a debate, while also filming a campaign commercial. In my "Media and American Politics" class, students wrote four blog posts using Tableau software to provide hands on experience with the new media.

For all students, class participation is vital to practicing critical thinking and applying what they learn to contemporary issues and cases. Promoting discussion begins by encouraging active reading, particularly of texts that expose students to multiple perspectives. Once this base is constructed, students are invited to respond to each others' comments during class. If students miss essential points or discuss them only briefly, however, instructors should elaborate on them before moving to new topics. I involve otherwise reticent students to participate by using a "present and prepared" system, in which students sign a sheet at the beginning of class permitting me to call upon them randomly to answer questions about the readings or reply to other students. Students are not required to sign, but earn extra credit for doing so. For students with legitimate reasons for not participating verbally in class, I provide alternate means of participation evaluation.

To help students perform their best, I make sure to let them know how they will be evaluated and to evaluate them before major assignments are due. Class participation is one opportunity to provide feedback before formal grading, by encouraging students to think aloud in a non-threatening atmosphere. Commenting on paper proposals and rough drafts also helps show students what I look for in written assignments.

In political science papers, a writing assignment's thesis, organization, and conclusion should be explored gradually as students learn more about a general topic. Students should begin with a general topic, gather relevant arguments and compare them to their initial beliefs, and finally formulate a thesis that reflects what they have found. In my classes, many of these steps would correspond with an evaluation. The structure, sources, and other elements of the paper should be determined after this process, to fit the needs of a particular thesis. While students often begin research with a particular conclusion in mind, I encourage them to view writing as a tool for exploring different outcomes to their questions, whether normative or empirical. Writing facilitates an internal dialog in which students reexamine their prior beliefs in light of new arguments and new evidence.

Although employers often require separate research philosophy and teaching philosophy statements, research and teaching have a symbiotic relationship. Research calls student attention to the creative, dynamic element of the discipline and reminds them that political science is not a static body of knowledge that remains constant from one textbook edition to the next. My own research has shown students at several schools what political scientists do apart from teaching. In the spring of 2013, I taught a well-received seminar on "Gender, Sexuality, and the American Party System" at Wellesley College. I brought my seminar students to Radcliffe College to read documents from the newly-opened National Women's Political Caucus archives. Last spring, my students at Washington College interviewed Maryland activists and legislators who were influential in the marriage equality debate at the state level. Future courses could likewise introduce students to the challenges and opportunities of doing research with primary sources and elite interviews.

Having studied political science at UCLA and Boston College, I am familiar with quantitative methods, rational choice theory, and historical approaches to teaching political science. All have a place in a balanced curriculum. Many students are curious about the debates political scientists have among themselves and only fully understand one approach when contrasted with another. Colleges increasingly require political science majors to complete a research project before graduating, and my strong background in both quantitative and qualitative methods will help me suggest research techniques tailored to student topics.

My broad teaching experience, research background, and methodological training have equipped me to teach a variety of classes. I am committed to advancing active learning in political science regardless of student level or background. When college courses are taught correctly, students will broaden their horizons with new perspectives in political science and new analytical tools to apply to current and past events.