

TEACHING STATEMENT

Spencer Kiesel, Political Science Department, *University of California, Davis*

My own unique educational journey and experiences teaching diverse audiences underpin my teaching philosophy. As a Faculty Lecturer at UC Davis, I have taught multifarious classes ranging from core substantive political science courses such as Comparative Institutions and American Politics to technical courses on research methods and programming in R. My educational outlook prepared me to be an exceptional teacher, mentor, and researcher because I view each class, challenging situation, and instructional moment as an opportunity to share my love of learning and as an opportunity to further my own education.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Education Is About Fostering a Lifelong Love of Learning

My distinctive education kindled an essential curiosity, drive, and grit. I grew up on a rural farm and was homeschooled until I attended college at 16. My education was experiential, community based, and active. I enjoyed an individualized and open educational experience that let me explore my own curiosity. I freely explored ideas, concepts, and skills. This infused a core passion for knowledge where there is no divide between living and learning. I fundamentally believe the world is a complex web of knowledge where exploring that web becomes life's greatest joy.

I endeavor to inspire this same love of learning in my students. As an educator, I not only communicate the underlying information but also motivate understanding and engagement. It's not enough to just present the information as existing in a vacuum. Educators must answer the "so what" questions throughout every lecture, workshop, or seminar by showing students how course material is part of a broader web of knowledge that touches each and every student in their own lives. Why should students care about the topic? How is it important to them? What is the utility of knowing this? Students must be engaged and connected in the educational process. As an instructor I further this goal by beginning every course with a survey of the students so I can learn who they are and what they hope to learn. I then tailor course material to connect the course to their lived experiences. I employ class discussions and debates that make students active participants in their own education rather than passive objects. My approach combines course flexibility and responsiveness to student needs with an environment that invites their active involvement in their own education.

Teaching Should Be Directed and Adapted to Individual Students

Because my education was not tethered to a singular location, I travelled throughout the Southeastern United States. I attended my local State college at 16, before transferring to Case Western Reserve University. There, I was exposed to two divergent lifestyles, cultures, and modes of living. I also encountered the differences between a state-funded university system and a well-funded private system. I then traveled 2,400 miles to California, finally crossing the Mississippi for the first time, for graduate school, where I had no family, friends, or connections. These experiences exposed me to the spectrum of American life and gave me a varied educational, personal, and social perspective. For me, diversity is more than a checkbox; it is a lived experience at the core of who I am. After inhabiting starkly different socioeconomic, educational, and cultural worlds, I approach difference, difficulty, and bewilderment as

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opportunities for learning and gaining knowledge, a mindset that enables me to be accepting, resilient, inquisitive, and resourceful.

My exposure to economic, cultural, and racial diversity has been furthered throughout my time in graduate school. Davis is a majority-minority community and a [Hispanic-Serving Institution](#) where I mentor an amazing array of students. My students have enormous diversity and there is no stereotypical Davis student. I know that education isn't one size fits all. The trick is to inspire each individual student's own curiosity and engage them in what will foster their love of learning. My lived experience allows me to create an educational experience that appeals to a diverse range of students while maintaining an open and inclusive environment for all. Drawing examples from students lived experiences, presenting multiple perspectives, and keeping materials relevant to current events all aid in engaging students with the material. Because my education fostered a profound love of learning, I strive to foster this same love of learning in them. I want students to leave my classroom with a deeper appreciation for thinking and the desire to explore their own curiosity, rather than memorizing rote information.

TEACHING INTERESTS

My research and love of engagement with knowledge inform my teaching interests. I have taught courses on Congress, the policy making process, the intersections of government and the economy, legislative behavior, comparative politics, and comparative institutions as well as sections on coding in R, research methods, and American government.

I have a keen interest in developing courses related to my research, such as the intersection of religion and politics, and the causes and effects of political polarization. Additionally, I have the relevant substantive background to develop and teach classes related to Public Policy and Public Administration.

Methodological courses I can teach include but are not limited to research design, causal inference, survey design, experimental methods, modeling (MLE, GLM, etc.), coding in R and Stata, and data visualization at undergraduate and graduate levels.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Faculty Lecturer, University of California, Davis

Spring Quarter 2023	POL 140: Comparative Legislatures POL 174: Govt & the Economy
Summer Session 2023	POL 162: Public Opinion POL 105: The Legislative Process
Fall Quarter 2023	POL 001 American Government POL 105: The Legislative Process
Winter Quarter 2023	POL 104 CA State Government POL 164 Public Opinion
Spring Quarter 2024	POL 02: Comparative Politics POL 140: Comparative Legislatures

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Associate Instructor, The University of California, Davis

Sole instructor of Record

Spring Quarter 2021	POL 105: The Legislative Process
Summer Session 1 2021	POL 105: The Legislative Process
Winter Quarter 2022	POL 105: The Legislative Process
Winter Quarter 2023	POL 02: Comparative Politics

