

Teaching Statement

In preparing the materials for this application, I noticed a statistical curiosity: Despite the difficulties of teaching during a pandemic, Spring and Fall 2020 have produced the highest average evaluation scores that I've had at Gardner-Webb.¹ I don't take this as evidence that my instruction improved during the pandemic, but it does show that I've avoided a dramatic drop-off in quality despite completely revamping my course delivery methods on the fly. Even before the pandemic, higher education was wrestling with how to integrate the possibilities of technology without losing the magic of in-person instruction. While many have tried to replicate the processes of in-person learning in online spaces, I have found success by focusing instead on reproducing the desired *outcomes* of in-person learning, acknowledging that the process to get there must necessarily change.

Regardless of delivery method, I focus on producing experiential learning through active learning, discussion, and undergraduate research. I utilize a battery of different exercises, simulations, and thought experiments meant to force students to think critically while also engaging with course material. In my experience this can be accomplished online or in-person; it just requires careful attention to how the course delivery method can help or hinder the exercise. I found that while the "Hobbes game" can't be played in an online class, my Panopticon simulation worked even better because Zoom rooms are functionally Panopticons if students "pin" the instructor's window. Discussion is likewise more difficult in an online space, but I found ways to manage thoughtful discussion by utilizing technological solutions. Beyond active learning exercises, I try to center courses around the rigorous discussion and critical evaluation of cutting-edge scholarship. My job, as I see it, is to give students the fundamentals of scholarship on any one topic or discipline and then thrust them into current debates in the literature. Thus engaged, students can see themselves not simply as consumers of material, but as junior scholars themselves. Many of my students have engaged in their own independent research projects at the undergraduate level, and their research questions almost always have their genesis in classroom discussion. To that point I do not shy away from integrating quantitative material into my classes, as it familiarizes students with the tools of research while also building marketable skills.

Outside of the classroom I find that effective advising and mentorship is key to unlocking students' potential. A bachelor's degree alone isn't enough to guarantee success on the job market, so I concentrate my advising around adding other lines to the resume or C.V. that will build towards a student's goals. Political science offers a broad array of career opportunities, but the path isn't always obvious. I begin my mentorship work with students with a discussion of career goals or interests: Basically, the conversation centers around "where do you want to go from here?" Once we have identified an objective, we work to identify and fill holes in the student's resume by filling out a checklist of student accomplishments: Work experience, internships, volunteerism, awards, conference presentations, grants, and other accomplishments are noted. In the first meeting this checklist is almost always blank but keeping track semester to semester allows us to identify shortcomings that we need to fix and systematizes the process of advisement. In doing this, students build a fantastic and well-rounded resume over time, one that is specifically crafted to fit their career of choice. In many cases, I have had to create new opportunities where they didn't previously exist. In my time at Gardner-Webb, I have worked with various local governments, private firms, and international NGOs to create a new suite of internships for our students. I also organized a collaborative simulation with the National Counter-Terrorism Center, which connected students to practitioners and gave them counsel in pursuing a career in counter-terrorism.

Overall, my approach has been tremendously successful in my time at Gardner-Webb. The Global Studies program was nearly dead when I first arrived, and it now has the highest enrollment growth rate in the entire university. My students have achieved tremendous success after graduation, with some going on to prestigious graduate programs and others going straight into their desired professions. In recognition of these successes, in 2020 I received both the Mentorship and Advising Award as well as the President's Early Career Award. I believe my success is borne not out of a superior approach, but instead from my sincere desire to continually improve and provide the best possible platform for my students to find their place in the world.

¹ See the Teaching Evaluations document in my teaching portfolio