

### Goals for student learning

My teaching philosophy is rooted in lessons from my first teachers, my parents, who cultivated my curiosity of the world. Despite the predominant cultural belief in children (and especially girls) being seen but not heard in Zimbabwe, my parents encouraged me to ask questions, share my thoughts, and zealously defend my voice in a world that would attempt to silence me. The primary goal of my teaching is, therefore, to pique and develop student interest in political institutions and human behavior, and create a safe learning environment in which students are empowered to *critically inquire* into, *de-construct*, and *re-construct* the political world around them. Enhancing substantive knowledge, data literacy, oral and written communication, and teamwork are focal points of my teaching. These are critical for students' personal and academic development, and post-baccalaureate endeavors.

### An inclusive learning environment

My philosophy is nurtured by *Ubuntu*—"an age-old African term for humaneness—for caring, sharing and being in harmony with all creation. As an ideal it promotes cooperation between individuals, cultures and nations."<sup>1</sup> My philosophy is further informed by Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Standing at *various intersections* of race, class, gender, religion, and nationality, but unified in our humanity, *we are all knowers*—uniquely and collectively capable of building knowledge and solving complex problems. The second goal of my teaching is, therefore, to develop in my students the importance of *listening* to and *empathizing* with *diverse perspectives*—via student-led discussions, partner and group assignments, and research presentations—and *corporately advancing knowledge*.

### Teaching methods and measuring student learning

I have developed a unique set of methods for teaching in classroom and laboratory contexts during my graduate teaching assistantship in the USC Department of Political Science and in the USC Security and Political Economy (SPEC) Lab. Student participation is an essential component of my classroom teaching and I facilitate it with great care. For example, when I pose questions to my students, I do not always call on the first person to raise their hand. I have discerned that pausing for ten, fifteen, or even thirty seconds gives other students the opportunity to reflect, prepare, and share their remarks. I think this is especially valuable for women, first-generation, minority and ESL students—all of whom have been historically under-represented in and under-served by institutions of higher learning.

I use a variety of formats to account for students' diverse learning styles. I use multi-media presentations, arrange debates, and facilitate simulations. I have students work by themselves and in groups in order to foster *independence* and *teamwork*. For example, I sometimes have my students individually prepare a response to a given prompt and then have them break out into groups of three or four to share these responses. They are then tasked with corporately constructing a fuller, more detailed reflection to share with the rest of the class. I have detected that this type of small-group work facilitates *mutual understanding* and *engagement* of more students.

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1. UBUNTU and World Forum of Civil Society Networks Secretariat. Reforming International Institutions: Another World is Possible. Routledge, 2009. 5

*Reflection, deliberation, and revision* are central features of my classroom because it is more important for me that students deeply understand, rather than memorize, the material. For this reason, I place more emphasis on papers and oral presentations than on exams. I also greatly value student feedback on my teaching. It is important for me that students have a stake in their own education and hold me accountable for supporting their intellectual journeys. One tool that I have integrated into my teaching is mid-semester evaluations, which give me insights into (1) the effectiveness of the formats I am using, (2) how challenging students find the work, and (3) how well students think the course is meeting its stated objectives. I encourage students to recommend changes that I should make to enhance the course and I also challenge them to detail what changes they can make to enhance their learning. I am open and flexible to course-correct, and have found that students appreciate this degree of *intentionality* and *concern* for their perspectives and individual learning.

In the lab context, I use data collection as one of many strategies to create and evaluate knowledge and understanding. Data collection or coding may not, at first blush, seem like a teaching method, let alone an interesting one. However, if understood as a *deliberative exercise*, data collection can yield substantive as well as meta cognitive skills. When, for example, I was conceptualizing a set of papers on international development banks' accountability mechanisms, my undergraduate research assistants confronted human rights complaints whose particularities did not fit neatly within the parameters of the codebooks my co-author and I had created. Such hurdles produced *robust discussions*, from which students acquired the skills necessary to make the best judgment calls. Indeed, they have developed expertise on the operations of these quasi-judicial institutions embedded in IDBs, such as the World Bank. Moreover, my students alerted my co-author and me to our own blind spots and motivated revisions to our codebooks and reconceptualization of the phenomena we study. Inter-coder reliability checks are another fruitful exercise—not only for assuring the quality of the data collected and the strength of inferences drawn from the data, but also for discerning convergence of knowledge. When I see students making the same coding choices across scores of variables, I have direct evidence of the ideas I am teaching translating evenly to all students.

While student learning is the central goal, the input I receive from students cannot be understated. Since *reiteration, reconceptualization, and refinement* of ideas are built into my teaching, my own understanding is enhanced. So, while I may officially be the teacher, I also learn from my students.

### **Enhancing exposure, access, and connection**

I believe that knowledge blossoms when shared with others. As a woman of color researching and teaching about non-traditional spaces and forms of justice, I am working to make the field of international justice, the disciplines of political science and international relations, and the setting of the academy more *diverse, inclusive, and accessible*. I challenge traditional academic parochialism, by incorporating non-Western sources into my course syllabi, and integrate the voices of individuals from the countries my students and I study for a more *holistic* analysis. In addition, I strive to mentor independent research informed by students' intersectional identities—research that will feed and sustain them within and outside of the academe, and that will inform and serve their *local and global communities*. Cultivating these types of relationships and supporting students' personal and professional goals honors and multiplies the investments educators have made in me for the next generation.