

Statement of Teaching
Christina Noriega Bambrick

In both scholarship and pedagogy I recognize value in diverse perspectives. The rationale for studying constitutions in comparative context is that we learn more when we put constitutional politics from different places into dialogue. Points of comparison give scholars perspective to appreciate both the particulars of specific cases and general patterns of the broader picture. Similarly, I recognize that my students come to the classroom with a range of perspectives. This awareness is rooted in my own history, as my grandfather grew up the son of poor ranchers in Mexico and went to law school in the United States with nothing more than a high school diploma. This personal history has continually driven me as a mentor and teacher, not least when I served as a mentor for a UT undergraduate student from Mexico interested in going to law school. As in my scholarship, so too in my teaching do I remain mindful of perspective and context. In hearing diverse perspectives and studying different contexts, my students develop a broader picture of the world and an appreciation for the difficulty of historical and contemporary issues in politics.

As the most important debates in constitutional studies recur across time and place, opportunities for comparison grow out of my course designs naturally. For example, before getting into the details of the ratification debates between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists in my class on Constitutional Principles, I asked my students to look up the constitution of a country with which they were completely unfamiliar. They each chose a particular provision from a constitution and wrote an explanation of how that provision was (or was not) representative of the more abstract principles of constitutionalism we had studied earlier in the course. This allowed students to begin their study of American constitutional politics with the knowledge that dozens of other countries had confronted similar questions and often had come to different answers. In the discussion that ensued students demonstrated a good sense of both the stakes and the reach of these questions. While I will doubtless include exercises such as this when I teach Comparative Constitutionalism, I will also continue to include similar exercises in my classes on American constitutionalism. This practice of studying the U.S. Constitution alongside other constitutions equips students with both knowledge of the country in which they live, as well as greater perspective to think critically about it.

My courses have taken a wide variety of forms, from a seminar of 25 students and a more lecture-based class of 90 for which I was the instructor of record, to the online class of 800 for which I was the lead TA. Regardless of the size or medium of instruction, I draw from the same principles of comparison and dialogue in designing and teaching all my classes. One of my primary objectives in my Introduction to Rights class was to challenge students' assumptions about the origins, status, and efficacy of rights in modern politics. Although these objectives clearly invited (even demanded) discussion, I realized I could not teach a class of 90 in the way I would a small seminar. And so, I built provocative questions into each lecture. I would ask students to discuss with their neighbor or jot down some thoughts before reconvening to discuss these questions as a class. In some ways, this method is better for certain students than a typical seminar style, insofar as it gives everyone an opportunity to be heard without the pressure that comes with addressing the whole class.

In both my smaller and larger classes, I create writing assignments that challenge students to articulate and support a particular position. In this way, they engage the questions of the course more fully while also honing basic skills of argumentation. I try never to assume that

students know what some might consider commonplace knowledge. Indeed, my students typically come from vastly different school districts--a result of a Texas statute that automatically admits to the University system students from across the state in the top 10 percent of their graduating classes. While some receive excellent instruction in writing in high school, others do not. Mindful of this, I build writing assignments into my syllabus in a way that allows me to provide essential instruction and offer active feedback. I ask students to choose a topic, develop a thesis statement, and write an outline over the course of the semester, so that when they submit their final draft, they have met with me several times and can be confident that they know something about the writing process. Thus, whether my classes are large or small, online or in-person, my students will always have to make arguments, in verbal exchange with one another as well as formal written assignments.

In the first class of each semester, I like to say a few words about my own research on how various constitutional orders understand the relationship between public and private spheres differently. My aim is to make real for students the kinds of questions that the course promises to raise, questions which are not easy but demand answers. Recently, I have been able to cite *Masterpiece Cakeshop vs. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, the case where a Christian baker refused to bake a wedding cake for a gay couple. Many students had heard of this case and some were actively following it. In showing how my own research speaks to this issue, I model for students how I lean into timely questions, demonstrating how they have an opportunity to do the same in the class. Indeed, after the *Masterpiece* decision was handed down in summer 2018, a student from two semesters prior emailed me to discuss the decision.

In May 2018, the Liberal Arts Council selected me from teachers across several departments to receive their 2017-2018 Excellence in Teaching Award. In my teaching evaluations, my most recent class gave me a perfect score of 5.0 in "instructor preparedness," scores of 4.9 in the categories of "genuinely interested in teaching the course," "instructor availability," and "class participation encouraged," and an overall score of 4.7. Still, some of the greatest affirmation of my efforts in the classroom has come in students telling me that my class forever changed the way they think about rights or emailing me to continue to the conversation an entire year later.