

Teaching Statement

Francesca Parente

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is centered around three principles: be accessible, be relevant, and be challenging. First and foremost, instruction should be *accessible*. As a teaching assistant and instructor, I have implemented several policies to promote accessibility. I am cognizant of the fact that students have different learning styles, so I always try to present information in a new format. For example, if students saw a bullet point list of definitions in lecture, I review the material in the form of a chart or table in section. If the topic permits, I will present information previously given in words as simple mathematical equations (for example, dividing a dollar as a mental frame for the bargaining range) or graphically. Whenever I present the information in a different format, I emphasize that students do not need to learn the material this way, but that some students might find the technique useful.

I offer a variety of types of assignments and ways that students can earn points. Because some students, especially minority students and international students, are not as willing to speak publicly in sections, I allow for students to earn participation points through written summaries of assigned readings, course policies permitting. In my summer course, I ensure that there are a variety of types of assignments in which students are graded; I do not just have exams, but use a combination of attendance, short quizzes, a position paper, and a final exam to determine final grades. If students do not feel they are good at test-taking, they can bolster their course grade by performing better on the position paper, and vice versa.

I stress the importance of a tolerant and inclusive classroom. In discussion-based courses especially, it is important that students feel that their views are welcome, particularly when they are in the minority. In foreign policy classes, when students make critical remarks about the current administration that other students challenge, I direct the discussion toward theories we have learned in the course. For example, after the 2016 election, students were discussing what President Trump meant for American foreign policy, with some students pessimistic, and others more defensive. I reminded the students that these views are also represented in the literature: some scholars we had read argued that individuals mattered, while others treated the state as a unitary actor. These theories would make different predictions about the effect of President Trump on foreign policy.

Second, I believe that instruction should be *relevant* to students' lives, both in other courses and outside of the classroom. I aspire to teach theoretical and methodological frameworks in an engaging way that encourages students to use these tools to explain present-day problems in international politics. As an instructor for the undergraduate course in international law, I guide students through academic articles and position papers on topics in the news, like the legal use of force; the ongoing conflict in the South China Sea; and what can be done about the crisis in Syria. Since many students taking international law plan to attend law school, I teach them not only the course content, but also memorization and study techniques that they can use later.

When teaching methods courses, I am always aware that students have varying degrees of comfort with mathematics. To that end, I make sure to provide the intuition, in words, behind any model I present. Whenever possible, I connect the model to substantive questions with which students are familiar to help ground them in the literature. I also make connections to previous or future courses students might take. For example, to help motivate graduate students through more difficult topics in Math Camp, I connected each lecture to specific courses in the first-year methods sequence (both quantitative and formal) so they could answer the perennial question "Why do I need to know this?"

Finally, instruction should be *challenging*. I do not enjoy testing rote memorization, so I strive whenever possible to create assignments that test critical thinking. For example, my writing assignment in international law requires students to apply what they have learned about the rules of international law to a current crisis, like the Zika outbreak in Brazil, or the treatment of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. In another course, instead of having students describe the Prisoners' Dilemma on the midterm exam, I challenged them to apply what they had learned about the game theory models in international relations to identify Prisoners' Dilemmas in new contexts. Students often comment in their evaluations that my courses are demanding, but ultimately rewarding and worthwhile.

Courses

I am prepared to teach a number of courses to meet students' interests and department needs in both International Relations and Quantitative Methods. I enjoy teaching both general introductory courses on international relations and statistical inference, and courses on more specialized topics like international law, international organization, and advanced research design. In addition to teaching the undergraduate course on international law, I have also taught the department's mathematics review course ("Math Camp") for incoming graduate students in the Political Science department, which reviews calculus and probability in preparation for the first-year methods sequence. I can offer the following courses at the Graduate (G) and Undergraduate (U) levels:

| International Relations | Methods |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Introduction to International Relations (G/U) | Probability (G/U) |
| International Law (G/U) | Advanced Research Design (G/U) |
| International Organizations (G/U) | Regression Analysis (G/U) |
| International Political Economy (G/U) | Formal Theory (U) |

Evaluations

Below is a table summary of evaluations for students' "overall rating" of me as an Instructor/Teaching Assistant. All T.A. scores are averaged over three sections, except scores for PS 20, which are averaged over four sections. All questions on a 1–9 scale, where 1 indicates "Very low or never" and 9 indicates "Very high or always." For reference, the department average for Teaching Assistants on this question was 7.63 in 2016. Full evaluations for all courses are available upon request.

