

**SAMBUDDHA GHATAK, PH.D.****Teaching Philosophy**

Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly what kind of dent you want to make in the world means that you must continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative questions of all: What effect am I having on students and on their learning?<sup>1</sup>

A teacher is the window through which students look at society; therefore, as a teacher it is my responsibility to present a clear and impartial picture of the world and to encourage critical thinking about issues that can impact the daily lives of students. The political world that I introduce to my students is one that can subsequently shape the society and polity in which we live for generations; any distorted view of the political process could have severe consequences.

Accordingly, my primary objective as teacher of political science is to enable my students to think logically and clearly about political questions so that they can make informed decisions, without being swayed by emotion or prejudice. I strongly believe that having information is not sufficient for students to make educated decisions, as exercising the mental faculty to logically analyze pieces of information also is required. This is not to say that information lacks importance in and of itself, but asking the question ‘why’ – and not taking any ideas as given – is more important for developing a rational person. The real ‘dent’ in a student’s mind, then, is to inculcate the quest for scientific knowledge. This is my ultimate objective as a teacher.

Accordingly, in more advanced upper level courses, my interest is to encourage students to better understand the study of politics by using scientific methods. Whether students are applying quantitative or qualitative methods, the scientific method – developing a theory, testable hypotheses, and an appropriate research and case-selection strategy – should be applied rigorously. Since not all political questions naturally lend themselves to scientific inquiry, students should be equipped with correct research methods when called upon to find, and to conduct research over, empirical questions. This approach is at the core of my teaching of upper level political science courses, to the greatest extent possible. In lower level classes, my approach is to encourage students to follow scientific methods, at least in framing a question and hypotheses and also in exploring the question with a search for factual evidence. My scientific orientation is a result of my training in research methods and advanced statistical techniques. I want to inspire my students in this spirit of never-

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<sup>1</sup>Brookfield, Stephen D. (2006). *The skillful teacher: on technique, trust, and responsiveness in the classroom*. CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 18-19.

ending empirical inquisition. I believe that an average teacher merely teaches, but the best teacher inspires. Thus, if I can inspire my students to explore the political world in a scientific way, I would have made an 'imprint' in their malleable minds.

With these objectives serving as a roadmap, in my introductory political science classes, I present the facts and puzzles through lectures and, subsequently, encourage the students to critically assess the information. Debates and discussions are integral parts of my teaching; therefore, I emphasize students' participation in the classes. In this regard, presenting the students with conflicting viewpoints and theoretical explanations of politics and then asking them to critically analyze these problems can motivate their contributions to the learning process. In my upper level courses, I move a step further by assigning journal articles and asking students to critique those; paper critiques comprise twenty percent of their grade. This critical-thinking approach is especially important for students, as there will always be a need for educated people to engage in enlightened debate and to work together to find innovative solutions to complex social problems.

Another component of my teaching philosophy is to encourage cooperation instead of competition. I believe that cooperation has an impact on an individual's personality in terms of cultivating traits like adaptability, compassion, and trustworthiness; further, the collective development of such qualities engenders a healthier learning environment by allowing everyone to participate actively without fear of censure. As a result, I try to infuse an environment of friendly cooperation in my classes by assigning joint research projects, engaging teams in issue debates, and encouraging study groups; this can make the learning process an enjoyable experience for both students and for the instructor.

Additionally, I am a proponent of requiring students to engage in extensive written, as well as spoken, discourse. For example, I require students to write a formal 12-14 page paper, which they have the opportunity to revise if dissatisfied with their initial grade. In upper level classes, I also require them to write four short paper critiques on selected journal articles. Allowing students to express themselves through research paper critiques affords me the opportunity for a more complete assessment of a student's writing and critical thinking abilities.

In summary, I am very committed to nurturing a learning environment that is both exciting and rigorous, one that empowers students in their pursuit of knowledge. I treat my students with the utmost respect, creating conditions where students feel safe to candidly discuss topics that they might otherwise be hesitant to address. In terms of specific abilities that are developed, students who take my classes will have ample opportunity to hone their writing skills and verbal

communication abilities. Finally, I take pride in making myself available to the students through emails and informal meetings during my office hours. Overall, I try to make learning a pleasant experience to the greatest extent possible, without sacrificing my commitment to academic and scientific rigor in the process.