

## **Teaching Philosophy**

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Capable students abound if capable educators step up to meet the challenge. This core philosophy guides my teaching. I have found that there are some consistent ways to implement and model capability on my end that encourage and foster capability and mastery on the part of students. First, I believe courses should be built around grand projects that allow students to anchor their learning in something they will remember after the semester has ended. Second, I believe in building confidence by scaffolding assignments so that the final product is something the student has had an opportunity to build themselves with appropriate guidance. Finally, I believe the best use of the university classroom is to build critical thinkers who not only understand material but are able to challenge assertions on their own terms.

Each course is capable of housing a grand project that anchors student learning. In my Introductory U.S. National Government classes, I am developing and implementing, along with a colleague, a newly developed citizenship portfolio that will have students actively engaging in acts of citizenship such as investigating their ideology, comparing U.S. citizenship to fictitious citizenship in a film, attending community events, and determining the citizenship status of a hypothetical newly found territory to the U.S. In my Civil Liberties and the Constitution class, students regularly engage in a series of increasing case study workshops leading up to the presentation of a written brief and oral argument of a current term U.S. Supreme Court case. Perhaps my favorite example of this is the use of a wiki project in my Law and Administrative Processes class—a class that can be difficult to make relevant and interesting—to couple concept learning with staged writing and research activities on an agency of each student's choosing throughout the semester. For this project, I won the university-wide 2016 Provost Innovation in Teaching Award for mixed mode or hybrid course delivery.

Each of these grand projects have two major components that result in heightened student learning. First, they all have elements of scaffolding or staging within them that allow students to practice concepts at increasing stages of risk to their overall grade. This helps not only to ensure that students are on the right path before the end of the semester, but it also builds confidence and allows students to truly learn a piece of the course material in great depth over time. Second, there is always an element of some personal investment in the project that makes the project, and therefore the course concepts, increasingly relevant. For example, with the wiki project in Law and Administrative Processes, students regularly become interested in the workings of their chosen agencies to the point that not only are they budding experts on them, but they seek out experiences with them such as grants, internships, and job shadowing opportunities. When coupled with reflexive writing exercises that demonstrate understanding of course concepts and critical thinking about the project itself, these experiences provide active learning that continues way beyond the classroom.

Grand projects and critical thinking about the world in which they exist allow students to deepen their learning and appreciation for course concepts. Scaffolding builds stronger writers and thinkers out of necessity and practice. These projects make teaching complex but rewarding because of the results that they bring during the semester and well beyond.