

## TEACHING STATEMENT

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### Overview & Teaching Philosophy

I teach a wide range of courses in international relations and human rights at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. My courses are regularly among of the highest rated in our department, and I am committed to building on my successes in the classroom as I continue to improve my teaching effectiveness. In addition to regularly updating my courses and soliciting feedback from students and colleagues, I applied to and received two course improvement and development grants and participated in UNL's Peer Review of Teaching Project, for which I now serve as a mentor and first year leader. My work as a teacher has also led to the (re-)formation of UNL's Model UN team and the creation of a corresponding class. I aim to match my efforts and success in the classroom with one-on-one mentorship of both graduate and undergraduate students. Indeed, undergraduate students I have mentored have gone on to pursue higher degrees in high-ranking professional programs, won Fulbright awards, and even been named a Truman Scholar.

As a teacher, my goal is to encourage students to think critically and to apply theory and research to politics, both in the classroom and in their daily lives. To help my students accomplish this goal, I orient my teaching style around three overarching objectives: 1) creating an open environment in the classroom where students can explore opposing viewpoints, contemplate the implications of given assumptions, and engage with the material and with each other; 2) sharpening fundamental analytical thinking skills that help students become life-long learners and engaged global citizens; and 3) bringing theory to life through concrete examples, innovative assignments and experiential learning. I elaborate on each of these in the "Teaching Methods and Effectiveness" section, below.

### Course Rotation and Teaching Responsibilities

My teaching responsibilities are diverse, ranging from a required 100-level course in international relations to a graduate seminar on human rights. I have not always taught the standard 2-2 load because of parental leave (Spring 2013) and because of course reductions (Fall 2010, Fall 2012, and Spring 2015). My regular teaching responsibilities include the following:

***International Relations (POLS/GLST 160):*** This introductory course, which is required for both POLS and Global Studies majors, enrolls between 150 and 200 students each semester, drawing students from across the UNL campus. (Spring 2011, Fall 2011, Fall 2012, Fall 2013, Fall 2014 and Fall 2015; evaluation average across all semesters taught: 4.26 out of 5.)

***Model United Nations (POLS/GLST 364):*** This one-credit class enhances the University's Model United Nations program and introduces students to the UN and the Model UN program. (Fall 2013, Fall 2014 and Fall 2015; evaluation average across all semesters taught: 4.48 out of 5.)

***International Human Rights (POLS 470):*** Although this course is based in political science and draws a number of political science majors, this class is the capstone to the human rights minor and regularly includes students from across the university. This class is almost always at capacity. (Fall 2011, Fall 2013 and Fall 2014; evaluation average across all semesters taught: 4.60 out of 5.)

***International Law (POLS 469):*** This 400-level course on international law combines international relations theory with case law from domestic and international courts. This course attracts students interested in international politics as well as those who intend to pursue a career in law. (Spring 2012 and Spring 2014; evaluation average across all semesters taught: 4.72 out of 5.)

***Human Rights Graduate Seminar (POLS 960):*** This graduate level seminar introduces students to the field of human rights and connects human rights research with the larger field of international relations. While most students enrolled in the course are from political science, the course also regularly draws students from related disciplines, such as history and anthropology. (Spring 2012 and Spring 2015; evaluation average across all semesters taught: 4.61 out of 5.)

***Additional Courses Taught at UNL:*** In addition to the courses outlined above, during my time at UNL I have taught the honors version of Introduction to International Relations (POLS 160H); a more conceptual, 400-level international law course, Problems in International Law and Organization (POLS 473); and the graduate field seminar for international relations (POLS 960). I have also developed but not yet had the opportunity to teach a graduate seminar on international law and organizations and an undergraduate course on “drugs and thugs.”

### **Course Development and Improvement Grants**

In addition to prepping each of the courses listed above, I have taken advantage of three opportunities offered by the University of Nebraska to improve my teaching effectiveness. First, I received a competitive grant offered by the ACE program for course improvement. With support of this grant I hired four undergraduate students in summer 2011 to help me revamp my large introductory international relations course. The main innovation for the course, which I will discuss more in detail below, has been launching an online simulation called Statecraft and integrating the simulation into the course curriculum.

The second opportunity I pursued was the Peer Review of Teaching Program. I worked with this program to develop my 400-level course, International Law. I used the time in the Peer Review of Teaching Program to develop a two-week long mock-trial simulation, which brings together my expertise on international courts and my interest in innovative teaching methods. Within the course, I use the simulation to help solidify basic legal concepts and to bring those concepts to life for my students. My Peer Review of Teaching portfolio explains this in more detail. This year I was asked to serve as a First Year Leader for the Peer Review of Teaching Project, meaning that I mentor new participants in the program.

