Teaching Philosophy and Objectives

Studying politics means not only mastering core concepts but also learning how to use them to make sense of the world. My goal as an instructor is to help students build a strong foundation in political theory—especially as it applies to authoritarian and hybrid regimes—and engage them in rigorous, evidence-based policy analysis and evaluation.

- I tailor instruction to students' intellectual and cultural backgrounds, whether shaped by liberal democracies or authoritarian systems. Adaptive learning plans enhance both relevance and engagement.
- I create an inclusive classroom where diverse perspectives are actively encouraged and critically examined. I promote intellectual ownership through discussion, debate, and collaborative problem-solving.
- I emphasize theory-to-practice translation. Concepts like censorship, elite control, and democratic erosion are taught not as abstractions, but as tools for diagnosing real-world governance challenges.
- My ultimate aim is to cultivate independent thinkers and effective analysts who can interrogate structures of power—in academia, policy, or civil society.

Teaching Interests. I am prepared to teach courses in Comparative Politics, Authoritarian Politics, Judicial Politics, Chinese Politics, Causal Inference, and Computational Social Science. I also plan to develop graduate seminars on experimental design and text-as-data methods.

Teaching Methods

Student-Centered Personalized Learning. At the start of each course, I learn about my students' academic backgrounds and professional goals to design personalized learning experiences. In my graduate-level course on Quantitative Methods and Maximum Likelihood Estimation, I surveyed students about their statistical training, programming experience, and interests in STATA/R. This allowed me to tailor examples and readings to their needs. Throughout the course, students selected application projects aligned with their interests, and I worked closely with them to ensure they could apply key tools to their own policy questions.

Inclusive and Active Learning. I design my classes to be inclusive, participatory spaces where all students feel comfortable asking questions and engaging deeply. I use inclusive language, embed interaction throughout my lectures, and hold accessible office hours to discuss coursework and career development. For example, in a guest lecture on Chinese politics, I grouped students from different cultural and social backgrounds to discuss China–U.S. relations. Their discussions—thoughtful, lively, and at times contentious—demonstrated the power of creating a space where all perspectives are welcomed and examined critically.

Technology-Enabled Engagement. I use digital tools to support active learning. For example, I run in-class surveys and quizzes through Poll Everywhere to check comprehension. In one session on common-pool resource exploitation, I ran a simulated "fishing game" using Google Sheets, allowing students to see firsthand how overextraction plays out. This experience led them to explore game-theoretic concepts like the tragedy of the commons with new urgency and insight. One student remarked that this hands-on approach helped them "finally get how strategy works in real life."

Applications and Real-World Connections

Students often ask, "So what?"—especially when theory feels disconnected from the real world. I answer this by embedding vivid, accessible examples into each topic. When teaching strategic interaction in international relations, I use diagrams to show how states respond to each other's moves, just like players in repeated games. When introducing coalition formation, I draw on pop culture—like Game of Thrones—to make the logic of alliance formation intuitive and memorable. As one student said: "You make abstract political ideas simple and engaging—and I actually want to apply them."

In Summer 2024, I independently taught a course on Causal Inference and Applications to 47 undergraduates. This lab-based course introduced students to policy evaluation methods using STATA and R. In the final session, students were asked to evaluate the effectiveness and cost of China's digital surveillance program using real data and frameworks from my own research. They applied a range of program evaluation tools and reflected critically on their methodological choices. The experience helped them consolidate what they had learned and think deeply about real-world policy tradeoffs. The course was well reviewed, and several students expressed interest in pursuing policy research using computational tools.

Undergraduate Mentoring. I also advise undergraduate honors theses, particularly those involving computational social science. I recently supervised Tairan Liu, a cognitive science major, on her thesis titled *Benchmarking ASR Accuracy and Failure Analysis With Naturalistic Caregiver-Infant Recordings*. I introduced her to the basics of automatic speech recognition (ASR) and worked closely with her on implementing analysis pipelines in Python. We covered model benchmarking, error analysis, and the ethics of human voice data. Her project was ultimately accepted at a selective academic conference—testament to both her dedication and the power of hands-on, interdisciplinary mentorship.

Future Development. To continually improve my teaching, I am completing a Certificate in Teaching Online at UC San Diego and regularly attend pedagogical workshops. As higher education increasingly shifts toward digital and hybrid models, I view e-learning as a vital evolution in knowledge delivery. These trainings have helped me develop and assess online curricula, integrate new instructional tools, and expand my repertoire as an educator. While platforms may change, I remain committed to the core values that define my teaching: clarity, inclusivity, and intellectual curiosity.

Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

- **Causal Inference and Applications**, Summer 2024, Undergraduate Level
  - # of students: 47
  - Role: Instructor
  - Overall Rating: 4.8/5.00
- **Introduction to Comparative Politics**, 2022, 2023, 2024, Undergraduate Level
  - # of students: 120 per term
  - Role: Instructor
  - Overall Rating: 4.7/5.00

- **Corruption in Developing Countries**, Winter 2023, Undergraduate Level
  - # of students: 220
  - Role: Teaching Assistant
  - Overall Rating: 4.7/5.00
- **Analyzing Politics**, Winter 2022, Undergraduate Level
  - # of students: 55
  - Role: Teaching Assistant
  - Overall Rating: 4.6/5.00
- **Advanced Statistical Applications**, Winter 2025, Graduate Level
  - # of students: 20
  - Role: Teaching Assistant
  - Overall Rating: 4.8/5.00

Table 1: Selected comments from qualitative teaching evaluations

Course	**Student Comments**
Intro to Comparative Politics	"TA made a giant lecture hall feel like a seminar—so easy to stay engaged!" "Honestly the first time I actually understood what authoritarianism means beyond the textbook." "Brought in super relevant examples—like stuff I saw in the news that week." "He made space for everyone to speak—especially appreciated as an international student."
Causal Inference	"This class totally changed how I think about data and causality—so powerful. Gary is an INCREDIBLE teacher." "Gary made R and STATA less scary and actually fun. I didn't think that was possible. I don't need GPT now!" "The professor showed us that China surveillance project. It is MIND-blowing. I've never felt more like a real policy analyst." "Hardest class I've taken, but also the most rewarding."
Corruption in Developing Countries	"Massive class, but somehow still felt personal—he was always available and encouraging." "Loved the way he explained corruption using real-world scandals. Felt like a Netflix doc!" "The readings were dense, but he made them make sense—and made them matter."
Analyzing Politics	"He provided valuable and reasonable comments and grades." "Gary's OH was informative and helpful!" "So patient, and really knows how to teach without making anyone feel dumb."
Advanced Statistical Applications	"Clear. Kind. Brilliant. Best stats support I've ever had." "Helped me debug messy code at 9pm before a deadline. Literally a hero." "Made technical material click by showing how it matters in real-world research."