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TEACHING STATEMENT

In the summers of 2018, 2019, and 2020, I independently taught small sections of the course "Poverty, Welfare, and Work," which enrolls primary sophomores. Before that, I had acted as a teaching assistant for a larger, lecture-based version of the course in spring 2018. When leading the course independently during the summer, I redesigned it to play to my strengths. The class covers the theories and policy details of the U.S. welfare state, emphasizing the relevance of the politics of race and gender and placing the U.S. in a comparative perspective. In the summers of 2018 and 2019, the course was taught in-person, and in 2020, the course was taught online with synchronous discussion sessions. In this teaching statement, I detail my teaching philosophy and the balanced teaching techniques that I developed throughout my experiences in the classroom. Subsequently, I discuss my goals for student mentoring, commitment to diversity and inclusion, and provide a summary of student evaluations.

Teaching Philosophy

Two principles guide my teaching philosophy. *The first principle*: learning requires that each student be treated with dignity and respect, but we must not shy away from difficult truths. Instructors and students should approach sensitive material thoughtfully, inclusively, and without disrespecting others or varying points of view. But those discussions should not avoid social and political realities; otherwise, it will compromise students' ability to learn effectively. For instance when teaching students about the politics of welfare, I use the insidious origins of the "welfare queen" trope and the "spillover" of immigration attitudes for public opinion toward welfare to demonstrate the long-standing connection between ethnicity and welfare policymaking in the U.S. Throughout, I emphasize that the studies discussed in class are a matter of social science investigation with real-world implications and ensure that I am careful with my words, in order to avoid alienating any students.

The second principle: especially in the social sciences, it is vital that course content be relevant to the world that students observe in their daily life. Theories need to be grounded in the real world and current events, and pedagogical research on lecture framing demonstrates that this strategy promotes learning. Real-world grounding helps students to process the material and understand its implications. In my welfare policy course, I combine lessons on theory and policy details with personal stories of program recipients. For example, I assign students an excerpt from Jamila Michener's *Fragmented Democracy*, in which she describes her interviews with actual Medicaid beneficiaries. That gives students a clear understanding of how Medicaid affects people's lives, which allows for an engaging conversation about other more abstract concepts, such as the details of Medicaid eligibility rules and the relationship between the federal government and state policymaking. Assignments are also used as a tool to personalize poverty and welfare recipients. For instance, one assignment asks students to create a week-long meal plan for a family of four on a food stamps budget.

A main learning objective for Poverty, Welfare, and Work is that students should be able to evaluate the U.S. welfare state and develop their own ideas for how to best reform it. For example, I have students research a welfare-related policy reform proposal. The assignment requires students to identify deficiencies in the welfare state and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these policy proposals in a two-page memo—which necessitates concise writing. When I taught the course in-person in 2019, I also had each student share a summary of their memo with the class in a brief PowerPoint presentation.

Balanced Instruction

Since students can have different learning styles, I constantly strive to provide a balanced learning experience with a variety of assignments and in-class activities. When I taught the course online this past summer, I conscientiously designed a well-balanced course with: lecture videos for students to complete

at their own pace; a wide variety of readings from academics, think tanks, and government agencies; virtual discussion sessions that include polling the class and breakout groups; a guest speaker that discusses her experiences working in the affordable housing sector; and a variety of assignments that include essays, memos, short written answers, long written answers, and multiple choice.

Relatedly, technology is frequently integrated into my teaching and can be valuable in the classroom. Quizzes and exams can be conducted online (via software such as Blackboard or Canvas) to save time in class. Virtual discussion boards allow students to interact with and learn from each other, even if they are nervous to participate during class. While teaching, I try to create an engaging experience by showing news clips and "explainer" videos, and occasionally assign podcast episodes from the Scholars Strategy Network's *No Jargon Podcast* as recommended readings. I have used multi-media presentations to show students how eligible Americans would go about applying for complicated programs like Medicare or show them the specific regulations that the Social Security Administration uses to determine whether applicants qualify for disability benefits.