During the summer of 2012, I received funding to support the development of a new course, Transnational Criminal Networks: Narco-Traffickers, War Criminals and Terrorists (a.k.a. Drugs and Thugs). This class builds on my research on international war criminals and meets student demand on courses related to the “unsavory” elements of globalization. Further, this course fills a notable gap in our department’s 200-level offerings in international relations and contributes to the Global Security Studies minor. In addition to these courses, I also created a new, 1-credit course, Model United Nations, which contributes to the Model UN program. (For more information about Model UN at UNL, please see my service statement.) This course was offered for the first time in fall 2013 and provides students academic credit for the academically rigorous research and preparatory work that they do for Model UN.

### **Teaching Methods and Effectiveness**

This section explains the tools and processes I use to achieve my goals as an instructor, namely: 1) creating a space conducive to student engagement; 2) sharpening analytical skills; and 3) linking theory with practice.

**Creating a space conducive to student engagement.** In my experience as a teacher, I have found that an immediate challenge in the classroom is creating an environment conducive to student engagement. I establish this type of environment by motivating and facilitating discussion in which students are encouraged to engage with the course material, with me, with their TAs and with each other. I use a number of techniques to create an open atmosphere. In my smaller classes, I use a combination of lectures, seminar-style discussions and small-group work. For example, in a unit on human rights activists, the students in my human rights course first had a round-table discussion about a book they read on Amnesty International and then broke into smaller groups to go work through the steps of forming a new NGO.

In my large introductory international relations class, I create an engaging environment in a number of ways. First, I begin each class by playing a song and/or video that prompts students to think about the major themes of the day. For lecture on trade, for example, I might show a Chiquita Banana commercial from 1947 that leaves students puzzling out the relevance of a talking banana to international trade. This practice gives the students something on which to focus as they settle into the lecture hall, sparks their curiosity and makes the setting of a larger lecture less intimidating. I also have experimented successfully with Q&A and debate with the students in the large lecture hall. For example, in response to a lecture on the social and political elements of development, I ask students to formulate a policy to best combat drug-related violence in Central America. Each of the nearly 200 students in the class worked in groups to identify a strategy for dealing with this policy problem and then select teams shared their solutions with the class. The class as a whole voted for the best policy. Students have responded so well to this exercise that I have continued to do this activity as well as others like it.

Establishing a comfortable learning environment does not just happen during class time. The one-on-one contact I have with students after class, during office hours and in e-mail exchanges is the foundation for a positive classroom environment. In keeping with the practice of other faculty in our department, I often hold coffee hours, which provide a less intimidating venue for students to come and meet with me. I have found coffee hours to be particularly successful for some of my more advanced undergraduates, who have come to coffee hours to talk frankly about their research projects. In all of my interactions with students, I create an inviting atmosphere that encourages participation and open discussion of the issues—an environment in which students are not afraid to take risks, challenge the readings and each other in mindful and constructive ways and ask difficult questions. My course evaluations suggest that students appreciate this type of environment.

**Sharpening analytical skills.** My objective in the classroom is not only to facilitate my students' substantive knowledge of a given subject area but also to help them sharpen their writing, analytical and critical thinking skills. This allows them to engage more fully with the course material and also equips them with the skills they need to be active global constituents and lifelong learners. In designing syllabi, I put a strong emphasis on writing and research design. In my 400-level classes, I generally ask students to produce a substantial (20+ page) research project and guide them through the various phases of research. They turn in the

composite parts of their projects (e.g. proposed question, literature review, analysis, policy implications, presentation) over the course of the semester. At the end of the semester they are then required to integrate my comments on the individual parts as they revise the whole product. While many students are overwhelmed with this process in January and August, come the end of the semester they are proud of the work they produced. Moreover, many build on their research. Students have used their research papers as the bases of senior thesis, for applications into graduate programs, and even as the foundations of academic journal articles.

When I grade papers and exams I provide concrete and constructive feedback to help my students become stronger writers and analysts, but I have found that one of the most effective ways of helping students become stronger thinkers and writers is by having them review each others' work. In my graduate human rights seminar, for instance, I have students engage in ongoing peer review of their work. Not only is reviewing a critical part of academia but by becoming better reviewers, the students also were able to recognize flaws in their own arguments, logic and methodology. I do not reserve peer-review only for graduate level-students, however. In my undergraduate human rights course, for instance, students work in groups of three or four and the week before each of the parts of their research projects are due, we have a writing workshop in class, during which students are responsible for presenting and critiquing each others' work. Not only does this dramatically improve the quality of their research, but it also provides students with a better sense of what makes a good research project. I also ask students to revise their written work—a lot. In my 400-level classes, this typically means that students will incorporate my feedback and that of their peers before turning in final drafts of their research projects. The difference between their first drafts and their final products is often outstanding.

