

Teaching Statement

E.J. Fagan
Department of Government
University of Texas at Austin

Teaching Philosophy

Students should leave my classroom able to practically apply political science theory and research in the real world, either in a professional setting, as a researcher or as a citizen. Politics is a vast industry where our students can find fulfilling, well-paying jobs. Even those students that choose careers outside of politics benefit from skills and knowledge learned in a political science classroom. Before graduate school, I worked for five years in campaign politics and issue advocacy. I use this experience in my classroom. While political science often writes from the perspective of high-level decision-makers such as members of Congress or the President, I also teach the perspective of the legislative assistant, issue advocate, or other entry-level occupations. I assign both research papers or critical writing and also other projects that ask students to apply their knowledge from class to perform a real-world entry-level task, such as writing an op-ed, preparing a piece of campaign literature, or crafting a policy brief. During office hours, I use my experience to more effectively advise students on potential internships and career options.

I help students develop a deep understanding of politics by integrating the material into tangible examples and followed-up with critical writing assignments. For example, on one class day I lecture about the legislative process, and how Congress makes policy decisions. On the next day, we watch a 10-minute clip of a hearing on a proposed bill to strengthen anti-money laundering laws in the 115th Congress and discuss the goals of the members and witnesses in the hearing. Finally, I tell students to watch the full hearing outside of class, and assign a short critical essay asking students to apply the material from the first class to the questions that members are considering in the hearing.

I also incorporate data and research skills into my classes. Political science students benefit from being at least literate in reading and interpreting visualized data and able to produce simple data visualizations. One assignment asks students to go to the Policy Agendas Project online Trends Tool, which allows for easy graphing of issue attention over time and use it to explain the course of a policy over time. In class, I walk students through how to use the tool, and create a few example graphs. I then ask students to create a graph of their own using two different time series, such as attention to energy policy in Congressional hearings over time and public opinion on energy policy salience, and briefly explain the trends on the graph. For many students, this assignment is the first time they have ever used data, and most will use it in their final paper.

Finally, I work to ensure that my classroom is inclusive of all students. I make sure that my syllabi include a diverse set of readings and multimedia from women and people of color. When possible, I avoid expensive textbooks in favor of more affordable or free options. For example, my Introduction to Public Policy syllabus does not include a textbook, and only asks students to buy one \$12 book and one \$4 e-book. In place of the textbook, I assign a number of free online readings, YouTube videos, and podcasts that explain the same material.

Teaching Experience and Interests

I served as a teaching assistant at the University of Texas at Austin for eight semesters. Four of these were traditional undergraduate classes: three of Introduction to Public Policy and one of Political Parties. I played an active role in designing the courses, writing exams, and leading discussion in the classes, particularly the public policy sections. I also served as teaching assistant for the Policy Agendas Project lab for two semesters, mentoring and assisting graduate students working with the project for their research.

All three public policy sections were large, writing-intensive classes. I balanced the demands of grading a hundred papers with individual instruction to improve student's writing skills. I was encouraged to see the average student's writing ability increase tremendously between the beginning and end of the semesters. In the course instructor surveys included below, students consistently cite my attentiveness, professionalism, breadth of knowledge, and enjoyable lectures in their evaluations.

As manager of the Policy Agendas Project for two years and teaching assistant for the related undergraduate class for one year, I supervised and mentored undergraduate research assistants in our two-semester Pickle Fellows program. As part of a related class, these students worked as research assistants under my supervision while also developing their own research projects. In addition to classroom instruction, the research assistants learn research skills through helping the project collect and code data. At the same time, I worked closely with students on their individual research projects. Although most of the students had little previous experience with research or data, they produced impressive quantitative research. One student's project on earmarks and ideology was so interesting that Professor Sean Theriault and I worked with him to develop it into a co-authored paper that is now under review.

My research and training have prepared me to teach a variety of courses on American politics, including both undergraduate and graduate courses in American political institutions, American political parties, the U.S. Congress, research methods and lobbying. Furthermore, I am also prepared to teach courses on public policy, including the policy process, policy analysis, agenda setting, economic policy, and social policy.

Conclusion

In sum, I seek to provide my students both strong theoretical instruction and hands-on applications. Students should walk away from class with both knowledge and skills. These should reinforce each other. Students gain knowledge through hands-on assignments and improve their skills by applying knowledge using critical writing, analyzing data, and accomplishing simulated real-world tasks.

Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

GOV 372L: Government Research Internship (Two-Semester Class).

