Statement of Teaching Philosophy

When I meet my students on the first day of class, I am often asked why one should study political theory. In response, I articulate political theory's importance in one overall aim: it develops students as global citizens and human beings. In each of my political theory courses, I achieve this aim by foregrounding two goals: (1) increasing my students' ability to assess the claims of central texts in the history of political thought in a charitable, yet critical manner and (2) developing my students' ability to make normative and political arguments through dialogue and writing.

Drawing on my own experiences as a student and teacher, I view the successful attainment of these two goals through the lens of *linguistic fluency*. Political theory—like political science, history, philosophy, East Asian studies, or any other field—possesses a disciplinary language with which it comprehends the world. Fluency in political theory, in particular, enables students to grapple with concepts like rights, freedom, and justice that are an uncritically assumed part of their everyday world. By developing their fluency in political theory, my students are able to discover, inhabit, and navigate both familiar and unfamiliar worlds, regardless of what career path they choose in the future.

Still, classrooms are social spaces comprised of students and instructors with diverse backgrounds, even if the composition of any given class may not be representative of the pluralistic world in which we live. By "social spaces," I simply mean that classrooms involve the whole of my students and myself—not just our minds, but our family histories, our personalities, our identities, and so much more. As a teacher, stewarding such a space demands that I address potential instances of oppression and self-deception so that students do not reinforce stereotypes and caricatures, marginalize visible and invisible identities, or stifle transformative learning. Ensuring student learning and collective growth in this space requires that I steward it to account for both my own and my students' diverse constellations of prior exposure to political theory. From my students who read Plato in high school to my first-generation students who do not even know what "political theory" is, to my economics majors set on an investment banking career or my pre-med students looking to help their family out of abject poverty, I aim to develop our classroom as a space where we can collaboratively assess important political arguments throughout history while knowledgably forming our own. In so doing, I aim to develop my students' ability to be informed and engaged global citizens.

Crafting assignments that require the collaborative construction of informed political-theoretical vocabularies has worked particularly well for my introductory courses in political theory. Prior to the first class, I ask my classes of mostly first- and second-year undergraduates to submit pre-assessment surveys which, among other things, detail their prior exposure to, and knowledge of, the political theory canon. I then assign the students presentation projects that require them to work in small groups that are reflective of complementary levels of prior exposure to political theory. Each group is tasked with coming up with a coherent and original argument drawing exclusively on the primary text(s) of one or more thinkers in the course. To achieve this goal, students must develop a short presentation in which they defend their argument from their skeptical peers. The other classmates are required to critically assess the argument based on what we've read in class. Students are graded not only on how well they defend their thesis or assess the presenting group's arguments, but also on their collaboration with their peers. This naturally feeds into the final assignment of the course, which has typically been a final paper. When I have assigned a final exam, I break it into three parts: multiple choice, short answer, and a longer essay. Whether a final paper or exam, students are assessed on their ability to recall arguments from the term, synthesize them into a coherent argument, and present compelling evidence against alternative readings. If students have grown in their ability to recall, synthesize, and argue in a compelling manner, I know they have learned. Further, with every assignment, I offer extensive written feedback with the goal of helping each student reflect on their growth in assessing and make normative and political arguments. That said, growth is not limited to the students. After my first time crafting these assignments, I learned through student evaluations and conversations that including smaller, lower-stakes written assignments before the presentations better aids the students in achieving the course goals, as both goals require a fairly sophisticated level of cognition. In subsequent courses, I have included

smaller quizzes (with short essays built in) to remedy this lack. Students have found this quite helpful, as evidenced by my teaching evaluations.

Despite success with leading discussion and crafting written assignments, I have still had my fair share of challenges with course reading material. For many students I have taught over the years, the texts we cover in class can often seem abstract, irrelevant, or even oppressive, given the identities and arguments of the authors and the historical circumstances in which they wrote. Further, I have often received feedback from students expressing fears of being ill-equipped for class discussion due to lack of familiarity with the cultural context or outright frustration and disinterest in the material because of the gap in time between us and when the text was first written. On this front, I have done two things. First, I have worked with fellow pedagogues to develop course material in such a way as to speak to the concerns and themes that are of significant importance to my students. These include, among others, themes of race, class, gender, and imperialism. Second, I have continued to develop in-class assessment techniques that encourage peer-to-peer interaction because this has often encouraged collaboration across diverse experiences and knowledge bases, leading to significantly higher levels of overall student participation. For example, I have had great success with a "jigsaw" technique I use to teach Book III of Aristotle's *Politics*. Before class, I break up the day's readings into four themes (citizenship, constitutions, authority, and justice). At the start of class, I sort the students into four groups mirroring these themes and give them discussion questions based on that day's reading to help them become "experts" on that theme. Then, I re-sort them into new groups composed of at least one member from each of the previous theme groups and encourage the students to synthesize the themes (their respective areas of "expertise") across Book III into a coherent thesis concerning Aristotle's overall argument. Students find this activity rewarding because it enables them to speak collectively and authoritatively on the text.

I anticipate that as I continue to grow as a teacher, other challenges will provoke further developments in my pedagogical methods. However, my intent is that even as I continue to learn how to teach more effectively and inclusively, I will continue to emphasize facilitation and peer-to-peer learning in my efforts to develop student fluency in political theory and related fields. By leveraging my own and the students' unique backgrounds and experiences, we collectively reconstruct the vocabulary of the field even while we learn how to use our own languages to engage with ones in different fields. This goal not only acknowledges the profound influence social learning environments can have on students, but it also recognizes the potential students have for profoundly influencing the social environments in which they find themselves—whether in the classroom or in the world.