

## TEACHING STATEMENT

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My experience teaching in a variety of disciplines and institutions has taught me a number of pedagogical lessons. First of all, I take a **developmental view of learning**. I have structured all of the six different courses I taught at Duke University and Carleton College around incremental assignments that build from basic skills of analysis to more advanced critical thinking, thus teaching thinking through staged writing. In the four Political Science courses I taught at Carleton, for example, students first interpreted difficult arguments; then analyzed and criticized these arguments; then created their own arguments. At each stage I used peer revision to focus on particular aspects of academic writing: introductions, the use of evidence, and conclusions. By the end of the course, students had moved from struggling to understand the claims of a text to advancing their own arguments in conversation with other authors, both the authors we had read and their fellow authors in the class.

Alongside my developmental view of learning, my experience teaching has also shown me the **crucial role of questions**. I frame all of my courses with “big questions” – about justice or political life or freedom – that grab students’ attention and sustain it throughout the semester. On the first day of class I tell students that these questions have challenged writers and thinkers for millennia and that in this class they will join a community of inquiry spanning these many centuries. Once they view their own writing as part of a conversation about big questions, students recognize the meaningfulness of their work and pursue creative answers. In my Political Philosophy course at Duke, students investigated the role of hypocrisy in politics by using Machiavelli and the political significance of friendship by rethinking Aristotle. No longer do they write mere “papers,” but “essays” that attempt to say something new and significant about important matters of concern.

These questions also give an urgency to my courses that heightens the **engaged learning** I seek to develop in my students. By “engaged learning” I mean connecting what we learn and do in the classroom to students’ preconceptions and their daily interaction with the world around them (their “mental models”). In discussions I do this by introducing material with film clips, images, or recent newspaper articles. In my Writing 20 course at Duke this fall, students’ own writing has facilitated engaged learning by linking our reading of the *Republic* to current events through our class blog: <http://www.livingjustly.wordpress.com>. One student, for example, designed a banner for the blog by editing Raphael’s painting “The School of Athens” and then posted reflections on how her modifications conveyed certain aspirations for the course. Another student published a short essay that highlighted the perils of political education by comparing Socrates’ arguments to the example of child soldiers in Liberia. Students thus work with texts and rhetorical styles ranging from the fourth century BCE to the twenty-first century today, bringing the study of ancient political theory to political reality around them.

These examples of engaged learning also illuminate how **teaching translates to my own work**. My research begins from a deep concern with democratic culture in contemporary politics, a concern that I seek to explore in particular with the study of ancient political thought. One challenge of my research lies in finding points of contact where I can bring modern concerns into conversation with ancient thinking. By courses that have students seek such creative juxtapositions in their own writing, I can enlist them in the brainstorming process that I would otherwise do alone. Even at the most basic level of interpreting a particular text, students inevitably discover new insights when they pore over arguments I once regarded as familiar. In my Writing 20 course this fall, I have assigned

students three different translations of the *Republic* and in class sessions we often closely compare how subtle turns of phrase among these translations change the apparent meaning of the text. While I have read the *Republic* in Greek, these variations reminded me – and I impressed upon the students – that every reading constitutes a translation, a fact that my own proximity to the text had elided. As I seek to use these texts in my own work, teaching them in such circumstances enlivens their ambiguities anew.

Above all else, teaching appeals to me because **I love being in the classroom**. Perhaps it comes from my training as a concert pianist, but I find teaching thrilling: the performance, the back-and-forth, the exhilaration of learning with others. I often think of an orchestra conductor when I teach. The conductor must bring her ensemble to the best possible performance but she cannot pick up her fiddle and do it herself; she must somehow speak to the soul of each musician and find within each some source of inspiration. Working with undergraduate students also means initiating them into this wonderful aspect of collegiate life. Teaching thus gives me the opportunity to make music again.