While this means that students need to work hard in my courses and should expect to revise their work many times over, in the end they generally appreciate the fruits of their labor and come out with the abilities and the confidence to undertake large analytical tasks. As one student from my 400-level human rights class last fall put it, "She was very engaging and made us work to the best of our abilities." Another student that semester echoed the same sentiment: "This course was a lot harder than I expected, but it was a good academic challenge."

**Bringing Theory to Life.** As a political scientist, I constantly am seeking to link theory to practice, and as a teacher, I use a number of tools and techniques to make this happen. These tools range from facilitating class debates and tracking contemporary political developments to fieldtrips, simulations and policy projects. For example, this fall, the students in my human rights course will be taking a fieldtrip to view the Sheldon Museum of Art's rotating exhibition on the U.S. civil rights movement, in order to help us understand the nexus between international human rights and the American civil rights experience, as well as to introduce students to the relationship between human rights and the visual arts.

Perhaps the biggest innovation I have made in my teaching since coming to UNL has been the systematic use of simulations as a tool for bridging the gap between theory and practice. Building on the success of smaller in-class simulations, I used my time in the Peer Review of Teaching Project to develop a two-week long simulation of the European Court of Human Rights for my international law course. This simulation put students in the positions of judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys for a case that dealt with property rights and the rule of law during conflict. Working through the simulation not only required that they be able to make

sense of this complicated case but it also gave them the opportunity to research, write and present a compelling argument for their team, putting their theoretical knowledge to the test.

The simulation I have orchestrated in my introductory international relations class is the most substantial simulation I have used to date. The 11-week long simulation groups students into teams and each team leads a country in an online world called Statecraft. In this online simulation, students have the same opportunities and constraints as political elites in the real world. They can launch missile strikes on other countries, negotiate trade agreements, build schools and participate in UN proceedings. They also must deal with spies from other countries, protests from unhappy constituents, pirates and the constant threat of nuclear war. Statecraft has improved students' understanding of how fundamental concepts in international relations play out in real-world politics and made the course content more accessible for students who might be more comfortable with interactive gaming than traditional lecture-based learning techniques.

### **Mentorship and Advising**

In addition to my time with students in the classroom I make a concerted effort to mentor promising undergraduate and graduate students, and students I have mentored have gone on to win Truman and Fulbright scholarships, secure competitive internships, and attend prestigious graduate schools. I work with my teaching assistants in my introductory international relations class to ensure that they are comfortable in the classroom and are effective teachers. This means evaluating their performance in recitation section, offering them the opportunity to guest lecture in my courses and regularly communicating with them about best practices. In my time at UNL, I have served/am currently serving on 16 Ph.D. committees, two of which I am chairing. I am currently advising one M.A. thesis and have sat on two additional M.A. committees. I have advised 10 undergraduate honors thesis and served as a reader for three additional theses. In addition to this work, I have advised four UCARE students and three Forsythe Family Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Program Undergraduate Research Fellows. I find these mentorship and advising experiences to be some of the most rewarding aspects of being a professor at UNL, and I welcome the opportunity to help shape students' abilities and core research competencies. My service statement elaborates on some of my other efforts to mentor and advise our students.

### **Summary, Outcomes and Evaluation**

I am committed to improving my teaching skills. I elicit feedback in a number of ways. For example, I ask students to conduct a midterm evaluation in each of my classes and then I explicitly address any problems or concerns they raise. I have had two senior colleagues, Dr. John Gruhl and Dr. Patrice McMahan evaluate me in the classroom, and another senior colleague, Dr. Ari Kohen, evaluate my teaching portfolio. (Their assessments are available under the "Peer Evaluation of Teaching" tab in my review binder). I also participated in the Peer Review of Teaching Project; the course portfolio I created through that program is available in my teaching appendix. Through these evaluation processes, my teaching continues to improve.

The course listing and evaluation form in my review binder provides the teaching evaluations for each the courses I have taught since coming to UNL last fall and speaks to my effectiveness as a teacher. By creating a space conducive to student engagement, sharpening my students' analytical skills and bringing theory to life, my three-pronged teaching philosophy directly facilitates my core goal as a teacher: to encourage my students to think like political scientists.