

# Teaching Dossier - Selections

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## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Alfred North Whitehead's *The Aims of Education* provides me with the best summary of how I approach teaching. In my first-year class, I try to impart what Whitehead calls "romance" as an important goal: get students excited about the field and light the spark of knowledge. In upper year courses, I think what Whitehead characterizes as "precision" is entirely appropriate; here learning is about refinement of those basic building blocks. When I teach a graduate course I am interested in precision, of course, but also "generalization." At this level students, confident in their mastery, can make new connections and create new knowledge. Throughout it all, I seek to impart a sense of critical awareness of political problems, a healthy skepticism of conventional wisdom and a recognition that learning often follows different paths for students. The following are some of the principles that guide my teaching philosophy

### *Planned Serendipity*

Teaching has a performative quality, and like any good performer, one has to be adroit at going off-script if the need arises. Spontaneity is important in a classroom because it communicates an important sense of play that makes a classroom vital and engaging. Because I have the privilege of teaching political science, it allows me an opportunity to tap into current events, public policy debates or issues that highlight the concepts and ideas we are discussing. It can take the form of using a question that was asked to unpack its assumptions or it can be about integrating today's newspaper headline in the lecture.

Planned serendipity sounds like an oxymoron but it is to be open to interruptions that may have more pedagogical value in the longer term than the content at hand. For example, once in class I related data about the percentage of Americans who believe in creationism, expressing surprise at the results. I anonymously polled my first-year students on their beliefs. The results, that 25% believed that the world was merely a few thousand years old, shocked me. It led to an opportunity to discuss this in the context of the course material on theory, evidence and empiricism. The optional, extra class I held to continue this conversation was attended by over 100 students and went much longer than the hour I had planned. I had students mention that long after the course was over. Another example of planned serendipity surrounded a class discussion of Omar Khadr's Charter rights being violated. I knew that students would have a deeply ambivalent attitude to the Supreme Court decision that Khadr's rights were violated. Sensing students' interests in the complexity of this case, I held an extra-curricular class to moderate a very thoughtful and nuanced discussion by interested students. Many told me that the respect that everyone showed each other in an impassioned discussion was one of the important things they would remember from the course. The fact that again the room was over-flowing and that discussion went on without regard for time reminded me that meaningful learning occurs when students' natural curiosity is engaged.

### *Modeling Curiosity & Teaching without a Net*

As academics we are naturally curious. I think it's vitally important to inculcate that curiosity and wonder for the subject matter to model how students themselves should learn. I try to communicate my passion and enthusiasm for the material I'm teaching through my own curiosity. I begin all my classes reminding students that collectively we are all students learning together. As a professor, I know that students appreciate that the ideas we are discussing still excite me and I model that.

Modeling behaviour is an important part of my teaching. When I am facilitating a discussion in my upper year seminars or grad class about a contentious debate, I know that students are also learning norms of the profession and codes of academic conduct. That's often as important as the material itself.

To teach without a net is to take risks in the classroom. There is a certain kind of energy when I tell students that I'm trying something new and am not sure how it will go. In all cases, preparation and maintaining a sense of control is essential. Risk taking can be as specific as reading a Dr. Seuss book to teach about equality or having students write letters to themselves to be returned by me at the end of the course, both of which I've done. Teaching, like learning, is sometimes best achieved by pushing boundaries.

### *Learning by Doing*

Most of us learn a skill through practice. Students are no different in how they learn. In social sciences we expect students to learn critical reading and writing but, because of class size, give students few opportunities to practice writing in a class. Recently, I have been persuaded that we need to give students more opportunities to work at this skill. Indeed, a key to mastery is simply to practice. In addition, students can learn from one another. While group work is practiced in faculties that value team learning and collaboration, it is less used in social sciences. Peer evaluation has been a tool I have used to help students learn from one another and write more frequently. It also provides students with an opportunity to learn how the academic profession works. I have used double-blind, peer review for short papers to create an opportunity for them to reflect on what good writing should look like. It allows for low stakes, more frequent writing and invests the students in their own learning.

I also practice learning by doing through my scholarship of teaching. I have created a simulation game of the kind of negotiation that occurs at federal-provincial meetings to help students learn by doing. Students role-play cabinet ministers, the media and first ministers over the course of several classes. This has been published by Broadview Press as *The Art of Negotiation* and has been translated into French and Spanish and used around the world. Students tell me that the act of understanding economic and political trade-offs by role playing is far greater than if they had read about it. In a fourth-year political communication course, as a way of students learning about political advertising campaigns, I have them design, produce and 'pitch' a political ad campaign to the class. Like the simulation exercise, students speak of this experience as a significant amount of work but enormously rewarding.

