

Teaching Statement

Adam Ramey

October 16, 2010

Philosophy of Teaching

During my time as a graduate student, I have served as a teaching assistant (TA) on four occasions: Applied Data Analysis (twice), Introduction to Positive Political Theory, and Identity, Ethnicity, & Nationalism. Additionally, I designed and taught three times a previously unoffered course on Middle East politics. While each of these courses presented a different set of challenges, one theme resonated across the board: students require a structured and well-planned approach to instruction. Teachers who wish to communicate information to their students, especially complex technical material, must do more than lecture. They must use various teaching tools and assessments to make sure that students actually comprehend the material. Over the past few years, my views on how to do this have crystallized into a systematic, three-pronged approach to teaching that seeks to reach and engage students in multiple ways. The three prongs are interactive instruction, strategic reinforcement, and ongoing evaluation.

During the interactive instruction, students are presented new information using the latest technological aids. These include the seamless integration of Microsoft PowerPoint, YouTube, and the like during course lectures. It is my belief that these keep students engaged and experience has confirmed this. Moreover, by staying engaged, students are more likely to ask questions and, therein, develop a deeper understanding of course topics.

Strategic reinforcement is the process whereby students reinforce what they learn in class through readings, papers, and projects. I call this “strategic” because the instructor must vary the sorts of assignments in order to accommodate the variety of learning styles of students. Readings need to be from primary and secondary sources, chosen carefully to maintain rigor but, at the same time, be accessible to students. Papers and projects should range from analysis to application, allowing students to demonstrate mastery and to apply knowledge to new problems. Students should have the opportunity to work in groups, as the continual discussions among group members helps to reinforce course material even further.

The last stage, ongoing evaluation, is a process of examination that occurs throughout the semester, requiring students to synthesize new knowledge with previous knowledge. This comes in the form of exams, in-class debates, and student presentations. All too often, students fail to retain information because courses have a “quiz and quit” mentality. More specifically, students are required to “cram” by reading and reviewing lectures to pass a single exam. After the exam, students lose most of the information and repeat the process for any subsequent exams. In my approach, by continuing to assess knowledge and integrating old and new information, students develop a better and longer-lasting

understanding of course material. It also makes learning more fun and makes the “cram” approach a thing of the past.

For me, teaching is both a passion and a tremendous responsibility. The steps I outlined above have allowed me to effectively teach my students over the past several years and, moreover, have helped my students develop a long-term appreciation of what they have learned. Moreover, the development of this philosophy has also served to teach me an important lesson. I have learned that teaching is anything but constant. It requires careful adaptation of style and method to new challenges. Being open to new ways to address these challenges is, in its essence, the core of my philosophy.

Teaching Interests

I am interested in teaching both technical and substantive courses in a number of different areas. In what follows, U and G will abbreviate undergraduate and graduate courses, respectively.

American Politics courses

Congress (U,G). The undergraduate version of this course will serve as a broad-based introduction to Congress as an institution. The legislative process, committee system, party leadership, Congressional elections, and inter-branch bargaining will be presented in turn. Real-world examples of bills and procedure will be integrated as needed. The graduate version of the course would be seminar-style and would focus on both classics and modern pieces in the literature. Students would be expected to write an original research paper actively engaging outstanding questions pertinent to the course.

Political Parties (U,G). Both versions of this course would begin by reading Aldrich’s *Why Parties?* as a starting point for understanding the origins and continued importance political parties. The undergraduate version would proceed to examine historical patterns of party behavior, as well as partisan attachments and activities in the electorate. The graduate version would do this, as well as highlight the great debate over the role of parties in legislature. Readings would be drawn from recent literature, as well as classics like Fenno, Fiorina, Mayhew, and Clausen.

American Political Institutions (U). This course would be an undergraduate introduction to American politics, specifically focusing on the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Key issues in American politics would be addressed, including the growth in executive power over time, inter-branch bargaining, divided government, court confirmation debates, and the like.

Methods courses

Political Science Research Methods (U). This course would survey the fundamentals of conducting political science research. Building on my experience as TA for a similar course on two occasions, I will focus heavily on the practice of quantitative research by employing user-friendly statistical software and keeping undergraduates engaged with the systematic analysis real-world problems. Readings would be drawn from the new textbook by Kellstedt and Whitten, as well as undergraduate-appropriate articles in the literature.

Introduction to Regression (G). This course would introduce graduate students to the fundamentals of regression. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) will be presented in detail

and modifications of the basic model will be introduced organically. Topics will include regression diagnostics, basic time series, Generalized Least Squares (GLS), multi-step regression, regression discontinuity analysis, and rudimentary model comparison. The course would rely on the first half of Gelman and Hill's textbook on regression, with both Greene and Kennedy used as recommended texts.

Models of Inference: Likelihood and Bayesian Approaches (G). This course would be for students who are already familiar with the linear model. Rather than separate the study of Maximum Likelihood and Bayesian models, I propose merging the two into a one semester practical-analysis course. The semester would begin with a review of linear regression and an explanation why other models are necessary. The Likelihood framework will be introduced, as well as basic models for discrete choice: logit, probit, ordered probit, multinomial logit, count models, selection models, hazard models, and the like. The Bayesian approach will be introduced later in the semester and classical models will be revisited using it. Students will use modern statistical software to estimate the models introduced in the course and will be required to use their skills in a course paper. Gary King's *Unifying Political Methodology* and Gelman et al.'s *Bayesian Data Analysis* will be employed.

Multilevel Modeling: Theory and Practice (G). This is for students who have completed the basic linear model/Likelihood courses. The course will be a combination of lecture and discussion, with the early part of the semester devoted to teaching the basics of multilevel models. Readings from all major subfields in political science will be used to give students examples of how this class of models is used. A paper will be required.

Latent-variable Models in Political Science (G). This different breed of course is for advanced graduate students interested in modeling latent concepts like ideology, power, capacity, and the like. The course will begin with traditional Factor Analysis and Principal Components, then moving on to more modern topics. These will include item response models, ideal point estimation, Bradley-Terry models, latent class models, and the like. Readings will be drawn from the political science literature and psychometrics, where appropriate.