Goals for Student Mentoring
I especially look forward to being able to mentor and advise students, something that I have not had the opportunity to do thus far in my academic career. However, when I have taught independently, class sizes were small; therefore, I was able to get to know my students individually and provide them with individual attention as needed. I hope to more formally mentor and advise students as a faculty member. When I was an undergraduate, writing a senior thesis and acting as an undergraduate research assistant for faculty research projects were formative experiences for me, which helped me to realize my passion for political science. Understanding how valuable these experiences can be for students, I am passionate about supervising these activities as a faculty member.

Diversity and Inclusion
As a scholar of social and economic inequality, I am well aware of the importance of higher education in upward mobility, and I have experience teaching students from a variety of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. When teaching, I make sure to be aware of the diverse experiences of my students. For example, I frequently try to integrate pop culture references and American idiomatic expressions into my lectures, but I do not overuse them, since these references can be alienating to second-language English speakers and international students unfamiliar with American culture. Furthermore, when teaching about racially sensitive topics during Poverty, Welfare, and Work, I warn students beforehand and always emphasize that the research discussed in class is a result of the scientific method—not wantonly incendiary opinions. As well, I have had experiences handling Title IX and Americans with Disabilities Act student accommodations. In these instances, I give as much flexibility as is possible and recommended by case managers and I am sure to never draw undue attention to the fact that these students receive accommodations during class.

My passion for diversity and inclusion extends outside of the classroom as well, since my scholarly research explores the intersection of social and economic inequality. In a review of social policy literature, my co-author and I note the demographic disparities in the reach of the welfare state. In an analysis of the consequences of economic inequality for representation, my co-author and I draw attention to the cultural divide within the Democratic Party—on issues like immigration, abortion, and same-sex marriage. The focus of my current research—corporate political activity on civil rights—examines the role of corporate economic power in identity-based social issues.

Summary of Teaching Evaluations
The table below displays a selection of results from student evaluations. I can provide the complete report of evaluations upon request.

	Maks-Solomon			Dept
	2018	2019	2020	Avg
How much students learned	4.0	4.6	5.0	4.3
Rating of lectures and presentations	4.6	4.5	5.0	4.3
Overall rating of instructor	4.2	4.8	4.6	4.5
Overall rating of course	4.2	4.2	4.6	4.3
Course enrollment	8	12	15	
Evaluation responses	8	8	5	

How much students learned: On a scale from 1 (little) to 5 (a lot), students were asked how much they learned in the class. In 2018, 75% percent of students responded with a 4 or 5 to this statement. Because all students did not respond with a 4 or 5, I covered more content when I taught the course in 2019 and used class time more effectively to cover that additional content. In 2019 and 2020, 100% of students responded with a 4 or 5 to this statement.

Rating of lectures and presentations: On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), students were asked if they agreed with the statement that lectures and presentations were effective. In each summer I taught the course, all students responded with either a 4 or 5 to this statement.

Overall rating of instructor: On a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent), students were asked about the overall quality of their instructor. In each summer I taught the course, all students responded with either a 4 or 5 to this statement.

Overall rating of course: On a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent), students were asked about the overall quality of the course. In 2018, 88% of students responded with a 4 or 5, but in 2019 and 2020, 100% of students did so.

Written comments emphasized the quality of teaching:
- "I liked that the professor took the time to make the lectures as upbeat as possible. It's a condensed course, so things have to stay moving. But he really kept the content engaging despite the long class periods."
- "I appreciated the quality and effort put into this class, especially the PowerPoints and presentations. Making sure we're [understanding course material] and he was giving us the correct information was a top priority and I really respect that."
- "The Professor was very supportive, responsive and really helped as much as he possibly could."

In 2018, when asked what should be improved about the course, many students indicated that quizzes were too difficult. They also noted that they would like more discussion and less lecture. These two suggested changes were easy to implement the next time that I taught the course. In evaluations from 2019, less students indicated that the quizzes were too hard and that there was too much lecture. By 2020, most students responded that the challenge of assignments was "about right" and there was a "good balance" between lectures and discussions.