### *Temperature taking*

My teaching is governed by continuous active listening. It's a key to help me understand when my students are struggling and when they are not. Equally important is to be able and willing to take the temperature of the class to see if they want more or less; need greater encouragement or less and are able to delve deeper in the material. As instructors, we often forget the challenges of academic puzzles that we've long ago mastered. Feedback is not just a buzzword in my courses. It's an integral component of the curriculum.

These efforts to take the temperature can be very 'low tech.' In my first-year class I use a question box where students place anonymous questions to me and I begin each class with a 'question of the day.' Each class I will get a half dozen or more random bits of feedback which give me a sense of where problems lie. More comprehensively, at midterm I ask students in all my classes to fill in an index card answering three simple questions: 'what's working?', 'what's not working?' and 'what needs improvement?'. These give me a sense of how well the course is going, whether the material is resonating and also provide an opportunity for the students to reflect on the course before it's over.

I also use technology to get feedback. I have been regular user of 'clickers,' Top Hat and sli.do in my large first year course. All these tools allow me to begin the class with a question or two designed to assess students' understanding of the readings or lectures. They also are used to check-in with students about the pace of material or how well they are comprehending concepts I'm explaining. A very simple

ad hoc poll provides me with feedback about their comprehension and, equally importantly, allows the student who is struggling to not feel they are the only one. Polling students mid-lecture allows for a break in the lecture and forces me to think about different ways to provide information. In addition to providing feedback, these polls say to the student that we are both invested in their learning – an important part of any teaching.

In the past, I have also experimented with digital bulletin boards, where students can post anonymously, focus group sessions where random groups of students are asked for feedback facilitated by other colleagues and peer review – having colleagues sit in on a class and offer feedback. All provide important and on-going information about how effectively I am communicating. I have also had my teaching audited by staff at the Centre for Teaching & Learning at Queen's.

A good strategy must be closely related to goals and I use a variety of strategies depending on the course level, content and whether I want to focus on skills or knowledge. In all cases, my strategy is guided by the principle that intellectual development is an on-going activity and that we are all students of one sort or another.

### *The importance of being public*

Learning often occurs outside the class. I make a point of being public and accessible by creating learning spaces outside the class-room. I have scheduled films on political events, during elections I have held viewing parties in the student café for leaders' debates. I am an active user of social media and encourage my students to use Twitter to communicate. When I was teaching about political ideology, I had my students use a popular website called Political Compass that maps ideology on horizontal and vertical axes. They sent their data to me and I collected over 600 data points to produce a 6 foot-wide graph that showed ideological differences based on gender in a first year class. The poster was displayed prominently in a student café and was accompanied by text that engaged the reader about the data. The principal of Queens, Daniel Woolf, volunteered to take the test and allowed me to plot his results providing a very public learning opportunity for my students and others.

Being public means communicating my passion for teaching in a variety of venues to different people. I have taught a senior citizens' group called 'Later Life Learning.' I helped organize and deliver a workshop on the future of democracy to a group of citizens in Port Hope. In 2015, I spoke to a group of high school civic teachers from across Ontario; in 2004 addressed a citizen-led initiative to bring the academy to Kingston called Free Queen's. I have spoken to service organizations like the Rotary Club and the Kingston chapter of the Canadian Club on politics or election results. For several years, I served as a pro-bono advisor and consultant for TVO's Civics 101, a website created to teach citizens about democracy. This teaching outreach is not only evidence of my passion for teaching but reminds me of the critical role that university professors have in disseminating knowledge to a wider public.

### *Recognize that learning takes place in different ways and at different paces*

I am very conscious of the diverse ways students comprehend the material and try to help them use whatever medium is best suited to them.

Many concepts in political science use metaphors (like the night watchman state, black box of policy making or the veil of ignorance). To accommodate visual-learners, I integrate one-word slides of these metaphors in my presentations. They provide a mnemonic to the concept we are discussing and hopefully aid in retention. When Queen's classrooms had the functionality to video-tape lectures, I did so and posted them on the course website. Students have told me that this allowed them to engage in the lecture and material knowing that they can get the details later.

It's important to recognize that for some, learning can come from writing essays, and for others, learning occurs at the summative of an exam. In virtually all my courses I provide what I call 'the Rose bonus' which is to more heavily weight the assignment (essay or exam) in which the student performed better. It alleviates student stress and provides an incentive to perform better on the assessment tool in which the student excels.

