

Teaching Statement

My teaching interests are closely related to my research background. I would like to offer substantive courses on comparative politics, authoritarian politics, domestic Chinese politics, and the political economy of development. I would also be eager to teach courses on quantitative research methods, statistics, and research design at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

I have developed my teaching style in two contexts. In college, I started teaching English in China during the summer of my sophomore year. I later worked with a non-profit organization to found and direct a new English immersion program in rural China for students of minority and rural backgrounds, known as the Princeton in Asia Summer of Service program.¹ More recently, I served as a Teaching Fellow for Advanced Quantitative Methods, the highest graduate level course in quantitative methods in Yale's political science department. My teaching philosophy is the sum of the lessons I've learned from these experiences, and from the great teachers I've had in my own education.

If I had to articulate my beliefs on teaching, I would say the first tenet is to value clarity in the classroom. The best teachers of methods— and I've had several of them in my own graduate education— are able to communicate to all types of students, to bring the whole class along without sacrificing the complexity of the material. I came into graduate school with little technical training and have had to work hard to acquire research tools, but I actually think that has made me a better methods teacher. In my sections for Advanced Quantitative Methods, I tried to do all that little things that enable productive and clear sessions— getting students to send in questions beforehand, preparing detailed presentations on key points, walking through sample code, working through examples in small groups, and frequently checking for comprehension.

A second tenet of my teaching philosophy is to enable development on multiple dimensions. In Libby Wood's comparative politics graduate seminar, we would discuss a seminal work each week, learning the classic questions and debates of the subfield. At the same time, Libby would have us present the course material and lead discussions, subtly teaching us how to

¹More information on the program is available on the Princeton in Asia website, <http://piaweb.princeton.edu/>, or this short article in the Princeton Weekly Bulletin from 2006, <http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S16/10/07M65/?section=featured>.

be teachers. I founded PiA Summer of Service with a similar goal of enabling development beyond the narrow content of the curriculum. The program creates opportunities for the Chinese students to practice their oral English skills with foreign teachers in as many ways as possible— debate competitions, theatre groups, literary magazines, poetry readings, and so forth. Beyond English, these activities teach self-confidence, creativity, and independent thinking. I continue to visit Hunan and monitor the progress of the program, and I have noticed that the students’ character changes last much longer than their knowledge of the present progressive tense.

Finally, a third tenet I try to follow is to celebrate my students. I remember how Jeff Moger, my high school history teacher, walked into class every day and highlighted someone’s accomplishment. “Michelle scored three goals in her field hockey game yesterday. Give her a round of applause!” he would say. While professors may not have time to attend field hockey games, the best ones take a similar interest in their students’ lives, and actively contribute to their professional development. I have personally been very fortunate to benefit from the close mentorship of my dissertation advisors— Thad Dunning, Ken Scheve, Susan Rose-Ackerman, and Lily Tsai— as well as many professors at Yale who are not on my committee. I have tried to pay their generosity forward with my students in Advanced Quantitative Methods. Throughout the course, I worked hard to offer detailed feedback on replication paper ideas and other research projects, and for some, I continue to offer advice on their ongoing projects and how to navigate graduate school.

I am proud to say that my students in Advanced Quantitative Methods awarded me high marks for my teaching. At the end of the semester, I sent out an informal teaching evaluation survey that elicited feedback on four dimensions: effort and responsiveness; knowledge of statistical concepts; clarity of communication; and quality of feedback.² The students gave me ratings of “4 - Good” or “5 - Excellent” in 49 of their 52 responses.

I hope the main takeaway from this statement is that I take teaching and mentoring seriously. As I make the transition from graduate student to assistant professor, one of the things I am looking forward to the most is the opportunity to do more.

²Teaching Fellows for graduate-level courses at Yale do not receive formal evaluations.