Summary of Evaluations

| | Quarter | Course | Mean Score |
|---------------------------|-------------|---|------------|
| Instructor | Summer 2017 | International Law (PS 123A) | 8.46 |
| Teaching Assistant | Fall 2014 | International Law (PS 123A) | 8.56 |
| | Spring 2015 | International Organization (PS 123B) | 8.42 |
| | Fall 2016 | International Relations Theory (PS 137) | 8.74 |
| | Winter 2017 | International Law (PS 123A) | 8.79 |
| | Spring 2017 | World Politics (PS 20) | 8.68 |
| | Fall 2017 | International Law (PS 123A) | 8.57 |
| | Winter 2018 | Foreign Policy Decision-Making (PS 134) | 8.52 |
| | Spring 2018 | International Law (PS 123A) | 8.61 |

Selected Student Comments

- I really enjoyed this class. Parente is possibly the clearest and most straightforward teacher I've ever had, and even on a subject that can get a little confusing with all the Latin. The lecture outlines are VERY helpful in note taking and allow me to know what the main points are before coming in so that I already am tuned into what exactly the important information is. She mentioned in class that the quizzes were written so that they were difficult on purpose (and I heard some students complain), however I think that they were great. They made us focus on the most important information in a way that ensures we understood the whole point of the previous week (rather than quizzing on unnecessary details). I really enjoy Parente's strong and stable demeanor and would happily take a class being taught by her again and would recommend her to a friend in a heartbeat. (*PS 123A, Summer 2017*)
- Prof. Parente is an excellent instructor. I would highly recommend anyone to take a class that she is teaching. She's super concise but at the same time always ensures that the class has an understanding of the concepts she is presenting. I really like that she is straightforward and approachable. Her lectures were fast-paced (in a good way) and engaging. I always felt that her material is very clear and that she doesn't assign an insane amount of readings like some other professors do. It's clear that she has a commitment to seeing her students gain an understanding of the material she is teaching and that's so great to see in a professor. I really enjoyed the short 6 weeks with her and hope she will be teaching more courses in the upcoming year. (*PS 123A, Summer 2017*)
- This course gave students insight into what law school would be like, while also teaching them about the International Law system - a subject which the instructor was clearly passionate and knowledgeable about. The course material was very interesting and the lectures were always engaging, and I felt that overall I learned a lot. It's definitely one of the harder courses I've taken in Political Science, but it felt very worthwhile. (*PS 123A, Summer 2017*)
- I really like how this instructor didn't upload the slides until it was close to the final exam because it really pushed me to pay attention in class. I also liked how organized the lecture was, because of the lecture outline posted online. The outline really helped with taking notes because I wasn't confused on what notes I should take, and it helped me with paying attention to the lecture instead of struggling to write down everything the instructor is saying. (*PS 123A, Summer 2017*)
- I have thoroughly enjoyed having Francesca as a TA. Her strengths include her organization of section time and material, the interactivity of the discussions, and her knowledgeability of the material. I found the sessions incredibly rewarding and helpful to gaining proficiency of the class material. I appreciate the structure of the class, and found that the weekly quizzes kept me engaged and active in the readings and participation. Francesca is personable and welcoming, and I truly wish I could have been able to attend office hours, but could not due to my schedule. She offered rescheduling to accommodate students with conflicts on multiple occasions, but I felt that the material was so clearly laid out by her and Johns that it would not be necessary. I believe Francesca will make an excellent instructor/professor in the future, and I wish her the best in completing her graduate studies and moving on to what are certainly bright prospects. (*PS 123A, Spring 2018*)
- Francesca was helpful, organized, approachable and fair. I was impressed by her ability to organized the momentous amounts of assigned readings into themes and informational structures which helped expand on and explain course topics. She was engaging, gave the class opportunities to grow their knowledge, and made herself available in as many ways as possible. She required actual substance from students which made section far more meaningful than those run by TAs who are "purposefully blind" to those who do not put in any effort and those who do. While fair, her willingness to reward effort was refreshing and demanding. Francesca demonstrated a consistent and genuine concern for her student's grasp of material and success as learners. She is clearly on top of it and this provided a sense of safety and structure for the classroom. (*PS 134, Winter 2018*)