

Teaching Statement

I am committed to addressing systemic inequality in American society, especially in educational opportunity, through both my research and my teaching. I also believe that a scholar's approach to teaching should be just as data-driven, innovative, collaborative, and impactful as their research.

Prior to graduate school, I spent five years in K-12 education, eventually serving as a high school principal in a Boston charter school where most students would be first-generation college students. We prided ourselves on having 100% of our students accepted to college; however, we quickly learned that a college acceptance is only the first step. What students really need is to *graduate*, and our students—most of whom were Black and Brown and came from low-income communities—were doing so at far lower rates than wealthier, White students. College instructors have an incredible opportunity to close this opportunity gap through providing skill and content instruction that addresses differences between many students' high school preparation and college expectations.

Through reflecting on and revising my teaching practice to better prepare my students to succeed in higher education, I have honed my ability to develop courses, assignments, and learning opportunities that prepare all learners to excel. I am experienced in quickly pinpointing and addressing barriers to student learning. I know how to research, implement, and coach others on a variety of pedagogical best practices that reduce opportunity gaps for the least prepared while still inspiring and challenging the most experienced students. Having spent the first part of my career preparing students for college, I am now dedicated to teaching social science in ways that inspire and prepare all students to thrive civically and academically once they arrive on campus.

Excellent social science courses teach students both skills and content in order to prepare them to participate in and improve their communities. Mastering the skills of political science—reading critically, analyzing data, writing coherently and understanding civic institutions and processes—are essential to students' future careers, and, just as importantly, their civic lives. Therefore, in addition to engaging students in scrutinizing power dynamics, race relations, and the distribution of resources in American society, I explicitly teach students to read, write, and analyze social science. For example, when I teach “The Science of Politics: An Introduction to Statistics and Coding,” I guide students through a comparison of scholarly and non-scholarly sources and help them develop criteria for evaluating their biases, reliability, and validity. We also examine the structure of scholarly sources, preparing students to understand and respond to new research.

Research design and methods courses are especially well suited to practicing civic, analytical, and communication skills, and therefore are some of my favorite classes to teach. When I taught both my department's foundational tutorial and senior thesis seminars, I developed scopes and sequences, lesson plans, and materials that covered different aspects of research and writing in political science each week. During the thesis seminar, for example, we compared research topics and research questions to help students understand how to clearly frame their research. I then provided students with several examples of research questions and we identified the features of the most successful questions and workshopped the weaknesses of the others. These lessons wove together opportunities for evaluating scholarship, discussing theory, and regularly writing and receiving feedback.

As a scholar of American politics, race, gender, and class are integral to how I think about power and privilege; consequently, I believe that course readings and materials should complicate students' understanding of American history and politics by reflecting a diversity of views and experiences. This includes, for example, ensuring that reading lists reflect scholars of color, female scholars, and both conservative and liberal policy perspectives. I have developed and taught whole courses on the systemic causes of racism and inequality—like “How did we get here? America’s racial history and its impact on public policy” and “Created Unequal: The Origins and Legacy of American Social Policy”—and a course on the history and future of education politics called “A Dream Deferred: The purpose, promise, and politics of Education in America.” Other courses explore dynamics of various forms of inequality and avenues for addressing it. In “Power to the (Young) People: American Politics through Youth Led Social Movements,” for example, students examine youth-led social movements to learn about the structure and history of American government and political development.

I am also committed to preparing other instructors to teach equitably and effectively. Through my experiences as a high school principal and the Government Department’s Pedagogy Fellow, I learned to inspire and equip my peers to employ innovative pedagogical practices in their own classrooms. As a Pedagogy Fellow, I expanded, redesigned, and led the new instructor training for graduate students. I helped develop writing instruction toolkits—complete with rubrics, lesson plans, and student facing materials—to introduce undergraduates to the norms of social science writing. For the first time in our department’s history, I developed the first ever standalone training session on diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the classroom and incorporated research and strategies explicitly focused on creating an equitable and inclusive classroom into each subsequent session. I have also coached faculty-members from multiple universities and disciplines to implement inclusive and effective pedagogy, which resulted in award winning-instruction for many of them.

When I first became a teacher, my coach prompted me to determine what was in my “locus of control” when I faced a challenge. My research, which examines systemic drivers of inequality and the political barriers to enacting change, is a long-term contribution to addressing systemic inequality in the United States. Through creating equitable educational experiences that challenge students’ perspectives, explicitly teaching academic and civic skills, and encouraging students to ask and answer important questions I can also help address opportunity gaps now. I am dedicated to doing this effectively and to collaborating with colleagues to do so as well. I can only hope that there are similar efforts at the colleges that my former high school students now attend.