

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy | Daniel J. Simmons

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I approach teaching with two primary goals. First, I create an environment where students learn through experience. I design courses to emphasize discussion and personal reflection. My hope is students feel safe, empowered, and emboldened to ask questions, try out arguments, and be comfortable with revising weak arguments. My classroom rarely identifies a “correct” answer to the complex and nuanced topics we discuss; but we do acknowledge some arguments fall apart when subjected to discussion and scrutiny — including those I may offer. Central to learning is recognizing it as a dynamic process, with what we “know” always subject to revision and change as new ideas, observations, or data come to light. I guide students in adopting this approach to their learning.

A second goal is to provide opportunities for students to apply what we learn in the classroom to relevant career skills, or to address contemporary problems. In all of my courses, students learn information and study events and processes that affect how we interpret and function in society. Part of my responsibility is to help students recognize and translate their academic studies to assist them in their personal lives. Sometimes this goal is accomplished by helping students develop specific skills, such as data analysis, argument presentation, or parsing research. Other times it is helping students understand how to apply political processes to accomplish their own career goals or to inform their political actions. I assist students in proactively applying what they learn in ways best suited to their individual goals and aspirations; nothing taught in a class should remain confined to a course’s narrow focus.

Over the past two years, I taught six different courses. All courses I offer primarily serve political science majors, but each course also fulfills requirements in general education curriculum and major programs in criminology, international relations, gender studies, and American studies. Four courses (PO 120, PO 332, PO 334, and PO 338) were previously offered at St. Michael’s, but were fundamentally and significantly revised by me. A major focus of these revisions included adding an explicit and persistent focus on issues and questions about race in the U.S. PO 120, Intro to U.S. Politics, examines whether a multiracial democracy is possible in the U.S., and what it takes for such a government to endure. PO 332 and PO 334, my two constitutional law courses, highlight how race has been and remains at the center of interpreting and resolving constitutional arguments. PO 338, Criminal Justice, asks students to engage with racist judicial policies and actions that have long enforced negative outcomes for people of color, and Black individuals specifically.

I also developed two new courses (PO 230 and PO 336). PO 230, Politics of Cities, addressed a fundamental gap in St. Michael’s curriculum with respect to state and local politics. The course addresses topics and issues primarily impacting local government. Many careers in public service and policy focus on state and local politics. This course not only helps to prepare students for those careers, but also draws attention to the importance of local politics in many of the key policy issues our society is struggling to address. PO 336, Law & Social Change, examines the intersection between the judicial system and social movements, and how actions of both groups can impact law in the U.S. The course provides an in-depth examination of how law was made and continues to change with respect to key

areas that remain topical today: race, sex/sexuality/gender, class/labor, and disability.

I create and adapt assignments and assessments to empower my students to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-life problems and concerns in their own lives. For example, in PO 338 students are provided with several datasets relevant to criminal justice. The primary course assignment is to use the data to examine an original research question through statistical analysis, and present the findings in both a written report and oral presentation. The assignment provides an opportunity for students to develop and showcase quantitative analysis skills in high demand for careers relevant for political science. In PO 230, students identify a problem in their hometown and create a policy proposal to resolve it. The students write a short memo detailing the problem and their proposal, explaining how their solution will effectively, efficiently, and feasibly resolve the problem. Students present proposals to peers and provide feedback to each other. Students are also encouraged to give presentations to their hometown's leadership.

I also use formative assessments to enhance students' engagement with course themes. In PO 120 and PO 230, students create weekly memes about something they learned from that week's topics. Students learn to create digital media to share information about politics and issues they find personally important. In PO 332, PO 334, and PO 336, students keep a weekly reflection journal where they write in free-hand their thoughts and feelings about what they learned in class. Students review what they previously wrote, and remark how and why their thoughts and feelings have changed or been strengthened, helping them make connections week to week.

## **Advising Philosophy & Practice**

I serve as the formal academic advisor for 25+ political science or criminology majors in addition to meeting with dozens of students as the College's pre-law advisor. I have two goals when advising students. First, I take time every advising opportunity to ask students what they want to do with their degree. My purpose is to nudge students to seriously consider how they can translate their academic education into a career, and to make this consideration a habit. My effort is not an attempt to lead students to only consider courses and opportunities "appropriate" for a given career. Instead, I illustrate how all of a student's academic education translates into career preparation or skills they can market and showcase when pursuing their career. Students often struggle making the connection between what they learn and do at college, and how it converts to skills and experience that highlight their good fit for a specific career. By helping students make those connections from the start, I position them to be more successful in achieving their post-college goals.

Second, I encourage my students to consider how extra-curricular activities and opportunities can complement and enhance their education. I draw attention to typical opportunities such as studying abroad or internships early on to help students prepare; but I also highlight less obvious opportunities, such as service trips or participating in musical and theatrical groups. I also highlight papers and topics suitable for student research, especially as many students often feel they lack skills or ability to conduct original and innovative research. In short, my advising philosophy is focused on helping students broaden their understanding of what an academic education entails, and to encourage them to soak in as many of the opportunities afforded to them in order to be positioned for post-college success.