



## **Brittany N. Perry**

Teaching Philosophy

Central to my teaching philosophy is the belief that both the teacher and student must be active participants in the process of gaining new information and developing critical thinking skills. I strongly believe that students are most successful when their instructor is enthusiastic about the course and they themselves become excited about the learning process. My goal as a teacher is to expand students' knowledge of the subject matter while also challenging them to actively apply concepts, develop new questions, formulate original theories, and generally, push beyond their personal comfort-zones to explore new ideas and viewpoints. I am also deeply committed to cultivating a broader skill set in each of my students, improving not only knowledge of political science but also their reading, writing and, oral presentation skills.

In my courses and throughout all of my teaching experiences, I operate with these goals in mind. From the very first day of the semester, my aim is to get students involved and excited about the learning process. In my introductory course, we began by learning about key theoretical frameworks for understanding American politics. To teach the students about the prisoner's dilemma, I have two volunteers engage in a prisoner's dilemma of their own. Then, as a class, we discuss when and how we might apply the prisoner's dilemma and why the rationale of the theory sometimes does not hold. I find that this strategy of getting students actively involved helps them remember key concepts and better apply them throughout the course. An additional way I convey the significance of the course material and key theories is by frequently tying in current events, scientific studies, and film. When they see the importance of the subject matter beyond the classroom, students become more interested and begin to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the material. The success of this approach has been reflected in my course evaluations. As one student noted, "Professor Perry is extremely enthusiastic and made what could have been a potentially boring topic very enjoyable."

In addition to helping students understand new material, I challenge them to engage in critical thinking, question existing theories and develop theories of their own. In my courses, whether they be introductory or advanced, I like to introduce the process of political science research. My goal is to teach students how to analyze politics in a theoretical and unbiased fashion. One assignment designed to meet this goal has students pick a scholarly article related to the course and give a 5-10 minute oral presentation on the research question explored in the article, the theory and hypotheses tested, the research methodology used, and the results of the analysis. I then ask the students to think about additional questions the article raises and how they may go about challenging the assumptions made by the author. The purpose is to get them to move beyond their political opinions to answer deeper "why" questions about political institutions and behavior. In an evaluation from my Introduction to American Politics course, one student stated that this project "was great for introducing students to political science research" and s/he "wished [s/he] had done it freshman year." In my seminars and upper-level courses, I also assign readings from top academic journals. I find this to be challenging for many (especially undergraduates) so as a result, I make them submit weekly discussion questions to guide their understanding, while reviewing tougher concepts and methods in class.

Given that I teach on politics, and subjects that are often uncomfortable to discuss (especially in my race and immigration courses), I also make it a part of my philosophy to push students outside of their

comfort zones to explore new and different perspectives. In doing so however, it is first essential to create a safe environment, in which students are both open with their opinions, but also respectful of those held by others. In my “Racial and Ethnic Minorities in American Politics” course, I assign articles on why it is difficult to discuss racial politics in the U.S. and then the class collectively assesses how we ought to approach such topics throughout the semester while setting ground rules for moving forward. I strongly believe that in this environment students learn more from the reading, myself, and others. Numerous student evaluations I have received highlight the benefit of this approach, suggesting that this “positive learning environment” contributes to both “academic and personal growth.”

Finally, as an instructor, I find it essential to improve the larger skill set of my students (written and oral) in order to prepare them for future courses and careers. In my upper-level courses, I assign concept papers so that students can demonstrate their understanding of key ideas and convey this information in a coherent, concise manner. I give extensive feedback to my students on both their content and writing style so that they have the opportunity to improve throughout the semester. In all of my classes, I also encourage class participation and assign either individual or group presentations so that students gain more experience communicating ideas to others. In my “Latino Immigration and American Politics” seminar, I have students present the results of their final research papers, while their peers submit individual reports on the content of each talk and effectiveness of the presentation method. The goal of this is to foster improved oral communication as well as deeper working relationships among peers.

By developing courses that encourage active learning, critical thinking and the development of reading, writing and oral presentation skills, my goal is to cultivate a deeper appreciation for political science and the intellectual process. I hope that my enthusiasm and expertise will excite students and inspire them to continue enhancing their knowledge and skills in the future.