Section Instructor at the University of California, Davis

Sole instructor for twice weekly sections

Spring Quarter 2022	POL 051: Scientific Study of Politics
Winter Quarter 2021	POL 01: American Government
Fall Quarter 2020	POL 051: Scientific Study of Politics
Summer Session 1 2020	POL 051: Scientific Study of Politics

Teaching Assistant at the University of California, Davis

Jan 2018 – Dec 2022

Spring Quarter 2022	POL 051: Scientific Study of Politics	Professor Bradford Jones
Winter Quarter 2021	POL 152: Constitutional Politics of Equality	Professor Mark Verbitsky
Winter Quarter 2021	POL 01: American Government	Professor Cheryl Boudreau
Fall Quarter 2020	POL 011A: America Decides	Lecturer Isaac Hale
Fall Quarter 2020	POL 051: Scientific Study of Politics	Professor Rachel Bernhard
Summer Session 2020	POL 051: Scientific Study of Politics	Professor Bradford Jones
Spring Quarter 2020	POL 124: The Politics of Global Inequality	Professor Daniel Kono
Winter Quarter 2020	POL 174: Government and the Economy	Professor Adrienne Hosek
Fall Quarter 2019	POL 123: International Organizations	Professor Lauren Peritz
Spring Quarter 2019	POL 122: International Law	Professor Brandon Kinne
Winter Quarter 2019	POL 165: Media and Politics	Professor Amber Boydston
Fall Quarter 2018	POL 144B: Russian Politics	Professor Josephine Andrews
Spring Quarter 2018	POL 100: Local Government and Politics	Professor Scott MacKenzie
Winter Quarter 2018	POL 162: Elections and Voting Behavior	Professor Christopher Hare

EVIDENCE OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

The quantitative and qualitative evidence presented below demonstrates my record of success in teaching. My quantitative evaluations vastly exceed department averages, as noted below for instances where department averages are available. My qualitative evaluations are overwhelmingly positive comments left by students as reflected by the selection provided below.

Additionally, when the UC Davis political science department began running its own TA orientation and training for incoming graduate students, Professor Boydston selected me to serve on the planning committee and instruct incoming graduate students on teaching excellence. I was responsible for crafting the orientation and training program that provided incoming graduate students with a foundation for success in teaching. As part of this role, I served as the primary graduate student instructor for the orientation and training program.

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Quantitative: Numerical Teaching Evaluations

The forthcoming descriptive summary of evaluations are from courses where I was sole instructor of record.

Course Perceptions: “Please indicate the overall education value of the course from (1) poor to (5) excellent.”

- Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 106$): 4.5/5
- Overall Summary Mode: 5 (67/106)

Teaching effectiveness ratings are on the following five-point scale: (1) poor, (2) fair, (3) good, (4) very good, to (5) excellent. Summary teaching instruction ratings can be found below.

1. “Please indicate the overall teaching effectiveness of the instructor.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 106$): 4.6 /5
 - Weighted department average: 4.1/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (75/106)
2. “Please indicate instructor’s knowledge and command of subject matter.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 106$): 4.8 /5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (88 /106)
3. “Please indicate instructor’s openness to discussion and ability to stimulate it.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 106$): 4.8/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (89/106)
4. “Please indicate instructor’s availability for consultation.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 106$): 4.8/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (85/106)
5. “Please indicate effectiveness of style & methods of class presentations.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 106$): 4.6/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (74/106)

Qualitative: Quotes from Teaching Evaluations

“Great teacher overall, information was taught well and I liked the material of the class beforehand and I felt like I learned a lot coming out of the class”

“The professor knew so much about the subject matter that at times he seemed overloaded with things to tell us. He's somebody that clearly loved the subject and could talk about it for hours. That made attending his class enjoyable”

“Amazing instructor! Made lectures interesting and engaging, fostered discussion and questions among the class, and overall taught the material in an accessible and thought-provoking way”

“very helpful throughout this course by always providing good examples in and outside of Congress for us to understand the material and laws/policies in different ways.”

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“The professor had constant discussions in his class, and the debates he held were a fun way of making sure we understood the basic concepts enough to be able to make and defend a well-reasoned argument”

“I now understand Median Voter Theory thanks to Spencer's King Kong vs. Godzilla example. I believe this can be classified as edutainment. :)”

“Spencer teaches in a way that is accessible for all students. I always felt comfortable asking questions and felt that he explained pretty complex concepts in a way that we could all understand. I know I am not the only student that felt this way as there was always a handful of us that hung out virtually after live Zoom lectures to just chat with him and each other.” *Student from POL 105: The Legislative Process, UC Davis was fully remote at the time.*

“So passionate about his job and you can tell that he truly cares about his students. He is by far, one of the best professors I've had at UC Davis and the Political Science program is lucky to have him.”

“POL 105 became my favorite political science course to-date because we had regular class discussions/debate about relevant policies. It made me very engaged with the material.”

“His organization throughout the quarter was spot-on, and when there were changes or errors he always communicated quickly and accommodatively.”

“Spencer was one of the better TAs I've had at Davis. He knew what he was teaching and was always open to helping students.”

“Clearly understands R Studio inside and out.”

“Responsive to emails and canvas messaging”