



COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

Department of Political Science

371 Schaeffer Hall
Iowa City, IA 52242-1409

Teaching Statement

Willow Kreutzer

My main teaching interest is in international relations and comparative politics, with an emphasis on gender, institutions, civil conflict, and disasters. I am excited to teach introductory level courses in international relations and comparative politics, and more advanced courses in international conflict, international institutions, civil war, gender and conflict, feminist international relations, and development. My approach to teaching is provided below.

My teaching philosophy emphasizes creating an engaging, inclusive, and flexible learning environment for students, in which their unique identities and learning styles are not only accepted but also valued as part of an educational process extending beyond my classroom. I carry out this philosophy in a variety of ways. First, I actively create space for students to express themselves to demonstrate that I value their identities and experiences, and so that they can connect who they are to the political content they learn about in the classes I teach. Second, I engage in a flexible teaching practice that reflects the unique and fluid needs of students, so that course structure or material is not a barrier to student success. Finally, I prioritize transparency as integral to my teaching approach, as this offers students a clear pathway to achieving learning objectives. Through the integration of these three processes, I seek to create an optimal learning environment for all my students.

To establish a classroom environment in which students believe they are welcomed, heard, valued, and capable of success despite differences in learning styles and educational backgrounds, I begin every semester with a few key actions. On the first day of class, I give students an opportunity to share what they think I should know about them to help them learn and succeed. I inquire about what learning activities they find most and least helpful; what they are most nervous and excited about in my class; their familiarity with course content; and what motivated them to enroll in my course. In addition to this exercise, I introduce myself to students with my name and pronouns and ask them to do the same. In the following weeks, I reference and empathize with feelings that students have shared and make a concerted effort to quickly remember everyone's names and pronouns. I create a syllabus that is curated to different learning styles to ensure students feel successful and can be engaged with the lessons being taught. During class, I lecture, ask questions that they can answer in a quiet five minutes at the beginning of class, engage in a simulation or game each class, and foster group work whenever I can. These exercises allow learners of all types to not only feel comfortable and learn in the best way they can but also explore other learning opportunities. I believe that these small but meaningful actions clearly demonstrate to students that I see them as unique people with unique skills and experiences and that I am invested in their success.

I foster this environment throughout the semester by creating opportunities for students to connect their unique identities and experiences to the course, whether that is through class discussions, writing exercises, or other activities that encourage students' self-expression. For example, I encourage students to focus their assignments on events and topics that feel



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particularly relevant to our course and to their own lives. In my international conflict class, I ask students to select any conflict, civil or interstate, that they want to research throughout the semester. However, I emphasize that they should and can select conflicts that are more prevalent to issues they care about, or their majors. I help students select conflicts that have implications on healthcare, gender, trade, certain identity groups, or relate back to their family that has been in the service. I believe that cultivating a classroom environment that values students' diverse identities and experiences not only leads students to engage more in the class but also fosters deeper learning by encouraging students to draw personal connections to course-related topics. Studying political science and feminism creates opportunities for differing opinions and views to present themselves in the classroom setting. These discussions are important for growth and learning but can create the possibility of conflicting ideas or unknowns that may cause a pause in some students. In my teaching, I ensure all students feel welcome and use their ideas, past experiences, and identities in positive ways to enhance discussions, bring up questions, and cultivate a better learning structure through this diversity, not in spite of it.

Central to my teaching philosophy is the recognition that students are unique individuals with unique experiences. In addition to creating space for students' diverse backgrounds, I also create space for their diverse learning styles by differentiating my class activities and assignments. For example, I vary learning styles through watching videos, reading different types of academic literatures, and engaging in innovative in-class activities. In my introductory international relations class when discussing the prisoner dilemma, I not only lectured on the topic but also had my students play out the dilemma in small groups and come back together to discuss what we learned. We discussed how this works in political science, but also engaged in sociology and psychology literature throughout the discussion. In addition to differentiating assignments, I also embrace a flexible and empathetic teaching style that allows me to adapt and respond to potential changes in my students' needs. For example, after experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, I worked to ensure that the assignments and expectations in my course could be modified based on any changing circumstances of my students' health and availability. I also work to make sure my courses are empathetic to the ever-changing political, economic, social, reproductive, and environmental struggles facing the students and their communities. I meet students where they are at and ensure that their mental and physical well-being are a priority. These adaptations to the changing landscape of the semester hopefully encourage students to focus on the learning goal of demonstrating their knowledge of course content, rather than focusing on the stress of content memorization, test-taking speed, or due dates. Because of this shift in focus, I make sure the learning objectives I put in place of exams are well thought out. Adapting to students' needs and being flexible with teaching allows for the prioritization of student learning over course structure, and demonstrates empathy towards students, which further contributes to a classroom environment in which they feel set up for success.

Finally, I am fully transparent with students, as I believe that this reflects my honest commitment to their success. For example, when presenting assignments, I take time to discuss with the students not only the expectations of the assignment but also the learning goal that each assignment is meant to accomplish. I similarly explain my course policies and class culture at the



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beginning of each semester and why they are structured in the way I have specified. My transparency encourages students to be honest with me in return, whether it is about their confusion, their challenges, and their needs. I also believe it is important to be transparent with students outside of classroom work. For example, I hold check-ins with the students as a class to see where they are that week and inform my expectations for the activities and readings assigned for that day. I also reciprocate this act, so they can have an informed expectation of me as their instructor. I believe that a student-teacher relationship rooted in reciprocal transparency is imperative to creating an engaging, inclusive, and flexible learning environment.