Teaching Philosophy Statement
William O'Brochta

How do you convince a state senator that your strategy for solving a local environmental problem best represents constituents' needs? When I was asked to tackle this problem as an undergraduate, I needed to apply political science theories and concepts, to collaborate with a diverse team of students all working to develop an answer, and to deliver a relevant public policy proposal. The state senator did not end up implementing our policy proposal, but throughout that political science course I learned the tools necessary to be what I call an "engaged citizen." My teaching philosophy is to guide all students, no matter their level of background knowledge, through the process of becoming engaged citizens so that they can utilize political science literature, theories, and research methods to solve current and future community problems. To me, an engaged citizen has three components: disciplinary skills, collaboration, and public policy focus.

Students in my courses learn about political science by developing the key disciplinary skills of critical thinking, research, and writing. I value learning by doing, so I guide students through the political science research article writing process as a way to develop these skills. My courses are structured to introduce students to each component of this process, from identifying research questions to writing up results sections and presenting their work, and then to ask students to practice these components by completing their own research assignments. In my upper-level *Scope and Methods in the Social Sciences* course, students develop these skills in class-long workshops and then complete parts of a scaffolded research article assignment throughout the term. Research and computer programming skills alike are critically important for developing logical thinking and sound argumentation techniques that are a cornerstone of law school education and many other careers. My approach to large introductory courses like *National Government in the U.S.* is more flexible: students still engage with each part of the research article writing process, but they complete a substantial portion of this work during small group activities in class. For me, the key is that students are fully welcomed into the world of political science, that their work uses the same tools and engages with the same literatures as do journal articles written by career political scientists, and that their development of these skills enables them to tackle public policy problems. With this approach, disciplinary skills are no longer about producing published research articles, rather they build in-demand skills useful for a wide range of career paths in law, government, non-profits, and professions of interest to non-majors.

Collaboration is the cornerstone of being an effective engaged citizen. Impactful public policy solutions require a diverse team of experts working together toward a common goal. I endeavor to build a classroom environment where both specialization and collaboration facilitate equity and inclusion. When students engage with the research article writing process, they choose their own topic of interest, usually related to a public policy problem they care deeply about. In my *Representation, Identity, and Dissent* course, I give students space to reflect on their topic through free form online blog posts. Blogs provide an opportunity to ensure that personal connections to content are valued. I then, for example, take an international student choosing to study repression and a football player examining inequities in sports hiring and ask them to collaborate with one another. Collaboration involves opportunities to improve student understanding through small group discussions and peer review.

Small groups are then responsible for promoting the work of their members, culminating in a gallery walk around the classroom where students learn about their colleagues' valuable ideas. This system of collaboration reflects my fundamental belief that everyone, regardless of course level or major, has valuable contributions to make to student learning.

Public policy applicability makes political science relevant to students and to the local community. I emphasize the public policy relevance of my courses through research-based policy simulations and local community engaged projects. For example, in *Comparative Foreign Governments* students engage in a Model UN-like simulation that uses readings from comparative politics and international relations as the basis for negotiations over resolutions. Through the simulation, students learn negotiation tactics, briefing paper writing, and public speaking skills, all of which are immediately applicable to a wide variety of careers. I partner with local community organizations to create experiential learning opportunities that address their current needs. Students in *Representation, Identity, and Community* read comparative politics literature on representation and applied it to develop a proposal to increase community engagement on campus. This process involved students learning project planning, marketing, and collaboration skills that jump-started a university-wide initiative on civic and community engagement. Community engaged pedagogy provides an excellent opportunity for students to learn from community members with diverse backgrounds and perspectives and to intentionally engage in discussions highlighting the disproportionate impacts many public policies have on people who are underserved. Even simple activities like asking students to learn about the demographic composition of their home community and to attend course-related community events often uncover privileges and biases about which students may be unaware.

I use assessment best practices to evaluate the effectiveness of how I teach engaged citizenship and to adapt my teaching practices both across courses and over time. These methods include mid-course surveys and "ticket out" assignments. For example, when I learned that students in my *Comparative Foreign Governments* course were relatively unfamiliar with identifying and using appropriate scholarly literature, I devoted additional time in class about this topic and checked in individually with students to ensure that they were comfortable with this task. Since I teach students from a wide variety of backgrounds, it is essential to ensure that they can develop as engaged citizens in ways that resonate.

Additionally, I implement scholarship of teaching and learning practices to assess key student learning objectives. I have shown using pre- and post-test surveys how students in my *Representation, Identity, and Dissent* course improve their community engagement skills. Further, I am assessing the community group project model that I employ in *National Government in the U.S.* to determine how to make political science relevant and impactful for non-majors. This work adds to existing publications on the importance of even small community engaged projects for enhancing student learning.

My engaged citizen philosophy is adaptable, and I am continuously working to improve my teaching pedagogy. Current projects consider how to more effectively prepare pre-law students for law school, ways to facilitate equity and inclusion through community partnerships, and considering new approaches like class coauthored work. Practicing engaged citizenship may not convince state senators to change their policy priorities, but it does empower students to apply their learning to solve current and future public policy and career-related problems.