I recognize that some students take longer to learn the material that is why I often have multiple due dates in order to provide students to learn at their own pace. Students who submit at the first due date get a grade bump and an opportunity to submit again. Students who submit at the second due date receive detailed written feedback.

*"I used to teach them how to solve problems. Now I teach them how to problem solve."*

This quote by Eric Mazur summarizes the importance of empowering learners to take charge of their own learning. It's a skill I learned when in 2006 I had the privilege of being the Academic Director of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. I jumped at the opportunity largely for the pedagogical challenges it would provide. I could not resist the challenge of teaching 103 randomly selected citizens from around the province the intricacies of electoral systems, a subject with which many graduate students struggle. I knew that some participants had university education, others did not. Because of this, I rehearsed some of my lectures to adult literacy educators in Toronto. They explained how teaching such a diverse group should embody diverse approaches. I re-did many of my original presentations to accommodate visual learners including things such as 'one-word slides' and using metaphors to convey complexities. I also learned as a political scientist and educator, that citizens have enormous capacity to learn. Provide a venue – virtual or otherwise – and students will invariably teach each other. There's an argument that they are better at teaching than teachers as they have only recently mastered concepts and understand all too well the conceptual and logical problems that come with mastery.

This goal of teaching students how to problem solve has served as a model for me in my engagement with randomly selected citizens in other fora. I have facilitated citizens in Lethbridge, Alberta to make recommendations around election of local councillors and facilitated a panel in Prince Edward County to make decisions around the size of their municipal council. At the national level, I was humbled to be chosen by the Bank of Canada to co-facilitate the deliberations of a citizen panel to determine which female should appear on the \$10 bill. It was the first time the Bank engaged in such public and wide-spread engagement and the stakes and the outcome would be very public. More recently, the federal government was attempting to reconcile its commitment to the environment with its desire to exploit off-shore resources. Their solution was to create a citizen-panel to make recommendations on marine protected areas. I was chosen to facilitate the panel's cross-country's deliberations and help write a report which would serve as a basis for government protection of marine protected areas in Canada's oceans. In all these cases, my role is to be a 'guide on the side,' helping them master the material and ensure that no one is left behind.

### *Teaching Awards*

Frank Knox Award for Excellence in Teaching, Queen's University. This is the highest teaching award at Queen's given by students, 2013

Queen's University nominee for 3M National Teaching Fellowship Award. This is the country's highest university level teaching recognition, 2012. I was one of three nominees from Queen's that year.

Frank Knox Certificate for Commendation in Excellence in Teaching, 2011 & 2009

W. J. Barnes Teaching Excellence Award, highest teaching award in Faculty of Arts & Science at Queen's given by students, 2010

Shortlisted, Principal's Award for International Education Innovation, 2016

### *Pedagogical Innovation*

I have a number of innovations in teaching that provide evidence for my commitment to teaching. The following are some highlights.

#### Queen's Political Studies Summer Institute (QPSSI) 2016-present

Creator of two-week residential, experiential learning program at Queen's that has brought international students to campus to study Canadian politics. Now partnered with Australian National University and Western Sydney University, it is the first summer political science program of its kind in Canada. Students have an experiential learning opportunity by visiting the provincial legislature in Toronto, the federal parliament in Ottawa and a trip to Quebec. The curriculum is comprised of half day interactive sessions led by graduate students in our department and field trips in the afternoon. Over the course of its existence it has also made a profit of \$60,000 for the Department of Political Studies and has seen around 60 students graduate. The program was short-listed for a Principal's Award for International Education Innovation in 2016.

#### Honours Thesis Program, 2016

Re-imagined the honours thesis program (POLS 590) as a 1.5 course credit (9 Queen's units) from 1 credit or 6 units. In doing so, I wanted to create a capstone course experience that would provide an opportunity for our very best students to show-case their research abilities. Though it was not part of my course load, I met bi-weekly with students over the course of the year. The bi-weekly curriculum included sharing research methods, case studies, writing tips and progress reports but also to develop an *esprit de corps* among students whose research was, up to then, mostly solitary. The summative was an Honours Colloquium which in its first year was done in student run café to both make the outcome public and celebrate students' work.

#### Chair, Teaching Space Complex, 2010-12

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Science, Bob Silverman, asked me to lead a project creating a \$30 million dedicated teaching building on campus. Over the course of two years, I chaired a committee comprised of faculty, students and staff to plan and develop the programming for a new teaching complex slated to be located in the heart of campus (what is now Mitchell Hall). Meeting weekly over this period, the committee chose one of the country's leading architects, Moriyama & Teshima to design the building. The committee worked closely with them to approve architectural drawings and designs. It went on site tours of other universities to see examples of 'smart classrooms' as well as conducted research on collaborative learning in large classes. The committee held design charettes on campus comprised of student leaders, faculty, staff, senior university personnel and alumni to produce the final program. Because of budgetary considerations, construction of the building project was not pursued though the drawings and design of a state-of-the-art teaching complex remain.

