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Teaching Philosophy

I approach my role as an educator as a chance not simply to share my knowledge and learn from my students' experiences, but to demonstrate the interrelationship of fact, theory, and policy. In the courses on Research Methods, Iran, and Comparative Politics that I have designed or led, I have focused on teaching students how to identify and evaluate credible sources of information, apply rigor to their analysis of theory and evidence, and understand the real-world applications of the concepts they learn.

My first goal in the classroom is to advance students' understanding of the origins – and sometimes disputed nature – of the facts they use in their arguments. My main portfolio at the State Department was Iran, an issue about which basic events, from U.S. culpability for a 1953 coup in Tehran to the stability of the current regime, are highly contested. To translate my experience as a practitioner to the classroom, I focused each unit of my course on Iran on one of these political events, assigning authors from different national and ideological backgrounds for each topic. Students learned to understand the value of seeking out sources of information from different perspectives as a way not merely to check facts, but to understand the principles that serve as the foundation of others' opinions.

The second foundation of my teaching philosophy is applying the principles of the scientific method to evaluate evidence. Recognizing that the selection and interpretation of facts are subject to bias, we can still identify criteria to compare and judge them. When teaching research methods, I worked to give students a foundation in a broad range of methodological approaches, focusing on the similarity between qualitative and quantitative methods: the need to gather high-quality data and make comparisons that test a specific theory. I strove to balance between ensuring students without a background in statistics or programming could quickly get up to speed in the principles of hypothesis testing and basic coding techniques, while also challenging all students to learn new methods that would allow them to conduct more advanced research. The key principle I emphasized was ensuring the integrity of each stage of the process, from conceptualization to presentation of results.

Finally, I believe teaching should be firmly grounded in real-world applications. This means both understanding the policy implications of comparative analysis and including undergraduates in active research. While political science is at heart about drawing generalizations from the available information, policy analysis is about moving back from these generalizations to specific cases. My course on Iran focused on this interaction of broad theory and individual circumstances in understanding political outcomes. In addition, I regularly involved students in the practice of science by engaging them in my own research, giving undergraduates practical experience operating and designing a lab experiment and enlisting them in data collection for my dissertation in exchange for tutoring in coding and statistics. By tying theory and method to current events and their own experiences, students gained the tools to analyze the world around them more deeply.