University of Texas at Austin Course Instructor Survey Results (Range: 0-5)

Response	Str. Dis.	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	Avg
Available for Office Hours	0	0	0	2	15	4.9
Knowledgeable About Subject	0	0	0	2	15	4.9
Interested in Subject Material	0	0	0	1	16	4.9
Explained Material Clearly	0	0	0	1	16	4.9
Kind and Respectful	0	0	1	0	16	4.9
Patient With Questions	0	0	1	1	15	4.8
Receptive to Questions	0	0	0	1	16	4.9
Gave Helpful Feedback	0	0	0	1	16	4.9

Teaching Assistant Rating	V Unsatis.	Unsatis.	Satisf.	Very Good	Excellent	Avg
	0	0	0	2	14	4.9

Notes: In-person paper surveys administered May 2015. Full scanned results available upon request. 17 of 18 students completed surveys.

All comments:

“Was always available and very helpful.”

“Very helpful in my research. I really appreciated all he did!”

“E.J. has been really helpful! Always willing to provide assistance.”

“Good job E.J.! 5 Gold Stars for you!”

“E.J. was a vital part of constructing my research project. He is a great guy.”

“Very available. Maybe start projects sooner.”

“Cool guy get to know him!”

“E.J. is by far the most helpful TA I have ever had at UT.”

“Very interested in progress of students, phenomenal TA!”

“Very accessible and responded quickly to questions. One of the best TAs I’ve had.”

“E.J. is a great teaching assistant! He is very patient and willing to help students.”

“The TA went out of his way to help students, and spent time out of office hours to be accessible to students. He was friendly and knowledgeable.”

GOV358: Introduction to Public Policy

University of Texas at Austin Course Instructor Survey Results (Range: 0-5)

Response	Str. Dis.	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	Avg
Available for Office Hours	0	0	0	7	33	4.9
Knowledgeable About Subject	0	0	0	1	39	5.0
Interested in Subject Material	0	0	1	1	37	4.9
Explained Material Clearly	0	0	0	1	38	5.0
Kind and Respectful	0	0	0	2	38	5.0
Patient With Questions	0	0	1	1	38	4.9
Receptive to Questions	0	0	0	3	36	4.9
Gave Helpful Feedback	0	0	0	7	33	4.8

	V Unsatis.	Unsatis.	Satisf.	Very Good	Excellent	Avg
Teaching Assistant Rating	0	0	0	6	33	4.8

Notes: In-person paper surveys administered May 2015. Full scanned results available upon request. 40 of 93 students completed surveys.

All comments:

“E.J. could have taught the entire course. A great asset to the University of Texas.”

“E.J. was amazing. Really helpful.”

“E.J. was a fantastic TA and has singlehandedly furthered my interest in pursuing an academic career.”

“E.J. was the best TA that I have had during my time at UT. The couple of times that he lectured in place of the professor, E.J. did an excellent job. He is knowledgeable about the course material and tries to be as available as possible. He also gives feedback on my writing which was great.”

“E.J. was an ideal teaching assistant; he was someone I enjoyed listening to. He gave perfect, easy detail to difficult material and was informed on everything needed.”

“Thank you for a great semester you were very helpful.”

“Very professional and personable. Very prompt and useful responses to questions.”

“Great TA, very helpful in clarifying assignments. Lecture on criminalization was great!”

“Extremely knowledgeable.”

“I got the most of the class the days that E.J. taught. He is extremely knowledgeable & experienced about the subject matter, and presents in an organized and interesting way.”

“Overall, I really liked this [illegible]. Weekly assignments were slightly tough, but think this maybe the best way to prepare lecture’s tests.”

“Very easy to talk to and approach.”

“Thank you for taking the time to meet with students outside of office hours and your willingness to assist with DC endeavors. One of the most knowledgeable and receptive TAs that I have had at UT.”

“His lecture was very enjoyable. Engaging, knowledgeable and calming communicator.”

“Clearly passionate & great w/ students.”

“Great TA, very knowledgeable, helpful, flexible, and respectful!”

“So great! A really dynamic, engaging and knowledgeable lecturer. Always willing to discuss and provide input on a subject.”

“E.J. is one of the most knowledgeable TA’s I’ve ever been around. Having him as a TA to Professor Jones was certainly more of a benefit to the course.”

“Always available in office hours and very helpful. Also, had a very quick reply on email and fair at grading.”

“No complaints.”

“E.J. rocks!!! Best teaching assistant I’ve had.”

“Very articulate, loved his presentations and lectures.”

“One of the most informed and ‘on top of things’ TAs I have ever had. I was very pleased with him.”

“E.J. was a great TA always answering my questions with thought and [illegible] allowing my knowledge for this class to grow.”

“Thanks for being an enthusiastic and helpful TA. You helped me a lot on my paper.”

“Very helpful, intelligent and pleasing to work with.”