#### First Ministers' Simulation & Publication

I was asked by the Forum of Federations/ Forum des fédérations and Institute on Research on Public Policy (IRPP) in Ottawa to create and deliver a curriculum for over one hundred students from around the



world for the Forum's first international youth conference. The point of the simulation exercise was to demonstrate, by role playing, the importance and style of bargaining and negotiation at the elite level in federal systems. The result was turned into a book called *The Art of Negotiation: A Simulation for Resolving Conflict in Federal States* published by Broadview Press. It has been used at universities in Canada and abroad and has been translated into French (*L'Art de la Négociation: Une simulation de règlement des conflits dans les pays fédérés*) and Spanish (*El Arte de la Negociación: Una simulación sobre la resolución de conflictos en los países federales*). In 2020 (just pre-Covid), plans were underway to revise and update the book with Prof. Alain-G. Gagnon, Canada Research Chair at Université du Québec à Montréal.

### Teaching Assistant (TA) training

TA training is now a regular part of a teaching assistant's employment. What is now the standard in our department was instituted by me in 2000 when I created and implemented a full-day of training for political studies graduate teaching assistants. At that time, training included mock tutorials, simulations of difficult situations as well as pedagogical techniques that could be used in tutorials. It was designed to instill confidence in new TAs and provide them with tools to run tutorials.

### Grad course evaluation

Since 2015, I have provided graduate students with an opportunity to provide feedback on my teaching. While I understand that providing evaluation in a small group has the potential to expose the student to risk, I think that there are ways to mitigate this. This can be done by having a student collect the evaluations and returning them to me in the following term. Moreover, I use a template that students can type instead of hand-write to further anonymize the responses. The value of requesting feedback from graduate students is that it provides clear evidence that I take the process of teaching seriously, communicates transparency to the students and provides me with excellent and always constructive feedback on how to improve the course. I am pleased that the Political Studies Graduate Students Association has seen fit to pursue this as a departmental policy.

### *Presentations and Writing on Teaching*

I do not assume that I am proficient in the literature of 'the scholarship of teaching and learning,' but below are some examples of my engagement in the writing on teaching.

Co-Principal Investigator (with Amanda Bongers, Department of Chemistry, Queen's), "Unsettling the Disciplines: Decolonizing and Indigenizing the First Year Curriculum," for Queen's 'Wicked Ideas' Research Grant, requested \$75,000. Unsuccessful. 2020.

"Transforming Classroom Spaces for Active and Collaborative Learning," Panelist, Studies in Teaching & Higher Learning & Education (STHLE) Annual Conference," Queen's University, June 18, 2014

"Technological Divide in the Classroom" *Queen's Journal*, July 31, 2012

"The Effectiveness of On-Line Peer Review: A Case Study of Two Disciplines," Presented with Brendon Gurd to Showcase on Teaching, Queen's University, 2011.

Queen's University, Learning Enhancement Grant \$10,000 (Brendon Gurd, co-applicant)

"Teaching with Clickers," *Queen's Gazette*, November 23, 2009

“The Perils of Powerpoint,” *Queen’s Gazette*, April 2008.

“A Space To Interact,” *Queen’s Journal* Supplement on “How Can Queen’s be Better,” March 30, 2007

“Enhancing Learning in Large Classes Using Out-of-the-Classroom Technology,” Merlot Educational Conference, California. (co-written with Jeff Hanlon, Michelle Villeneuve, Andy Leger; presented by Villeneuve & Hanlon)

### *Teaching Leadership*

I have been asked to be a faculty mentor for new faculty members of colour at Queen’s. In addition, I have been a faculty-staff mentor for visible minority students and a residence mentor for the international floor of Victoria Hall residence. For my engagement with undergraduate students, I was awarded the title of Honorary President, Alma Mater Society.

I participate regularly in the annual Centre for Teaching & Learning’s (CTL) “Showcase on Teaching” in addition to holding the following positions at the CTL:

Speaker & Co-Organizer, one-week workshop, Queen’s-Tohoku University Joint Program for University Teaching, Donald Gordon Centre, Queen’s University, 2011

Educator in Residence, Centre for Teaching & Learning, 2010-2012

Learning Technology Faculty Associate, Centre for Teaching & Learning, Queen’s University, 2002-04